

Latin America and the Caribbean

➔ **Bolivia** Amid ongoing political tensions, interim govt made moves to prepare new general elections in agreement with Movement toward Socialism (MAS) party of former president Evo Morales, while unrest in streets fell dramatically; relations between Bolivia and Mexico soured. Morales 12 Dec obtained asylum in Argentina following month in Mexico where he fled after his 10 Nov resignation; same day announced he will lead MAS party's electoral campaign, 29 Dec said after a meeting in Buenos Aires his party will name its presidential candidates for 2020 elections on 19 Jan; other Bolivia-based MAS factions dispute Morales' leadership. Interim govt 18 Dec issued arrest warrant against Morales for crimes of "sedition, terrorism and terrorist financing". National Assembly 18 Dec elected new six-members Supreme Electoral Tribunal, which by 7 Jan will set date for new elections, meant to occur within 120 days but likely to extend until May/June, necessitating extension of interim govt and National Assembly mandate. U.S. President Trump 17 Dec announced backing for interim President Jeanine Áñez and "peaceful democratic transition" and denounced ongoing violence. Interim govt and Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 12 Dec created independent expert group to investigate clashes between police and protesters which left 36 dead and hundreds injured Oct and Nov. Interim govt 5 Dec passed decree to compensate families of those killed during anti-govt protests; 29 families rejected financial settlement, instead called for intervention of international tribunals in their case against govt. Diplomatic tensions between Mexico and Bolivia rose over Mexico's granting of asylum in its diplomatic facilities in La Paz to nine people, including allies of Morales who Bolivia wants to try for sedition and armed revolt. Mexico says Bolivian authorities have harassed and intimidated its diplomatic staff, including an incident 27 Dec in which Spanish diplomats were also involved. Mexico's FM 26 Dec announced country will file a complaint against the interim govt of Bolivia at the International Court of Justice, while interim govt asked 30 Dec Mexican ambassador and two members of Spanish mission in La Paz to leave country in 72 hours.

➔ **Chile** Anti-govt protests continued across country at lower intensity, although with continued clashes between demonstrators and security forces, while govt moved forward with non-binding consultation referendum and constitutional reform project. Police 6 Dec arrested 136 people during violent protests in Santiago and other major cities; prosecutor's office reported they have detained over 30,000 protesters, charged 20,000 and placed 2,000 in pre-trial custody since beginning of protests in Oct. More than two million people from 225 of 346 national communes 15 Dec participated in non-binding civil consultation referendum; 92% of participants agreed to new constitution and govt prioritisation of pensions, health and education. Chamber of Representatives 18 Dec approved constitutional reform project detailing measures for formal referendum and subsequent procedures to elect national constituent assembly, President Piñera 27 Dec signed decree that set 26 April 2020 as date for referendum. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights 13 Dec released report on protest violence; said police responded in "fundamentally repressive manner", leading to 26 deaths and 4,903 people injured, including 2,792 police. Judge 27 Dec remanded in custody six Chilean police officers, accused of torturing and sexually assaulting protester at police station during curfew imposed during first days of protests. Reported rate of dissatisfaction with President Piñera

rose to 80% according to survey by pollsters Cadem despite reduction in unrest and reforms.

➡ **Colombia** National Strike continued to pressure govt of President Duque, whose planned “National Conversation” talks did little to quell protests, while attacks and clashes involving armed groups continued, displacing civilians along Pacific Coast. Coalition of university and workers’ unions, peace activists, indigenous leaders and opposition continued to demand govt directly negotiate with strike organisers on growing list of demands; tens of thousands joined protests on 6 Dec in Bogotá, Cali, Bucaramanga, Barranquilla, Cartagena, and several smaller cities. Govt 2 Dec agreed to hold separate dialogue directly with strike organisers; on 26 Dec announced minimum wage increase of 6%, largest increase in recent history. Strike leaders who also resurrected calls for govt to restart direct negotiations with National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrillas, suspended since Jan 2019. Duque 10 Dec said door to negotiations remained open, but ELN must release all hostages and unilaterally halt attacks. Car bomb attributed to ELN exploded in Boyacá department at military base close to Venezuelan border 12 Dec, wounding at least three; Duque said attack indicated ELN did not want peace. Violence and clashes between Gaitanista criminal cartel (AGC) and ELN continued to displace five Afro and indigenous communities in Alto Baudó (Chocó), with govt early Dec reporting 3,200 displaced in November. Both groups seeking to consolidate control over corridor connecting coca-producing areas in Bajo Cauca (Antioquia) to Pacific coast. Elsewhere, combat escalated along Pacific coast communities in Nariño between armed forces and FARC dissidents, displacing several hundred civilians; military early Dec reported FARC dissidents and others increasingly deploying improvised explosive devices. A young couple, both environmental activists, was killed 20 Dec in rural area outside Atlantic city of Santa Marta; 24 Dec social leader Lucy Villarreal was assassinated in Tumaco, Nariño. Duque announced 27 Dec he was replacing head of military Nicacio Martínez, whose year-long tenure was plagued by scandals over past association with “false positive” assassinations, pressure on soldiers to capture and kill combatants. New army chief is Eduardo Zapateiro.

