

Latin America and the Caribbean

➔ **Colombia** National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrilla group increased attacks, prompting fears govt will abandon the currently-suspended peace process, while Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) dissident groups continued to clash with security forces and each other. Increased ELN attacks during month included bombing of bridge and clash with army in César province (north), injuring five civilians. ELN 8 Nov bombed Caño Limón, Colombia's longest oil pipeline, in north east, following similar attack in Oct. ELN 13 Nov released one of reported four remaining kidnap victims in Arauca province (east), following reported extortion payment by family; govt continued to demand release of hostages and cessation of criminal activities to restart negotiations with group. ELN continued attacks against security forces in Venezuela, killing three, in sign of guerrillas' expanding operations (see Venezuela). In continuing FARC dissident violence, in Caquetá province (south), army 5 Nov killed dissident commander alias "Humberto Mora". Conflict between most powerful dissident group United Pacific Guerrillas (GUP, led by alias "Borojó") and dissident Oliver Sinisterra front (FOS, led by alias "Guacho") continued in south west. In Tumaco, landmine placed by FOS killed civilian taking part in eradication of coca crops 16 Nov. Political killings of activists continued, including murder of Edilberto Niño Cristancho, union leader stabbed to death by unidentified assailants in Villavicencio, Meta province (centre) 4 Nov.

➔ **El Salvador** Authorities in cooperation with regional counterparts 6 Nov detained 340 alleged gang members including two heads of MS-13 and 18th Street gangs, and captured another MS-13 leader 9 Nov; gangs targeted security forces in response to govt's anti-gang operations with soldier killed during clashes 31 Oct, bringing total of members of army and police killed by gangs in 2018 to 28. Lawmakers 16 Nov elected four new magistrates to Supreme Court's Constitutional Chamber after four-month delay. Salvadorans joined "migrant caravans" heading toward U.S. late Oct-early Nov with largest group of 2,000 leaving 31 Oct; NGO Cristosal 5 Nov said 1,672 people had been internally displaced by armed violence in 2018.

➔ **Guatemala** Govt continued campaign against International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), which has been preparing case and possible charges against President Morales and others for illicit electoral financing. VP Jafeth Cabrera 20 Nov said govt will resist external pressure to renew CICIG mandate. Tensions increased between govt and Constitutional Court (CC, which ruled against govt's decision not to grant CICIG head re-entry as unconstitutional) with some 50 members of Congress drafting bill to dissolve court via popular referendum, although unlikely to gain majority support for the measure. CICIG and attorney general late Oct detained former interior minister and four top former police officers on charges of operating extrajudicial executions 2004-2007; deputy interior minister, also reportedly implicated in case, resigned and went into hiding 29 Oct. Congress 27 Nov approved 2019 budget cutting funds to Human Rights Ombudsman office; next day approved series of measures that some believe will favour impunity. Morales 5 Nov met with Honduran President Hernández to address "migrant caravan" and urged Mexico, U.S. and El Salvadoran authorities to investigate its origins and identify those responsible.

↓ **Haiti** Renewed wave of violence as anti-corruption protests gripped country 18-23 Nov and led to declaration of general strike lasting several days, demanding President Moïse's resignation; at least nine people died during widespread rioting and clashes with police; govt vehicle reportedly knocked down and killed six people 21 Nov. Moïse 21 Nov called for dialogue with opposition, opposition continued to insist on Moïse's resignation. Govt dismissed eighteen officials since late Oct suspected of involvement with alleged PetroCaribe fraud, called for independent commission to investigate missing funds, however civil society declined to participate citing lack of progress in existing efforts. Haitians continued to leave country en masse while others face deportation from countries including Dominican Republic and Chile.

➔ **Honduras** UN-backed political dialogue between govt and opposition entered new phase as working groups resumed 26 Nov, focused on human rights, electoral process, constitutional reform and institutional strengthening; UN coordinator 17 Nov gave positive assessment of last two months of dialogue saying some agreements had been made on electoral reform and human rights. Following migrant "caravan" headed to U.S. in Oct, govt 19 Nov announced 7,000 migrants had returned voluntarily since 23 Oct launch of its \$25mn plan to return migrants safely and provide temporary employment (although unclear how many were part of "caravan"). Despite overall reduction in homicide rate, spate of killings 18 Nov saw fifteen murders in cities La Ceiba and El Progreso (north). Month saw important developments in fight against corruption as Organization of American States (OAS)-backed Mission against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras (MACCIH) and Attorney General (AG) 5 Nov charged officials in former President Lobo's administration with fraud and embezzlement; AG 8 Nov launched nationwide operation against corruption in local govt and health institutions, leading to 377 arrests. Former lawmaker 'Tony' Hernández, brother of President Hernández, was arrested in Miami airport 23 Nov accused of drug-trafficking.

