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Dureza to share RP insights in peace work at Colombia meet

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Presidential peace adviser Jesus Dureza Monday flew to Bogota, Colombia to attend a meeting organized by a US-based peace group assisting the talks between the Colombian government and the National Liberation Army (ELN), one of Colombias two main guerrilla groups.

The New York-based **Project on Justice in Times of Transition**, which has been working with Bogota and ELN end over four decades of armed conflicts through peace negotiations, has invited Dureza to share insights on the Philippine experience in forging political settlements with rebel groups.

The Bogota meeting, slated on Wednesday, aims to give both parties a broader perspective on the peace process in the hope of breaking the current impasse in the Bogota-ELN talks.

In a pre-departure statement Monday morning, Dureza said his trip to Bogota presents a notable opportunity for the Philippines peace process to lend itself as vital reference to current peace negotiations in other countries such as Colombia.

The ELN and the government of Colombia have recently been holding negotiations that seek to enable entry of the ELN into the political process. If achieved, this would represent an important step in the overall effort to strengthen a still very delicate peace process in Colombia, Dureza said.

Dureza however, stressed that like the Philippine setting, the path to peace is never easy with Bogota also facing major challenges and obstacles that tend to impede the progress of peace negotiations.

We hope to be able to contribute, through our own challenges and experiences including our best practices, in suggesting a workable peace framework that provides a common ground for both parties, Dureza added.

ELN is a revolutionary, Marxist, insurgent guerrilla group that has been operating in several regions of Colombia since 1964 and with an estimated current strength of about 3,500 to 5,000 guerrillas.

This group is however, smaller compared to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia People's Army (FARC), the main communist revolutionary organization that has been linked to drug trade and with an estimated 12,000-18,000 members. FARC has so far refused any dialogue with Bogota.

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