

Latin America and the Caribbean

Andes

➡ Colombia Amid implementation of 2016 peace deal's justice provisions, court ruled case of former army chief charged in false positives scandal should remain with transitional justice tribunal.

Attorney general 25 Aug accused former army commander Gen Mario Montoya of overseeing killings of 104 civilians in 2007-2008 as part of “false positives” scandal, during which soldiers murdered civilians and registered them as guerrilla fighters killed in combat; Bogota’s Superior Tribunal 30 Aug however refused to allow trial in ordinary courts, said Montoya is under jurisdiction of special transitional justice tribunal (JEP) created by 2016 peace accord between govt and Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). President Duque 3 Aug ratified law creating 16 reserved seats in Congress for victims of decades-long civil conflict, as mandated in 2016 peace deal; seats will be up for election in forthcoming 2022 ballot. In first address to Truth and Reconciliation Commission, non-binding transitional justice body, former President Uribe 16 Aug said he did not recognise legitimacy of commission or any institution deriving from 2016 agreement; also denied responsibility in “false positives” scandal, arguing that while he had demanded strong results, soldiers had “tricked” him with body counts. Two former enemies during civil conflict, former top commander of right-wing paramilitary group Salvatore Mancuso, and former FARC leader Rodrigo Londoño, 4 Aug appeared together before truth commission, apologised to victims for war atrocities. Govt 5 Aug said police had foiled attack by FARC dissident group Segunda Marquetalia in capital Bogotá, detaining two people and seizing explosives; police 4 and 16 Aug said authorities had re-activated Interpol Red Notices for four Segunda Marquetalia members, including group’s leader Ivan Marquez, also requested latter’s extradition from Venezuela. Authorities 15 Aug killed Anderson Perlaza Caicedo (alias Borojó), alleged leader of FARC dissident group Guerrillas Unidas del Pacífico in Tumaco town, Nariño department in south. Govt 19 Aug for first time extradited alleged members of National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrilla group to U.S., with two of them due to appear before U.S. federal court on drug trafficking charges. Thousands of U.S.-bound migrants still stranded at month’s end in Necoclí town (Antioquia province).

⬆ Venezuela Govt and main opposition alliance held Norway-facilitated talks for first time since 2019, and in major strategic shift opposition announced participation in upcoming elections.

In renewed attempt to ease political stalemate, President Maduro’s govt and alliance of main opposition parties 13-15 Aug held Norway-facilitated talks in Mexico for first time since 2019; agreed to continue dialogue with view to “establishing clear rules for political and social coexistence”. To reach potential agreement, Maduro has demanded that U.S. and European sanctions be lifted, while opposition coalition has called for electoral calendar leading to anticipated presidential election, release of imprisoned activists, and humanitarian aid including COVID-19 vaccines for Venezuelans; talks set to resume 3 Sept. Authorities 15 Aug conditionally released Freddy Guevara, close ally of opposition leader Juan Guaidó, a month after he was

jailed on terrorism charges following rash of gang violence in capital Caracas; Guevara may join Mexico talks in place of Guaidó's negotiator Carlos Vecchio, whose presence Maduro objected to given Vecchio's role as Guaidó's U.S. representative. Meanwhile, ruling United Socialist Party 8 Aug held primary elections to select candidates for Nov elections for governors and mayors. Opposition figure and former presidential candidate Henrique Capriles 11 Aug confirmed opposition party Justice First's participation in polls; alliance of main opposition parties 31 Aug announced participation in polls, ending three-year boycott; Guevara same day called for "coexistence" with Maduro. Govt 19 Aug named country's envoy to China Felix Plasencia as new FM in cabinet shakeup; several other ministers also replaced. Central Bank 5 Aug announced it will slash six zeroes from bolívar currency to facilitate its use amid hyperinflation. Govt telecommunications agency 3 Aug called off air radio show known for being critical of govt. After floods in Merida state (west) killed at least 20, Venezuela's Bishops Conference 30 Aug accused "some civilian authorities" of preventing part of humanitarian aid from reaching affected population; press workers' union same day denounced attacks by authorities against journalists covering floods.

Southern Cone and Brazil

➔ **Brazil** **Rifts continued to deepen between President Bolsonaro and top court.** Supreme Court 4 Aug opened investigation over President Bolsonaro's unsupported claims that electronic voting system is riddled with fraud; Bolsonaro next day decried move as unconstitutional. Armed forces 10 Aug staged rare military parade with combat vehicles in streets of federal capital Brasília, reportedly in response to Bolsonaro's order few days earlier; move seen by media commentators and opposition as show of force as Congress debated Bolsonaro's proposal to revive use of paper ballots in next year's general election; Lower House hours later voted down proposal. In WhatsApp message, Bolsonaro 14 Aug asked group of followers to take to the streets on 7 Sept to support "quite likely and necessary counter-coup" against judiciary. Bolsonaro 20 Aug asked Senate to impeach Supreme Court judge Alexandre de Moraes, who is overseeing cases which could affect govt; Congress 25 Aug rejected request.

