

Latin America and the Caribbean

➔ **Colombia** National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrilla group continued attacks on security forces, while Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) dissident-related violence and attacks on social leaders remained high. ELN 18 Feb killed two policemen along bridge connecting Colombia and Venezuela in Arauca (east) and two more next day in Nariño (south west). ELN also bombed Caño Limón, Colombia's longest oil pipeline in north east, three times during month following similar attacks in 2018. Relations with Venezuela remained strained over alleged Venezuelan support for ELN, continuing mass exodus of Venezuelans across border and Bogotá's support for Venezuelan opposition (see Venezuela). Army 2 Feb bombed camp belonging to FARC dissidents led by Gentil Duarte in Caquetá province (south), killing Duarte's second-in-command alias "Cadete" along with nine other fighters. Dissidents reportedly from First Front faction 3 Feb killed policeman in Arauca. In Tumaco (south west), violence between dissident groups and drug traffickers continued with clashes along Mejjicano River 2-3 Feb, in which at least two and possibly up to nine fighters were killed. Dissidents 4 Feb killed two people in attack on town of Llorente, Tumaco. Murders of community activists continued with three activists murdered in Antioquia province (north west), two in Cauca and one each in La Guajira (north east), Norte de Santander (north) and Nariño.

➔ **El Salvador** In presidential election result 3 Feb, former San Salvador mayor Nayib Bukele, won in first round with 53.1% of votes, disrupting traditionally dominant bipartisan system. Bukele won with support of minority party GANA, whose low representation in Legislative Assembly raises concerns over challenges he will face in governing. Bukele met with U.S. ambassador 7 Feb, stated govt and U.S. would curb migration through economic development. Another migrant caravan of 105 people left San Salvador 16 Feb, in continuing attempts by Salvadorans to reach U.S. border. Gang-related and other violence remained high, though daily homicide totals fell; national police chief 14 Feb announced 46 women were killed 1 Jan-13 Feb.

➔ **Guatemala** Tensions remained high between govt and International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG, which has been preparing case and possible charges against President Morales and others for illicit electoral financing) following Morales' attempted cancellation of CICIG's mandate in Jan. Head of State Prosecutor's office 16 Feb reiterated govt does not recognise CICIG as a valid actor in national affairs, after CICIG representatives were present at initial hearing 13 Feb in case of former prosecutor accused of obstruction of justice. Sweden 17 Feb recalled ambassador for consultations citing political situation and state of bilateral relations; in May 2018 govt had claimed ambassador had interfered in domestic politics. Political violence increased with attacks on candidates in lead up to June presidential elections, including unknown assailants 11 Feb shooting dead Marvin Giovanni Peña, Fuerza party's mayoral candidate for Tiquisate, Escuintla department (south); Fuerza presidential candidate Mauricio Radford warned of chronic absence of authority in municipalities such as Dolores y Las Cruces, El Petén department (north). Govt late-Jan appointed Morales ally to oversee security of at-risk judges, leading to concerns Morales may use provision of security to pressure judges. In attempts to stem flow of Central American migrants northward, Morales

and foreign and economy ministers 15 Feb met delegation of U.S. senators and congressmen to review Alliance for Prosperity in the Northern Triangle plan to address structural problems fuelling irregular migration.

↓ **Haiti** Amid worsening economic situation and fuel shortages, violent anti-govt protests gripped country and left some 26 people dead. Opposition 7-17 Feb held mass “Operation Lockdown Haiti” demonstrations in capital Port-au-Prince and other cities, demanding President Moïse’s resignation; protests followed late-Jan court of auditors report alleging that former officials and senior ministers, including Moïse, had mismanaged and embezzled funds from PetroCaribe (alliance giving Caribbean states access to cheap Venezuelan oil). Police threw tear gas at crowds and clashed with demonstrators, while some protesters set fire to vehicles and looted stores; 78 prisoners escaped from jail in Aquin (south) 12 Feb, reportedly during protests in front of adjoining police station. In his first speech addressing protests, Moïse 14 February said he refused to resign and leave country in “hands of armed gangs and drug traffickers”, while PM Céant 16 Feb announced economic measures including cutting privileges for government officials. Gang and drug-trafficking related insecurity continued; police and U.S. drug agency 11 Feb arrested former police commissioner in Port-au-Prince on trafficking charges. Police 17 Feb announced they had arrested group of eight armed men, including five U.S. citizens, on “conspiracy” charges at checkpoint in Port-au-Prince.

➔ **Honduras** Following Dec agreements resulting from UN-led dialogue, parties began to discuss and approve reforms. Member of Congress 12 Feb proposed Electoral Procedural law to regulate operations of Electoral Supreme Court. Liberal Party 24 Jan proposed bill that would use plebiscites to decide on issues such as presidential re-election and electoral second round if parties cannot reach agreement. Political tensions remained high following late-Jan protests demanding President Hernández’s resignation; NGO 19 Feb reported 171 protesters detained in aftermath of Hernández’s election in 2017 have been prosecuted so far. Hernández 12 Feb claimed govt is liberating Honduras from gangs, with no homicides reported in 177 out of 298 municipalities in 2019. However, Church 7 Feb expressed concern over rise of femicides with some 40 murders of women 1 Jan-7 Feb; human rights commissioner 15 Feb stated 90% of cases go unpunished. Hondurans continued to set off in “caravans” attempting to reach U.S. border, with 200 people leaving San Pedro Sula (north) 8 Feb; officials 7 Feb reported 4,610 Hondurans deported from Mexico and U.S. in Jan.

