

Latin America and the Caribbean

➔ **Colombia** Govt refused to reciprocate National Liberation Army (ELN) Christmas truce, fuelling fears it may abandon the currently-suspended peace process, while Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) dissident groups continued to strengthen and carry out violence across country. ELN 17 Dec announced unilateral truce 23 Dec-3 Jan; govt responded that armed forces would continue to operate throughout country, including against ELN; President Duque reiterated conditions to continue talks with ELN are release of kidnapping victims and end to criminal activities. ELN attack on road between Medellín, Antioquia province (north west) and Caribbean coast killed civilian 8 Dec. In continuing FARC dissident violence, 33rd front dissident group 10 Dec reportedly kidnapped ten Venezuelan refugee minors in town of La Gabarra, Catatumbo (north east); military 21 Dec killed alias “Guacho”, leader of dissident Oliver Sinisterra front, in operation near Ecuadoran border (south west). In other violence, unknown assailants 17 Dec shot and killed six people including teenage boy in Mapiripán, Meta (centre), in area where First front FARC dissident group and Puntilleros drug trafficking group both operate. Authorities 4 Dec killed Puntilleros commander alias “Puntilla” during operation in Medellín. Reports emerged that in early Oct, certain FARC dissident leaders and ELN mid-level commanders met in Venezuela to coordinate economic activities along Venezuelan border area and discuss political cooperation. Country’s largest drug trafficking group Gaitanista Self-Defence Forces (AGC) declared unilateral truce 8 Dec-10 Jan. Political killings of community activists continued, including murder of two indigenous leaders in Cauca 6-7 Dec. FM Carlos Holmes Trujillo 30 Dec announced govt had uncovered “credible” plot to assassinate President Duque, and had arrested three Venezuelans in connection with alleged plot earlier in Dec.

➔ **El Salvador** Violence continued with 27 people killed over weekend of 1-2 Dec, however national police chief 9 Dec said 2018 homicide rate down 15% compared to 2017, at around 51 homicides per 100,000. Anti-gang operations continued with security forces arresting 631 alleged members in one day 11 Dec in Central El Salvador. In lead-up to Feb presidential elections, supporters of leading candidate Nayib Bukele 6 Dec broke into Electoral Supreme Court HQ following call from Bukele to denounce alleged fraud. Legislative Assembly 21 Dec elected new attorney general, ARENA party nominee Raul Melara, replacing incumbent Douglas Meléndez who had prosecuted and investigated two former presidents on corruption charges. U.S. President Trump 28 Dec threatened to cut “all aid” to El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras unless they do more to stop migration.

➔ **Guatemala** Govt continued campaign against International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), fuelling political tensions. Foreign Ministry 17 Dec revoked visas and waived diplomatic immunity for eleven CICIG investigators working on corruption cases including those against President Morales for illicit electoral financing; govt gave ten investigators 72 hours to leave country; civil society groups responded demanding resignation of FM Jovel, and Constitutional Court 21 Dec ruled ministry should issue visas by 24 Dec. Ministry 24 Dec filed appeal, clarifying reasons behind its defiance of court’s ruling; CICIG 31 Dec announced govt had renewed visas for the investigators. CICIG chief Iván Velásquez 7 Dec accused

political parties of sharing out posts in judicial system, 12 Dec expressed willingness to return to Guatemala in Jan. CICIG and attorney general continued anti-corruption efforts including several arrests on charges of illicit electoral financing 13 Dec. Thousands of Guatemalans continued journeying through Central America and Mexico to reach U.S. despite dangers along route; group of masked men 8 Dec attacked 45 Guatemalan migrants in Veracruz, Mexico, killing one, while two Guatemalan children died in U.S. Border Patrol custody 8 and 25 Dec, causing public outcry. U.S. President Trump 28 Dec threatened to cut “all aid” to El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras unless they do more to stop migration.

➡ **Haiti** President Moïse 14 Dec called for truce with opposition following anti-corruption protests and rioting in Nov demanding his resignation. Concerns over security mounted with reports of police struggling to deal with heavily armed gangs, emergence of paramilitary units with alleged ties to govt, and armed groups killing dozens.

➡ **Honduras** UN-led National Dialogue process resumed 11 Dec, with ruling-National Party, opposition Liberal Party and representatives of former presidential candidate Salvador Nasralla reaching over 70 agreements regarding human rights, electoral reforms and accountability, among others; no consensus on amnesty for detainees from 2017 post-election protests or on referendum to approve presidential re-election. Political tension remained high following descent into violence of 27 Nov anti-govt march in capital as police fired tear gas to disperse opposition supporters marching on anniversary of 2017 election; masked protesters 6 Dec burned several buses in Tegucigalpa. Thousands of mostly Honduran migrants continued to wait at U.S.-Mexico border to request asylum in U.S.; two Honduran teenagers reportedly murdered in Tijuana, Mexico 15 Dec. U.S. and Mexico 19 Dec announced \$5.8bn in U.S. aid for Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador and \$4.8bn for Mexico to stem illegal migration. Honduras, Mexico, Guatemala and El Salvador 1 Dec signed agreement for major development plan for Central America and southern Mexico aimed at slowing migration. Seven men found guilty 7 Dec of murdering environmentalist Berta Cáceres in 2016, in trial severely criticised by many human rights groups for lack of due process. U.S. President Trump 28 Dec threatened to cut “all aid” to El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras unless they do more to stop migration.