Central America and Mexico

➔ **El Salvador** **Authorities presented constitutional reform plan seeking to extend presidential term and rejected new evidence pointing to talks between govt and gangs.** Govt 13 Aug presented constitutional reform draft to foreign diplomats; reform, which includes 215 constitutional amendments, notably seeks to extend presidential term from five to six years and allow president to be re-elected after one term out of office instead of two. Public opinion poll which surveyed 2,400 people 18 Aug showed 85% approval rating for President Bukele, highest among Central America's presidents. Police 1-17 Aug registered average of 1.6 murder daily, lowest reported crime rate in recent years; yet, at least five public transportation companies decided to limit their operations as of 12 Aug, citing increase in gang extortion. Online news outlet El Faro 23 Aug published

leaks of 2020 Attorney General's Office's investigation showing govt officials met with main gang leaders in jail; Bukele and other officials next day downplayed publication and denied talks. Supreme Court 24 and 26 Aug halted extradition of two MS-13 gang leaders to U.S. International Monetary Fund (IMF) 2 Aug unlocked \$400mn to help country address COVID-19 pandemic; IMF late July had warned against using crypto assets as national currencies as El Salvador prepares for becoming first nation worldwide to make Bitcoin legal tender in Sept. Hundreds 27 Aug marched through capital San Salvador to voice concerns about use of Bitcoin, citing its volatility.

➡ **Guatemala Political tensions persisted as authorities appointed controversial figure as new top anti-corruption prosecutor, and anti-govt protests continued, albeit at lower intensity.** After thousands in July protested dismissal of Juan Francisco Sandoval as head of Special Prosecutor's Office Against Impunity (FECI), Attorney General Maria Porras 3 Aug announced head of Electoral Crimes Prosecutor's Office, Rafael Curruchiche, would take over; Sandoval immediately criticised appointment, accusing Curruchiche of protecting corrupt individuals; U.S. 5 Aug said move "does not add confidence in [FECI's] ability to independently investigate and prosecute corruption cases". Members of farmers and indigenous groups 9 Aug blocked roads across country, calling on President Giammattei and Porras to resign and accusing them of dismantling judicial independence; during renewed protest in capital Guatemala City, police 19 Aug prevented clashes between protesters and dozens of reported shop owners who threatened to dissolve rally with bats. U.S. newspaper *The New York Times* 24 Aug alleged President Giammattei received bribes from Russian delegation in April in exchange for concessions at Santo Tomás maritime port; Giammattei immediately denied accusations.

➡ **Honduras Authorities expanded tax-free zones despite opposition and launched major anti-gang operation.** Congress 13 Aug approved law that allows tax-free Zones for Employment and Economic Development (ZEDEs) to sign agreements with municipalities, 126 of whom have rejected move so far. Combined police and military force 13 Aug launched operation against criminal gangs in at least 12 cities; public ministry same day claimed operation was successful, resulting in 138 people detained, 35 guns and \$160,000 seized. Authorities 27 Aug arrested Jerry Hynds, mayor of Caribbean island Roatán, and three other men on drug trafficking charges. Over 75 NGOs 18 Aug called on Supreme Court to order release of eight environmental activists who have been detained for two years; request comes after Public Ministry in June requested extension of their provisional detention, which was granted 26 Aug for another six months. National Electoral Council 4 Aug approved budget of HNL1,000mn (\$42mn) for Nov general elections, next day announced approval of digital results transmission system aimed at considerably speeding up counting of votes.

➡ **Mexico Drug cartel violence continued, with journalists at particular risk; U.S. policy toward migrants and refugees came under scrutiny.** Heavy fighting throughout month persisted in Zacatecas state (centre north), allegedly between Jalisco Cartel New Generation (CJNG) and Sinaloa Cartel-affiliated groups, leaving at least 28 dead 3-13 Aug. In video released 8 Aug, men claiming to speak on behalf of CJNG leader threatened to kill prominent TV