➔ **Mexico** Amid record levels of violence, public security secretary Alfonso Durazo 1 Feb presented National Public Security Strategy, which many fear will cement use of armed forces in public security, although it also contains commitment to maintain and strengthen municipal police forces. Senate 21 Feb approved bill limiting deployment of armed forces to five years and establishing National Guard – controversial main instrument of AMLO’s National Peace and Security Plan to fight crime and violence – as civilian-police institution under aegis of Public Security Secretary. Govt 1 Feb announced deployment of 1,800 army and federal police officers under banner of National Guard to violent neighbourhoods in city of Tijuana, Baja California state (north), which saw 2,518 homicides in 2018, 41% increase from 2017; 6 Feb announced deployment of 600 officers each to seventeen regions affected by rising homicide rates. Amid continued opposition to National Guard from

civil society and experts, AMLO 18 Feb formalised end of all state financing for civil society bodies. Govt continued operations to curb oil siphoning, with over 2,400 troops now deployed to Guanajuato state (centre), area of competition over oil siphoning between criminal groups including Jalisco Cartel New Generation (CJNG) and Lima Cartel. Criminal group-related violence remained high, including attack by armed commando on bar in Cancún killing five, amid growing violent competition for extortion and drugs retail markets in this and other tourist hotspots in Quintana Roo (south east), where 2018 total homicides number (774) more than double that of 2017. Targeted killings of activists and journalists continued including journalist Jesús Eugenio Ramos, murdered in Emiliano Zapata, Tabasco (south) 9 Feb, and murder of indigenous environmental activist Samir Flores, in Amilcingo, Morelos (centre) 20 Feb. Interior ministry 4 Feb presented Plan for Attending to Victims of Disappearances, reporting total of 45,000 disappeared people and pledging \$21mn for search and identification, and establishment of National Forensic Institute by July.

➡ ☞ **Nicaragua** Facing mounting international pressure and economic crisis govt resumed National Dialogue 27 Feb, following visits of delegations from U.S., EU, and Organization of American States (OAS), and an exploratory meeting with private sector representatives 16 Feb. But situation remained volatile as govt alternated between repression of opposition and NGOs and détente measures. Police raided local NGO 7 Feb, withholding its equipment and detaining two workers. Judge 19 Feb sentenced two peasant leaders to over 200 years in prison. Police 25 Feb harassed José Pallais, negotiator for opposition Civic Alliance, and his wife. Govt 27 Feb released into house arrest some 100 political prisoners; previously, Committee for Liberation of Political Prisoners 19 Feb reported govt was holding total of 777 political prisoners. Among other controversial bills, National Assembly late-Jan approved Law on Dialogue, Reconciliation, and Peace in Nicaragua, which Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 1 Feb said is incompatible with international standards on truth, justice and reparations. Govt's international isolation increased; U.S. 30 Jan imposed sanctions on Albanisa oil company (joint venture with Venezuela's state oil company) while EU diplomats aired possibility of EU sanctions 20 Feb if govt did not cease repression and release political prisoners. Organization of American States (OAS) Expert Group 19 Feb suggested victims could press for trial of President Ortega in another country. Economic conditions continued to deteriorate.

↓ **Venezuela** Turmoil continued as govt and opposition hardened their positions and clashes sparked by opposition's attempted delivery of humanitarian aid prompted fears of further violence. Large quantities of international aid including medical supplies and food, mostly transported by U.S., arrived at Colombian border and opposition leader and regionally supported interim President Juan Guaidó announced 23 Feb as date for first aid shipment into country; govt shut all border points including main planned delivery routes; President Maduro 21 Feb called aid a "provocation" and suggested it was precursor to U.S. military invasion. Army 22 Feb opened fire on indigenous protesters attempting to keep border with Brazil open in Gran Sabana region, killing at least two. Clashes broke out as opposition activists and civilians 23 Feb attempted to bring aid across borders with Colombia and Brazil, with security forces firing teargas and rubber bullets and masked civilian paramilitaries firing live rounds; more people reported killed in Santa Elena de

Uairén on Brazilian border, hundreds injured in all; over 400 members of security forces, mostly National Guard, deserted by crossing border near Cúcuta, according to Colombian govt. Armed forces mostly maintained loyalty to Maduro govt during month, although largely refrained from attacking massive opposition demonstrations taking place across country; however, severe repression continued, including police death squads' reported use of summary executions. International opinion remained divided, with most actors rejecting military intervention. UN Sec-Gen Guterres 22 Feb met with FM Arreaza in New York, urging govt to refrain from using force against protesters, while Guaidó 25 Feb met regional members of Lima Group and U.S. VP Pence in Bogotá to discuss crisis, during which Latin American countries voiced opposition to military intervention; Pence announced further sanctions against members of govt and called on other nations to increase pressure. EU accelerated creation of International Contact Group at meeting in Uruguay 7 Feb, with stated purpose to seek path to free and fair elections under external observation. Guaidó 22 Feb left country clandestinely for Colombia, stating intention to return after visiting Brazil, Europe and U.S.