

Beat: News

Colombian rebels release former U.S. soldier after 4 months

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USPA News - Colombia's largest rebel group on Sunday released a former U.S. Army private who was captured in late June and held captured for more than four month, the Red Cross and the U.S. government confirmed, saying he was in good health. Kevin Scott Sutay was captured on June 20 by rebels belonging to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, commonly known as FARC, while hiking through a known guerrilla area in the southeastern province of Guaviare.

He had earlier ignored police warnings against trekking through the dangerous area. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said Sutay was released on Sunday and handed over to a team made up of ICRC delegates and representatives from the Colombian, Cuban and Norwegian governments. The handover took place in a rural area of Tomachipán, also in Guaviare province. "We are pleased to have facilitated his release so he can be reunited with his family," said Jordi Raich, head of the ICRC delegation in Colombia. He added that Sutay, who had been backpacking through several Central and South American countries before being captured, was in good physical condition despite his four-month-ordeal. After Sutay's capture in June, FARC released a statement which described Sutay as a U.S. soldier and proof that "American soldiers and mercenaries" were taking part in operations against the rebels under the guise of private contractors. But the U.S. government denied those claims, saying Sutay was a veteran of the Afghan war but left the armed forces in March of this year. The rebels eventually appeared to change their position earlier this month, posting online a lengthy interview with Sutay and commentary which acknowledged Sutay as a former U.S. soldier and describing him as an explorer. "With a backpack on his back, blue jeans and a few dollars in his pocket, he sets out to learn about and explore the world," an introductory note to the interview said. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry welcomed Sunday's release and thanked Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos for his assistance. "The United States is profoundly grateful to the Government of Colombia and commends its tireless efforts to secure his release," Kerry said in a statement, which also thanked the ICRC, the governments involved and Rev. Jesse Jackson for advocating Sutay's release. Raich, after Sunday's release, emphasized the ICRC is a neutral intermediary which is willing to facilitate other release operations in the future. The organization has facilitated the release of 19 people held by armed groups in Colombia so far in 2013, and served as a neutral intermediary in the release of over 1,500 people in Colombia since 1994. FARC, which is dedicated to the violent overthrow of Colombia's democratically-elected government, was formed in 1964 and is structured as a military organization, with approximately 10,000 armed guerillas organized into seven "blocs," 68 numbered "Fronts", nine named "Fronts," and four urban "militias." The group is present in 24 of the 32 departments of the South American country.

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