journalist Azucena Uresti over what they deemed to be unfair coverage of battle between cartel and vigilante groups in Michoacán state (centre). Unidentified gunman 19 Aug shot dead radio journalist Jacinto Romero Flores in Ixtaczoquitlán town, Veracruz state (east). Meanwhile, federal govt 4 Aug filed lawsuit in U.S. court against 11 U.S. gunmakers and arm dealers for alleged negligent practices encouraging illegal arms trafficking to Mexico. In blow to President López Obrador, referendum on trying former presidents 1 Aug fell short of 40% turnout required to make it binding. Head of Mexico Supreme Court 6 Aug said he would conclude his term as planned in late 2022 despite Congress's controversial decision in April to extend it by nearly two years. In possible strategic move ahead of 2024 presidential election, López Obrador 26 Aug appointed governor of his home state of Tabasco, Adán Augusto López Hernández, as new interior minister. UN refugee agency 11 Aug expressed concern after U.S. late July began deporting Central American undocumented migrants and asylum seekers to southern Mexico under COVID-19-related public health order. U.S. Supreme Court 24 Aug required U.S. President Biden's administration to reinstate former U.S. President Trump-era "Remain in Mexico" policy, which forced tens of thousands of Central American asylum-seekers to wait in Mexico for U.S. courts to hear their immigration cases; U.S. govt same day said it would challenge ruling. Meanwhile, caravan of about 500 migrants and asylum seekers from Central America and Caribbean 28 Aug left southern city of Tapachula for Mexico City to protest slow asylum process; as govt deployed hundreds of security forces, videos on social media showed National Guard troops and govt's migration agency officers allegedly beating and detaining migrants.

➡ **Nicaragua Despite govt's growing international isolation, crackdown on opposition and independent media continued ahead of Nov general elections.** Authorities targeted opposition party Citizens for Freedom (CxL): notably, police 3 Aug placed under house arrest CxL VP hopeful in Nov polls, Berenice Quezada, for allegedly "inciting hatred and violence"; Supreme Electoral Council 6 Aug removed CxL's legal status, de facto disqualifying party from presidential contest; interior ministry 8 Aug annulled passport of CxL president, Carmella Rogers Amburn (alias Kitty Monterrey), who 10 Aug said she had left for Costa Rica; police 9 Aug detained CxL figure and former diplomat, Mauricio Díaz. Police 20 Aug arrested opposition movement Blue and White National Unit official Roger Reyes for allegedly undermining country's sovereignty. Space for independent media and NGOs also under attack as authorities 13 Aug raided offices of main independent newspaper *La Prensa*, allegedly as part of investigation into "customs fraud and money laundering", next day detained one senior editor. Govt 16 Aug also cancelled operating permits of six international NGOs for allegedly violating transparency law, and 26 Aug banned another 15 national NGOs accusing them of "failing to meet their legal obligations"; moves bring to 49 total number of NGOs prohibited to work in Nicaragua since 2018. Internationally, EU 2 Aug sanctioned eight public officials and govt allies, including VP Rosario Murillo (who is also President Ortega's wife) for human rights violations or undermining democracy or rule of law; U.S. 6 Aug imposed visa restrictions on 50 relatives of Nicaraguan lawmakers, prosecutors and judges reportedly allied with Ortega and Murillo; U.S. Senate same day passed RENACER act, which calls for stronger sanctions on govt. Govt 9 Aug said it had recalled its ambassadors to Mexico, Colombia, Costa Rica and Argentina for "consultations"; move comes after all four countries recently recalled or suspended appointment of

their ambassadors to Nicaragua to protest against crackdown on dissent. Costa Rican authorities 9 Aug said they had received 10,077 refugee applications from Nicaraguans in June-July, highest number since 2018 protest movement.

Caribbean

➡ **Haiti Concerns rose over judiciary's ability to investigate President Moïse's killing, and gang violence disrupted earthquake relief.** Ombudsman-like govt agency Office of Citizen Protection 1 Aug warned Moïse's assassination could go unpunished, said Haitian judicial system "is held hostage by certain sectors". In letter to UN Sec-Gen Guterres, govt 3 Aug called for "international commission of enquiry" to probe president's killing. Judicial clerk assigned to investigation, Ernst Lafortune, found dead 11 Aug, days after Magistrate Bernard Saint-Vil said some judicial officials had been pressured to revise names and other details in inquiry reports on Moïse's death. National Association of Haitian Legal Clerks 12 Aug said Lafortune had "heated dispute" with judge overseeing case, who resigned next day. Lawyers representing owner of firm that hired former Colombian soldiers allegedly involved in Moïse's assassination 6 Aug claimed plot sought to change govt, not kill Moïse; Dominican and Colombian news channels 18 Aug broadcast testimonies of detained Colombian suspects who said plan was to kill president. Meanwhile, electoral council 11 Aug postponed constitutional referendum and first round of legislative and presidential elections, originally scheduled for 26 Sept, to 7 Nov; second round due 23 Jan 2022. After 7.2 magnitude earthquake 14 Aug hit country's southwestern peninsula, leaving at least 2,200 dead, UN Children's Fund representative in Haiti next day called for "humanitarian corridor" in gang-held areas to ensure aid can reach affected regions; in following days, gangs reportedly did not follow suit, instead hijacking aid trucks and ambulances; leader of G9 gang alliance Jimmy Cherizier 22 Aug said G9 would change course, now assist in relief efforts; news channel Al Jazeera 25 Aug reported aid was flowing through gang-controlled Martissant neighbourhood west of Port-au-Prince.