➡ **Mexico** President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) assumed office 1 Dec amid concerns that National Peace and Security Plan announced in Nov will cement militarisation of public security. AMLO started implementing new federal organisational structure that will increase centralisation and presidential control of security through central coordinating body, one of his campaign promises; but under pressure from state governors, AMLO 5 Dec handed them powers to coordinate security provision in each state, despite his campaign promise that he would personally be in charge of deciding over and overseeing day-to-day security operations. Govt 15 Dec announced 2019 federal budget, with focus on social and economic developments over security operations. Criminal violence continued unabated; in Michoacán (centre), armed groups affiliated with Jalisco Cartel New Generation (CJNG) mid-Dec began offensive against opposing alliance of armed groups. In neighbouring Jalisco state, CJNG members 3 Dec ambushed state police in Huerta, killing six. CJNG 6 Dec denied carrying out late Nov grenade attack on

U.S. consulate in Guadalajara, Jalisco state. Violence also increased in Guanajuato (centre) and Puebla (centre-south), where CJNG competes over oil siphoning markets; twenty people killed in Guanajuato 4 Dec. Central American migrants continued to travel through Mexico in efforts to reach U.S. and apply for asylum; group of masked men 8 Dec attacked 45 Guatemalan migrants in Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz, killing one, while two Honduran teenagers were reportedly murdered in Tijuana on U.S. border 15 Dec. U.S. and Mexico 19 Dec jointly announced \$5.8bn in U.S. aid for Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador and \$4.8bn for Mexico to stem illegal migration. Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras 1 Dec signed agreement for major development plan for Central America and southern Mexico aimed at slowing migration.

↓ **Nicaragua** President Ortega's govt displayed increasingly repressive tendencies during month in face of growing international condemnation of govt crackdown on social protests, attacking civil society and media, while political situation remained tense. Govt stripped legal registration of nine NGOs including Nicaraguan Human Rights Centre (CENIDH), and 19 Dec expelled two missions from Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), in moves condemned by international partners. Govt also increased repression on media and attacks on journalists including police 3 Dec seizing equipment from *Radio Darío's* offices and on 13 Dec detaining four employees and confiscating computers and documents from newspaper and TV offices; police 15 Dec allegedly beat at least seven journalists demanding information about equipment seizures. In political sphere, opposition Blue and White National Unity (UNAB) late Nov called for resumption of national dialogue, echoed by Episcopal Conference and private sector groups; Ortega accused Church of siding with opposition. Court 17 Dec sentenced three campesino (peasant farmer) leaders and members of opposition to decades in jail for various charges including murder of four police, terrorism and organised crime; first such high-profile members of opposition Civic Alliance to be convicted and sentenced. Govt's international standing continued to worsen; IACHR 6 Dec concluded "regime of terror" had been installed, while Organization of American States (OAS) 12 Dec expressed concern about ongoing repression and govt's lack of willingness for dialogue. Luis Almagro 23 Dec backed IACHR experts' report presented in Washington 21 Dec, alleging govt committed crimes against humanity in repression of protests; 27 Dec announced he would invoke Inter-American Democratic Charter, a process that could end in Nicaragua's expulsion from OAS. With economic situation continuing to deteriorate, Jesuit Migrant Service 13 Dec reported some 80,000 Nicaraguans fled country since April.

➡ **Venezuela** President Maduro's planned swearing in for second term 10 Jan, following his disputed May 2018 election, prompted growing domestic and international opposition, with some regional govts including Colombia indicating they may close their embassies or break off relations. Peruvian FM Popolizio 7 Dec said his govt would propose to Lima Group that govts break relations with Venezuela on 10 Jan, although members split on plan; Venezuelan FM Arreaza accused Lima Group govts of corruption and human rights violations. Opposition parties in National Assembly (AN) reportedly agreed during month that Juan Guaidó of Voluntad Popular party would be elected as AN chair 5 Jan in potential consolidation of moderate majority leadership of AN. Two Russian nuclear-capable bombers 10 Dec landed at airport in Maiquetía, Vargas state for "training exercise"; defence

minister Gen Vladimir Padrino López commented the two countries were “preparing to defend Venezuela”; official Russian news agency TASS indicated visit was intended to send message to U.S., which criticised visit. Maduro 17 Dec said civil militia had grown to 1.6mn members and its mission was to defend country against external aggression.