

Latin America and the Caribbean

➔ **Colombia** Negotiations between govt and National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrilla group resumed 2 July, with agenda including possible ceasefire and participation of civil society; no agreement reported, amid concerns talks will end in Aug; ELN reasserted its commitment to peace talks in 28 July letter to Episcopal Conference of Colombia. ELN 4 July marked its 54th anniversary with spate of attacks including IED attack in Buenaventura (south west), wounding eight soldiers, while clashes with army in Chocó (west) left one soldier dead. Govt late June found bodies of Ecuadorian couple kidnapped by alias “Guacho”, leader of Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) dissident group Oliver Sinisterra front (operating along Colombia-Ecuador border), which 11 July killed three judicial officials in Tumaco (south west); police 12 July arrested fourteen alleged members of group. Clashes between ELN and Ejército Popular de Liberación (EPL) in Catatumbo (north east) continued with six days of fighting beginning 11 July, displacing hundreds of people. Violence against social leaders increased, with five leaders killed in one week in early July. New Congress sworn in 20 July, including senators from FARC who were given ten seats as part of peace accords; former FARC commander Iván Márquez 16 July announced he would not take his seat to protest recent changes to peace accords and April arrest of fellow FARC leader Jesús Santrich, who sent a letter stating his detention prevented him from assuming his seat. President-elect Duque takes office 7 Aug. Duque ally and former President Uribe 24 July announced his resignation from Senate due to Supreme Court summons requesting testimony in criminal inquiry involving witness tampering allegations. Gaitán Self-Defence Forces (AGC), country’s largest drug-trafficking group, announced in 27 July communiqué that it is studying the recently passed law to enable its legal surrender, but have not decided yet to hand themselves in.

➔ **El Salvador** Trend of rising homicide rates continued with reported average 10.1 killings per day in June, up from 7.8 in May. With U.S. continuing to deport gang members, Salvadoran officials 12 July said 527 gang members so far deported in 2018, of whom 67 jailed. Newspaper *El Faro* late June released story concerning former mayor of San Salvador Nayib Bukele, who aims to run for president in March 2019 elections, alleging he negotiated with gangs. FM 10-11 July attended Northern Triangle of Central America and Mexico (Tricamex) meeting to address regional migration crisis and security (see Guatemala).

➔ **Guatemala** President Morales reportedly continued efforts to undermine International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), proposing changes including narrowing definition of corruption, increasing donor reporting requirements, limiting Commissioner Iván Velásquez’s authority and appointing govt-approved deputy commissioner. Police 4 July reassigned twenty of 45 police officers providing security to CICIG officials. U.S. embassy 6 July issued statement supporting anti-corruption efforts and conditioning tranche of aid on continuing fight against graft. Govt 16 July appointed Conrado Reyes – former short-lived attorney general (AG), who CICIG investigated and removed from office in 2010 over alleged links to criminal networks – as substitute judge in Constitutional Court. New AG Consuelo Porras reportedly ordered review of public prosecutor’s special unit against impunity (FECD) investigation into Morales’s alleged illicit election

financing. Morales implicated in further scandals as former FM Edgar Gutiérrez 9 July accused him of sexually harassing at least two women working in public institutions. Responding to migration crisis and U.S. deportations of Central American migrants, Guatemala 10-11 July hosted Northern Triangle of Central America and Mexico (Tricamex) meeting attended by El Salvador, Honduras and Mexico FMs, as well as U.S. homeland security chief Kirstjen Nielsen, who agreed to establish special homeland security office dedicated to family reunification, set up campaign to promote legal migration, tackle human trafficking and share information. Some observers accused govt of failing to adequately address issue amid reports of 5,995 Guatemalan children remaining in U.S. migration centres, with 475 separated from families in recent months.

↓ **Haiti** Govt 6 July announced hike in fuel prices as part of agreement with International Monetary Fund, prompting three days of violent protests in Port-au-Prince and other cities despite govt immediately withdrawing proposal; cars set alight, streets blocked and shops and hotels looted. At least four people died in violence, police detained 64 people for rioting and looting. Transport and public sector unions participated in major strike 9-10 July. PM Lafontant 14 July resigned, however activists vowed to continue to pressure govt. President Moïse 17 July opened consultations with several parties on selection of new PM, closed on 28 July.

➔ **Honduras** With UN-backed dialogue between govt and opposition groups stalled, President Hernández 11 July questioned lack of results. UN office in capital Tegucigalpa 16 July approved four Latin American mediators to lead thematic working groups on human rights, electoral process, constitutional reform and institutional strengthening; main opposition group Libre remained absent from dialogue. Judge 21 July ordered arrest of 38 lawmakers, officials and individuals for allegedly diverting over \$11.7mn of public funds to finance 2013 election campaign. Govt 3 July announced U.S. and Mexico had deported 36,500 Hondurans in first six months of 2018, 55.6% increase on previous year. FM 10-11 July attended Northern Triangle of Central America and Mexico (Tricamex) meeting to address migration crisis and regional security (see Guatemala).

