

## Latin America and the Caribbean

➔ **Colombia** Congress rejected President Duque's objections to transitional justice mechanism in show of support to 2016 peace deal with Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), while violence between armed groups continued to cause mass displacement. Lower House 8 April rejected Duque's objections and call for changes to Special Jurisdiction for Peace (SJP), transitional justice mechanism created under peace deal to handle cases deriving from govt-FARC conflict, with representatives voting 110-44 against. Ruling Democratic Centre party successfully delayed vote in Senate, which is also expected to reject objections. UN Security Council 16 April gave unanimous support to SJP and asked Congress to immediately pass law outlining its working systems; U.S. voiced support for SJP at meeting, despite U.S. ambassador early April pressing MPs to approve Duque's objections. Conflicts between armed groups including FARC dissidents and drug traffickers displaced or confined over 5,000 during month. Fighting between Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (AGC, country's main drug trafficking group) and AGC splinter group "Caparrapos" that began 22 March reportedly led to over 2,250 people fleeing their homes in Córdoba (north). In Chocó (west), fighting between AGC and National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrilla group moved toward town of Bojayá, trapping some 2,800 people. Clashes between FARC dissident group Oliver Sinisterra front and local drug trafficking group the "Accountants" in Tumaco (south west) 12 April displaced some 700, while 250 people were displaced by clashes between AGC and dissident Estiven González front in Nariño 16 April (south west). ELN 12 April announced unilateral ceasefire 14-21 April, leading to drop in violence, but bombed oil pipeline in Norte de Santander (north east) 13 April. ELN also clashed with dissident Carlos Patiño front throughout April in El Plateado, Cauca (south west), leading to deaths of six fighters. Army 16 April killed one FARC dissident in clash in Guaviare (south). Army also killed civilian and former FARC fighter in Norte de Santander (north east) 22 April, leading to widespread condemnation; army general 28 April apologised for killing.

➔ **El Salvador** Security situation remains critical with enduring high levels of killings and widespread gang violence. National Police 27 April reported 1,006 homicides since start of year, 228 less than same period in 2018, however homicide rate rose again during April. In anti-gang operations, police early April arrested MS-13 leader accused of extortion and 117 alleged members of group. Minister of Security and civil society 8 April called on Legislative Assembly to approve law recognising internal displacement, in line with 2018 Constitutional Chamber ruling; govt has previously refused to recognise phenomenon of internal displacement resulting from criminal violence. Anti-corruption drive focussing on high-level former officials continued with Supreme Court late March approving attorney general's request for former President Funes' extradition from Nicaragua on corruption charges, which Nicaragua rejected, saying Funes has political asylum; Funes and former President Saca among ten Salvadorans on U.S. blacklist of corrupt officials published 4 April.

➔ **Guatemala** Political tensions and manoeuvring intensified ahead of June general elections, with Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) revoking presidential candidacy of former attorney general and candidate for Movimiento Semilla party Thelma Aldana over investigations into alleged fraud and cronyism, widely believed

to be politically motivated. Judge from Femicide Tribunal forbade prosecutors from approaching second presidential contender Sandra Torres, candidate of Unidad Nacional de La Esperanza (UNE), who is under investigation for illicit electoral financing in 2015, despite Constitutional Court 1 April ruling that her immunity should be lifted – prompting speculation over institutional effort to block challenges against her. International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) continued to face political hostility despite high public approval; Sec Gen of Organization of American States Luis Almagro 8 April met Torres and discussed need for transparent elections with TSE working without interference from bodies such as CICIG, drawing criticism from CICIG chief Iván Velásquez.

➔ **Haiti** Amid political tensions and worsening economic situation, President Moïse confirmed Jean-Michel Lapin as permanent PM 9 April, third PM since Moïse's election in Feb 2017. Ayiti an Aksyon party 1 April joined other opposition parties in rejecting Moïse's invitation to national dialogue, citing Moïse's indifference to public demands and calling for meaningful change and advances in investigation of embezzled funds from PetroCaribe (alliance giving Caribbean states access to cheap Venezuelan oil) and case of seven mercenaries arrested in Port-au-Prince in Feb, who were reportedly hired by Moïse to secure PetroCaribe funds. Gang-related insecurity remained high: clashes between armed groups in Cité Soleil neighbourhood of Port-au-Prince left some seven dead 30-31 March; police 29 April announced they had killed gang leader alias "Tije", suspected of killing five people and injuring seven in attack in Port-au-Prince 24 April. Ahead of end of UN security and police reform mission mandate in Oct 2019, UN Under-Sec-Gen for Peace Operations 3 April told UN Security Council that UN trusts national police to manage security without international support.

➔ **Honduras** Political tensions continued amid protests over corruption allegations and unpopular reform program. Some 5,000 demonstrators participated in anti-govt protests in capital Tegucigalpa 5 April calling for President Hernández's resignation over allegations of graft and links to drug trafficking. Protesters 26 and 29 April staged further rallies in response to govt approval of reforms to health and education systems that may lead to mass dismissals; 29 April burnt three buildings in centre of Tegucigalpa; Congress next day suspended reforms and invited protest leaders to dialogue. Govt continued moves to bolster public security and increase capacity of Honduran Military Police. At least 30,000 Hondurans reportedly deported from U.S. and Mexico since beginning of year, with ambassador to Mexico predicting total deportations could reach up to 80,000 in 2019.