➔ **Mexico** Incoming govt's new National Peace and Security Plan prompted concerns it could further cement dependence of public security provision on armed forces, while violence perpetrated by small armed groups continued. Ahead of assuming office 1 Dec, President-elect López Obrador (AMLO) 14 Nov released National Peace and Security Plan including creation of National Guard formed by members of army, navy and federal police alongside 50,000 new recruits; division of country into 266 regions under operational command of armed forces; and stricter human rights training and supervision. AMLO 16 Nov announced he would seek constitutional changes to allow National Guard to control public security, after Supreme Court previous day declared 2017 Law of Internal Security unconstitutional for placing public security provision under control of armed forces. UN human rights representative and NGOs said plan would increase militarisation of public security and urged govt to reconsider. Security Plan also prioritises fight against corruption; shifts priorities away from combating drug trafficking groups head-on to crimes causing greater harm like extortion; and reformulating counter-narcotic efforts toward greater focus on social polices including helping public health efforts and combating drug use, potentially including decriminalisation of drugs. Violence continued across country, including clashes between criminal groups and targeted killings of politicians and indigenous land rights activists; clashes between rival gangs in municipality of Leonardo Barvo, Guerrero state (south) displaced some

2,000 people, some of whom were shot at while fleeing despite being accompanied by security forces, politicians and media. Some 5,000 Central American migrants and refugees in “caravans” seeking asylum in U.S. arrived in Tijuana, Baja California state (north west), where locals reportedly threw stones at them; U.S. border guards 25 Nov fired tear gas at around 500 migrants who tried to break through border at Tijuana. Tijuana mayor 23 Nov declared humanitarian crisis in town and asked for UN help. Group of 100 migrants disappeared in Veracruz 5 Nov, reportedly handed over by traffickers to criminal groups. Mexico, U.S. and Canadian leaders 30 Nov signed U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA).

► **Nicaragua** Protests continued in face of ongoing govt repression, arbitrary arrests and secretive trials against opposition activists, eroding support for President Ortega’s govt and stoking tensions with international community. Various organisations gave estimates of political prisoner numbers between 400 and 600; govt 5 Nov recognised only 273 prisoners. Former official of ruling Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) party 19 Nov admitted in media interview that govt’s response to outbreak of protests was to repress them via any available means. Nicaraguan Human Rights Centre (Cenidh) and others reported trials being held without public scrutiny and using dubious testimony. Anti-govt coalition attempted to improve coordination; activists 30 Oct created Blue and White National Unity alliance, while Nicaraguan exiles in Costa Rica created UNE-CR union aimed at increasing international pressure on govt to restore human rights and democracy. However, opposition remained divided over whether to participate in March 2019 regional elections. Tensions between govt and international community continued: President Ortega 9 Nov accused European and U.S. NGOs of training “coup” plotters and being accomplices of failed coup attempt; and cancelled his participation in Ibero-American Summit in Guatemala mid-Nov; U.S. Senate 27 Nov passed Nicaragua Human Rights and Anticorruption Act, now to be discussed in House; Trump same day signed executive order imposing sanctions on VP Murillo and national security adviser Néstor Moncada Lau. Thousands continued to emigrate; Inter-American Commission of Human Rights 1 Nov reported 52,000 Nicaraguans had entered Costa Rica Jan-Sept, though not all fleeing violence. Economic conditions continued to worsen; reported exports down and GDP anticipated to contract further in 2019.

► **Venezuela** Amid ongoing economic and social crisis and international isolation further reports emerged of splits in both govt and opposition, with reported divisions between govt factions over new constitution supposedly being drafted by National Constituent Assembly (ANC). ANC head Diosado Cabello, who is seen as rival to President Maduro, 12 Nov said there was still no draft, while some factions say only minor reform needed; followed Maduro’s late-Oct dismissal of head of intelligence service and Cabello ally Gen. González López. Opposition remained hampered by internal disputes. Opposition-controlled National Assembly 6 Nov approved motion of censure against former Spanish PM Zapatero for his efforts to mediate talks between govt and opposition, however almost half MPs opposed motion, arguing it would damage relations with Spain; hardline opposition branded them “traitors” and “collaborationists”, prompting criticism from former opposition presidential candidate Henrique Capriles. But majority of National Assembly members 13 Nov approved resolution favouring negotiated solution, and signs emerged that handover of Assembly presidency 5 Jan from one party to another may proceed as agreed.

Frente Amplio opposition front held successful congress 26 Nov in another sign of possible restoration of partial opposition unity. However, 27 Nov sentencing in U.S. of former state treasurer Alejandro Andrade for corruption brought spate of allegations from opposition hardliners that their moderate rivals had received part of Andrade's spoils. Colombia's second guerrilla group National Liberation Army (ELN) attacked National Guard in Puerto Ayacucho on Colombia-Venezuela border 4 Nov, killing at least three; opposition accuses govt of forging alliance with ELN to control illegal mining. Humanitarian and economic crisis continued; UN 8 Nov updated its previous Oct assessment of Venezuelans who had left country since 2015 from 1.9mn to 3mn, while International Monetary Fund estimated inflation rate of 1.2mn% by end of 2018. U.S. 1 Nov announced new sanctions including ban on U.S. citizens trading Venezuelan gold.