➡ **El Salvador** Judicial authorities took steps in fight against organised crime, including trial involving plea-bargain witness that ended 12 Dec with conviction of 373 of 426 MS13 gang members on trial, including seventeen historic leaders, on homicide, drug, and weapon charges among others, with sentences of up to 74 years. Judge said prosecutors should have also presented charges against politicians from ARENA (Alianza Republicana Nacionalista) and FMLN (the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front) parties whom witness accused of negotiating with gangs in exchange for political support. Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) paid first “in loco” visit in 32 years 2-4 Dec, focusing on public security, transitional justice, people deprived of their freedom, migrants’ rights, women’s rights and LGBTI people. According to National Police, December closed with 120 murders, which Bukele said 31 Dec was least violent month since 1992 peace agreement. Homicides dropped 6 per cent in the second half of 2019. President Bukele visited Japan, China, and Qatar late Nov-15 Dec, securing investment in important infrastructure projects and other cooperation agreements.

➡ **Guatemala** President Morales’ approval of Law of Acceptance of Charges, and Congress’s continued actions to delegitimise dismantled anti-corruption body

International Commission against Impunity (CICIG), point to increasing impunity despite pushback from opposition and civil society groups. Truth Commission created in Oct for people who consider themselves to be victims of CICIG concluded its last public hearing 27 Nov, with final report due to be presented 10 Jan to Congress, donor govts of CICIG, UN and Organization of American States. Morales 16 Dec sanctioned controversial reform that reduces sentences up to 50% for those involved in corruption cases who accept their guilt, despite protests against it by civil society groups, who also rejected planned budget cuts for health and education. After President Morales met with U.S. President Trump 17 Dec, the Wall Street Journal reported 20 Dec Guatemala is set to start accepting migrants from Brazil and Mexico, under Asylum Cooperation Agreement signed in July 2019.

➡ **Haiti** Political and economic instability continued amid political stalemate, although anti-govt protests subsided, with many schools and businesses reopening 2 Dec after more than two months closure due to protests. No significant progress in terms of negotiations between Moïse and opposition, although FM issued statement 12 Dec that private meetings between president and members of opposition have been making progress. President Moïse 7 Dec gave interview stating Haiti is ungovernable under current constitution, which he said limits presidential power. International community continued to support national dialogue, including visit of senior U.S. official 6 Dec for meeting with Moïse and FM; hundreds of protesters marched to U.S. embassy same day demanding Trump administration stop supporting Moïse. Consensual Alternative for the Refoundation of Haiti, an anti-Moïse political platform, 9 Dec rejected U.S.'s recommendation for dialogue among political actors without preconditions or delays. Levels of violence in slums reportedly increased amid security vacuum as police divert resources to dealing with protests; news agency Reuters 10 Dec reported gangs fighting over territory where they extract "protection" fees and carry out drugs and arms trades. Amid worsening humanitarian crisis, violence continued to affect aid distribution.

↓ **Honduras** A tide of killings shook the prison system, while the fate of anti-corruption body MACCIH (Mission to Support the Fight against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras) remained unclear. Lawyer of Nery Orlando López, murdered drug trafficker whose ledgers provided critical information to convict president's brother in Oct, was shot dead 9 Dec in western Copán department by unknown assailants; another lawyer next day announced he will request political asylum in another country, due to persecution from Public Ministry and death threats on social media. Director of El Pozo jail, seen talking to Nery Orlando López shortly before he was killed, also murdered 12 Dec while driving in Choluteca. Mutiny broke out 14 Dec in maximum security jail "La Tolva" leaving at least five dead, all MS13 gang members. Hernández 17 Dec decreed state of emergency in prisons, authorising militarised National Inter-Institutional Security Force (FUSINA) to take control of prison system, and suspending National Penitentiary Institute (INP). A further two mass jail killings in Tela 20 Dec and El Porvenir 22 Dec left another 18 and 19 dead respectively. Ahead of 15 Jan expiration of mandate of anti-corruption body MACCIH, National Congress special commission presented report 10 Dec arguing that body violated constitutional rights, guarantees and principles, and did not respect national laws or international conventions; 71 National Congress deputies same day endorsed report conclusions and voted in favour of not renewing MACCIH's mandate. Organization of American States-Honduran govt commission

presented its own report 12 Dec, concluding that MACCIH agreement should be renewed and improved. Civil society, opposition parties and international community spoke out in defence of MACCIH, including newly formed Media Platform against Corruption and Impunity, Partido Innovación y Unidad (PINU) and Libertad y Refundación (Libre) parties. Honduran Congressman Oscar Nájera, close to President Hernández, was sanctioned 20 Dec by the U.S. for involvement in “significant” corruption.