➔ **Mexico** Amid widespread concerns over govt's militarisation of public security and record levels of violence, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) 11 April presented "retiring" army general Luís Rodríguez Bucio as head of new National Guard (NG), controversial main instrument of security plan, and announced NG's core personnel will come from active army and navy groups. Controversial move drew widespread criticism and appeared to undermine Feb deal between govt and opposition defining NG as having "civilian character". UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet 5-9 April visited Mexico, signed memorandum with govt establishing unspecified role of UN in human rights training for NG and promised UN would monitor NG's human rights standards. AMLO 5 April reiterated govt's priority would be tackling root causes of violence through

economic and educational policies rather than fighting crime or drug trafficking groups. Over 11,000 murders officially recorded since AMLO took office in Dec 2018, higher rate than three preceding govts. Gang-related insecurity continued with criminal groups clashing with one another over control of territories. In Veracruz state (Gulf coast) – where fighting between at least six groups over control of extortion and kidnapping markets, trafficking routes and oil-siphoning has led to over 600 homicides since Dec – lawyer and activist Abiram Hernández was assassinated in Xalapa 30 March, while armed commando attack on party in Minatitlán killed thirteen people 19 April. Alliance of criminal groups led by Jalisco Cartel New Generation (CJNG) clashed with another alliance in Parácuaro, Michoacán (centre) first week of April, displacing some 100 people, while violence continued in Guanajuato state (centre), area of competition over oil siphoning between criminal groups including CJNG and Lima Cartel. Police 22 April detained some 400 migrants from Central America near Pijijiapan town, Chiapas (south), in operation targeting migrant caravans attempting to reach U.S. border.

➡ **Nicaragua** Political situation remained volatile as second dialogue attempt between govt and opposition Civic Alliance ended 3 April without reaching agreements on issues including justice and electoral calendar. Talks broke down over justice mechanisms for victims of govt repression, govt's opposition to return of international human rights monitoring bodies to oversee implementation of possible agreement, and opposition's desire to hold early elections. Implementation of agreements reached 29 March on release of all political prisoners and strengthening of rights also stalled; govt recognised 230 of 700 prisoners on opposition list, failed to coordinate with International Committee of the Red Cross which is supposedly overseeing prisoners' release, and continued repressive tactics including temporarily detaining 160 people 14-21 April. Civic Alliance 23 April met with representatives of church and Organization of American States (OAS), mediators of dialogue, to discuss govt's failure to abide by agreements. Govt 24 April announced it would not hold early elections despite OAS and opposition pressure. International condemnation of govt continued; UN Human Rights Council 22 March approved resolution condemning human rights abuses and requesting UN High Commissioner to produce report on country. U.S. 5 April convened OAS Permanent Council to discuss situation and expressed threats of further action. Amid deteriorating economic situation, U.S. 17 April imposed sanctions on recently nationalised banking regulator Bancorp and President Ortega's son.

⬇️🇻🇪\* **Venezuela** Failed uprising by opposition leadership 30 April led to clashes and further polarised political standoff, increasing fears of violent domestic or international escalation in coming days and weeks amid worsening humanitarian crisis. Opposition leader and "interim President" Juan Guaidó 30 April appealed to security forces to join "final phase" to remove President Maduro, in move govt labelled "attempted coup". Defecting soldiers and protesters clashed with pro-govt troops around military air base, leaving scores injured; pro- and anti-govt protests took place elsewhere in capital and other cities. Security forces subdued uprising, however Guaidó reiterated calls for mass nationwide demonstrations for 1 May; Maduro promised events would "not go unpunished", leading to concerns over further outbreaks of violence. Earlier in month, International Federation of the Red Cross 16 April began first shipment of humanitarian aid intended to assist 650,000 Venezuelans, following late March agreement with govt and opposition, who both

claimed credit for arrival of aid. UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock 10 April told UN Security Council 7mn people needed assistance, while some local NGOs say figure is higher; Lowcock also said 1.3mn of total 1.9mn requiring food aid are children under five; further deterioration anticipated as full impact of sanctions hits. Organization of American States 9 April voted 18-9 to recognise representative of Guaidó as ambassador, unseating Maduro's representative. Guaidó toured west of country 13-16 April, drawing large crowds despite alleged harassment by paramilitaries and authorities. Govt's attempts to disrupt opposition continued; govt-controlled Constituent Assembly 2 April removed Guaidó's parliamentary immunity following Supreme Court's call for it to be lifted on grounds he defied ban on leaving country. Following Feb nationwide electricity blackouts, Information Minister 11 April alleged leading opposition members including Guaidó planned acts of sabotage against electrical grid and banking system. Govt's international isolation continued with U.S. and Canada imposing additional sanctions against govt figures; U.S. also imposed sanctions on companies and vessels involved in shipment of oil to Cuba, and sanctioned Central Bank.