➔ **Mexico** In 1 July elections, left-leaning Andrés Manuel López Obrador (known as AMLO) from coalition Juntos Haremos Historia, who ran on promise to end corruption and replace militarised anti-organised crime strategy with peacebuilding measures, won 53.19% of votes for presidency, winning in all but one state and securing over 50% of votes in twenty states, most by any candidate in three decades. Incumbent President Peña Nieto's Institutional Revolutionary Party obtained 16.4% of vote, its worst result in decades. Political violence continued on election day with seven public officials reportedly murdered; 153 politically active persons, including 48 candidates, killed since Sept 2017 start of election campaign. NGO Impunidad Cero 17 July reported only 1.14% of criminal cases solved in 2018. Incoming govt, which takes power in Dec, 17 July invited pope to participate in peace and reconciliation process toward drug-related violence in country and initiated debate about establishing a new drug policy that includes decriminalisation of marijuana, as well as creating truth commissions and reparation for victims of criminal violence. Drug trafficking-related violence continued, with deaths from fighting between criminal groups and clashes between security forces and groups taking place in Mexico City (centre), Sinaloa state (north west), Guerrero (south), Michoacán (south

west), Guanajuato (centre), and Zacatecas (centre). Amid ongoing violence against journalists, police 8 July attacked two reporters covering shootout in Doctores, Mexico City. Police continued operations to tackle gasoline theft throughout country, especially in Puebla (centre). Newly elected President AMLO held phone call with U.S. President Trump 2 July and in 13 July letter proposed four priorities for relationship: trade, security, migration and development in Central America; also signalled willingness to cooperate on NAFTA revision, however govt 5 July launched second set of retaliatory tariffs against U.S.. Citizen Council of Mexico City 16 July reported 85% increase of incidents relating to human trafficking in first six months of 2018 compared to 2017. FM 10-11 July attended Northern Triangle of Central America and Mexico (Tricamex) meeting to address migration crisis and regional security (see Guatemala).

↓ **Nicaragua** Protests against President Ortega's govt continued into fourth month, with paramilitary and police forces attempting to subdue protest strongholds and restore govt control; reported death toll since April now exceeds 350 with pro-govt forces also targeting mediating clergy. Clashes between protesters and troops in towns of Diriamba (west), Jinotepe (west) and Matagalpa (north) left 38 reported dead 8 July, deadliest day since protests began in April. Protesters held nationwide strikes 13 July; police siege of church near main National Autonomous University of Nicaragua (UNAN) in capital Managua where protesters took refuge ended 14 July after assault by police and paramilitary which left two dead; paramilitary groups subsequently occupied UNAN. Pro-Ortega groups 15 July killed ten protesters in anti-govt stronghold Masaya (west); retook Monimbó neighbourhood 17 July in clashes that left four dead. Police and paramilitaries 23 July attacked protesters' barricades in Jinotega (north), killing three. NGO Nicaraguan Pro-Human Rights Association claimed 750 protesters abducted by paramilitary forces 22-23 July. In Diriamba, pro-govt armed militia 9 July entered church and attacked bishops who had been mediating dialogue between govt and protesters; Bishop's Conference suspended working groups set up to mediate. Clerics reported paramilitary groups attacked or looted at least ten churches during month. Ortega 19 July used anniversary of Sandinista revolution to attack Catholic Church as allies of coup plotters. Rival pro- and anti-govt demonstrations in Managua 28 July took place with no reported violence. Govt faced increasing international isolation and criticism: U.S. 5 July announced sanctions against three Ortega allies; UN Sec-Gen Guterres 16 July said govt allies used "unacceptable" force; UN human rights office 17 July stated violence "overwhelmingly perpetrated" by govt and govt-allied groups, demanded access to prisons. Ortega 23 July refused calls for early elections and blamed U.S. and private sector "interventionism" for violence.

➡ **Venezuela** Govt benefited from splintering of domestic opposition and signs of easing international pressure, however, congress of ruling United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) late July also revealed dissent in govt ranks, including over policy of currency exchange controls. Opposition Democratic Unity (MUD) alliance 5 July suffered major split with departure of one of its biggest members, Acción Democrática (AD); AD leader Henry Ramos Allup blamed MUD's inability to appoint new leadership or fulfil existing agreements. Former opposition presidential candidates Henrique Capriles, Henri Falcón and Manuel Rosales met with Ramos Allup 19 July to discuss how to reunify opposition, but other opposition leaders rejected idea of "revival of the MUD". So-called "Supreme Court in exile" (in

Panama) 5 July ruled Maduro must be replaced by interim president elected by opposition-led National Assembly. Pro-govt National Constituent Assembly 16 July confirmed plans to hold recall referendums against 30 opposition legislators. Electoral authority 12 July announced delayed local council elections to take place 9 Dec; opposition divided over whether to take part. Switzerland 10 July announced fresh sanctions against eleven officials including VP Rodríguez, and Lima Group 17 July reiterated call for restoration of democracy and expressed “deep concern” over reports govt has moved combat aircraft and other weapons to Colombian border. Colombian President-elect Duque said he would not appoint ambassador to Caracas. New govts of Spain and Mexico signalled softer stances on Maduro govt; Spanish FM Borell 16 July met Venezuelan counterpart and signalled Spain no longer so keen on sanctions; Mexican President-elect López Obrador 5 July said his govt would restore policy of “non-interference” in other countries’ affairs. International Monetary Fund 23 July warned inflation could reach a million % by end 2018; Maduro 25 July postponed introduction of new banknotes for second time to 20 Aug, announced five zeroes (instead of three) would be eliminated; also indicated gasoline rationing could be imminent. Miami newspaper *El Nuevo Herald* 27 July claimed Maduro under investigation in U.S. over massive money-laundering scheme involving Venezuelan state oil company.