➡ **Mexico** Violence continued across country, particularly in Guanajuato and other central states, while tensions with U.S. from Nov eased somewhat. Head of Public Security Secretariat of Cuernavaca in Morelos state (centre), Juan David Juárez López, shot dead 6 Dec in apparent targeted assassination. Also in centre, armed commando 11 Dec attacked municipal police building in Villagrán, Guanajuato state, killing three police and kidnapping four others who were later found dismembered in plastic bags 13 Dec; Jalisco Cartel New Generation claimed responsibility for attack; Villagrán lies in highly contested area due to pipeline running through it, from which criminal groups siphon gasoline. Guanajuato (centre) recorded as deadliest state in country for police, with 78 killed in 2019, out of 442 nationwide. Fighting between members of Los Zetas and the Gulf Cartel in a Zacatecas state prison 31 Dec left 16 dead in Cieneguillas town (centre). Genaro García Luna arrested in Dallas, Texas 9 Dec on charges of accepting millions in bribes from Sinaloa Cartel as public security secretary and chief drug-war architect under president Felipe Calderón (2006-2012), and as head of Federal Investigation Agency under previous president Vicente Fox. Calderón reacted with “surprise”. U.S. President Trump 6 Dec announced he was “delaying” designation of Mexican criminal groups as Foreign Terrorist Organisations, which he announced following early Nov killing of Mormon family with U.S. nationality in northern Mexico; Mexican govt had lobbied intensely against designation, which it argued would compromise its sovereignty. Following more than two years of negotiations after Trump re-opened Mexico-U.S.-Canada free trade agreement, the three govts 11 Dec signed USMCA to replace NAFTA. Already ratified by Mexico, the U.S. and Canada are expected to do so early in the year.

➡ **Nicaragua** Situation remained tense as govt threats and attacks on political opponents and churches continued, and domestic and international pressure on govt mounted, including new U.S. sanctions. Govt nevertheless released 91 political prisoners 30 Dec and moved them to house arrest following mediation efforts by papal nuncio Waldemar Sommertag; according to local human rights bodies, a further 65 remain in prison. Domestically, opposition organisations Civic Alliance and Blue and White National Unity worked to create more cohesive front, 12 Dec presenting joint proposal for electoral reforms. At least 70 civil society organisations 10 Dec denounced systematic violation of human rights. President Ortega’s brother Humberto 11 Dec released letter directed to his brother calling for release of all political prisoners before Christmas. Ortega’s international isolation increased; U.S. 12 Dec imposed another round of sanctions, targeting another of Ortega’s sons and three Nicaraguan entities including DNP Petronic, national fuel provider managed by Ortega’s family; Legislative Assembly 14 Dec approved its nationalisation. Russia meanwhile thanked Nicaraguan govt 12 Dec for its support in UN. Legislative Assembly 10 Dec approved 2020 budget, foreseeing just \$22.5 million in aid from five countries, compared to \$386.4 million from 21 countries when Ortega returned

to power in 2007. Govt maintained domestic repression. Police 3 Dec gave awards to officers who participated in raid which left five people dead, including two officers and three civilians allegedly involved in 2018 protests. Catholic church 8 Dec denounced police detention for twelve hours of priest accused of disrupting public order. Permanent Commission on Human Rights (CPDH) 10 Dec said it had received around 3,000 complaints regarding allegedly state-sponsored human rights violations. Police 12 Dec charged on opponents and journalists attending presentation of opposition's electoral reform plan in Managua, reportedly wounding at least six.

➔ **Venezuela** Govt mid-Dec launched fresh wave of judicial attacks on opposition MPs ahead of 5 Jan vote to ratify Juan Guaidó as president for next 12 months. Govt-controlled Constituent Assembly 17 Dec lifted parliamentary immunity of four MPs accused, inter alia, of treason. Police special forces (FAES) 20 Dec arrested another, Gilber Caro, without specifying charges. Guaidó 11 Dec admitted failure so far to oust Maduro, promised talks with all sectors of opposition to determine way forward; however opposition deeply divided over whether to participate in 2020 legislative elections. Guaidó and his "govt" tarnished by corruption scandals involving opposition legislators and individuals linked to his team late Nov/early Dec, including online news site exposé of eight opposition legislators allegedly involved in attempts to clear names of corrupt businessmen linked to govt's food distribution scheme CLAP (Local Committees for Supply and Production); Guaidó ordered investigation. Lawmakers claimed Maduro govt actively seeking to corrupt members of opposition, offering individuals up to \$1mn to switch sides. Likelihood of foreign military intervention receded further with passage by U.S. Congress 16 Dec of appropriations bill rejecting use of force in Venezuela and explicitly endorsing strategy of "direct, credible negotiations"; also allocates \$400m for humanitarian assistance. Despite partial reactivation of economy, due to informal dollarisation, openings for foreign capital and sanctions-evasion schemes, as well as stabilisation of oil production, severe petrol shortages over Christmas/New Year brought lengthy queues. Maduro 23 Dec accused Colombia, Brazil and Peru of backing 22 Dec raid on 513 Jungle Infantry Battalion in Bolívar state in which dozens of weapons were stolen and (according to govt) one soldier killed. Govt demanded Brazil return 5 military deserters accused of attack who fled across border.