

Latin America and the Caribbean

Andes

➔ **Colombia Attacks against security forces continued across country, notably along Pacific coast and Venezuelan border; some senior and retired military officials faced accusations of links with armed groups.** Police and soldiers faced attacks throughout month, notably in Norte de Santander and Cauca departments, wounding dozens. In Meta department (south), motorcycle bomb 9 Feb exploded in front of Infantry Battalion N.21 “Batalla Pantano de Vargas” in Granada municipality, killing two; security forces killed 15 Clan del Golfo members during raid in Ituango municipality. In Pacific Coast, UN 2 Feb reported 18,000 forcibly confined in Nariño’s El Charco municipality; said another 20,000 later displaced and confined in Nariño’s Triángulo Telembí, fluvial area contested between competing factions of Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) dissidents and local criminal groups. Armed men 15 Feb attacked convoy of Mayra Goana, candidate for Congress’ designated seats for victims, in Catatumbo region (east). Army 24 Feb launched military operation in Arauca department (north) killing at least 23 FARC dissidents. Violence along Venezuela-Colombia border ran high; Venezuelan security forces targeted Colombian criminal groups and FARC dissidents, 14 Feb and 20 Feb said Colombian criminal groups had planted explosives prompting them to deactivate landmines along border. Some senior military officials accused of links with armed groups. Notably, magazine Cambio 11 Feb reported General Jorge Hernando Herrera allied with criminal group Los Pocillos in combating FARC dissident front Carlos Patiño; Blu Radio 15 Feb revealed attorney general’s case against retired General Leonardo Alfonso Barrero who allegedly worked with La Cordillera, local franchise of Clan del Golfo post-paramilitary group in Northern Nariño (south). National Strike Committee and United Workers’ Union 9 Feb called for 3 March peaceful protests against govt; National Liberation Army 23-26 Feb conducted 72-hour “armed” strike against President Duque’s govt, which saw series of incidents notably in eastern Santander province where road explosion between Socorro and San Gil municipalities left eight people injured. According to civil society group Indepaz, six massacres (murder of three or more persons) took place across country 2-11 Feb, killing 18 in total; Indepaz 23 Feb said at least 12 social leaders killed during Feb.

➔ **Venezuela Dialogue initiative between authorities and opposition in Mexico City remained stalled, while low-level violence persisted at Colombian border.** Supporters of opposition leader Juan Guaidó 12 Feb held peaceful gathering to reject authoritarian rule, turned up in small numbers with mostly members of Guaidó’s Voluntad Popular party and representatives from minor parties. Mexico talks between opposition and authorities remained stalled; International Contact Group (with among others Chile, Ecuador, EU, France, Germany and Spain) 4 Feb urged all parties to resume dialogue. U.S., EU and 19 other countries 16 Feb seconded dialogue request, highlighting willingness to review sanctions policies. U.S. court 16 Feb revealed Maduro’s close collaborator Colombian businessman Alex Saab was cooperating source for U.S. Drug

Enforcement Administration from 2018 and provided agents with information about bribes he paid to Venezuelan officials; Maduro has frequently demanded Saad's release, saying he is Venezuelan diplomat whose presence is needed for Mexico talks. After govt late Jan began process of slimming down Supreme Court from 32 to 20 members, 2 Feb installed parliamentary committee to appoint new justices; following discussion with some opposition and civil society members, govt accepted five of their nominations and extended nomination period until 21 Feb. Low-intensity conflict continued in Apure state at Colombian border: Defence Minister Vladimir Padrino 11 Feb said military operations killed at least nine illegal armed groups members; shoot-out between National Liberation Army and dissident faction of Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia known as 10th Front 7 Feb killed one civilian in El Amparo. Antipersonnel mines placed by warring guerrilla groups in rural areas first week of Feb killed eight civilians, also in Apure. EU election observer mission 22 Feb presented final report on 21 Nov elections in Belgian capital Brussels, having failed to get permission to present it in Caracas; said election conditions had improved, proposed 23 recommendations for changes. After Russian deputy PM Yuri Borisov 16 Feb visited capital Caracas, Maduro expressed full support for Russian invasion of Ukraine, promised "powerful military cooperation" between two countries. Venezuela 24 Feb reopened border with Brazil which had been closed for two years due to COVID-19 crisis.

Central America and Mexico

➔ **El Salvador** Following allegations of state-sponsored surveillance on journalists and activists, authorities endorsed revisions to criminal code allowing "digital undercover operations". Legislative Assembly 1 Feb amended criminal code, with new measures authorising state-led digital undercover operations, reportedly in response to crimes that are and can be committed through abuse of information and communication technologies; opposition alongside NGOs including Human Rights Watch and Association of Journalists of El Salvador (APES) immediately condemned move, said it legalises espionage and gives too broad powers to prosecutor's office. NGO Cristosal 8 Feb filed complaint before Court of Audits against President Bukele, and three other officials including minister of justice and minister of defence, for alleged use of funds to support Pegasus surveillance program which had been found in numerous Salvadoran activists' and journalists' devices. Dozens 4 Feb protested in capital San Salvador demanding pension reform promised by Bukele. U.S. agency Fitch Ratings 9 Feb downgraded El Salvador's Long-Term Foreign Currency Issuer Default Rating from B- to CCC, arguing "weakening of institutions and concentration of power in the presidency have increased policy unpredictability" and "adoption of bitcoin as legal tender has added uncertainty about potential for IMF [International Monetary Fund] program that would unlock financing for 2022-2023". After three U.S. senators 16 Feb introduced Accountability for Cryptocurrency in El Salvador (ACES) bill, Bukele same day called them "boomers" and denied U.S. jurisdiction over "sovereign and independent nation". Bukele 20 Feb said he will send Congress proposal to grant citizenship to foreign investors. Attorney General's Office 25 Feb brought forward charges against former President Alfredo Cristiani and 12 others for role in 1989 massacre of six Jesuit priests and

two women. Nicaragua 6 Feb denounced violation of maritime space by El Salvador naval forces in Gulf of Fonseca, deemed it provocative; El Salvador next day said space under its sovereignty.

➡ **Honduras Agreement between factions of ruling party Libre ended split within assembly, but Luis Redondo's leadership in Congress continued to be questioned; U.S. requested extradition of former President Juan Orlando Hernández.** Following Jan dispute over election of National Congress head, Libre Party 7 Feb signed agreement with dissident deputies supporting Libre legislator Jorge Cálix, recognising instead Luis Redondo from Honduras' Saviour Party (PSH) as National Congress head; agreed that 18 lawmakers who they said in late Jan would be expelled from party would be reinstated. Redondo next day presided first plenary with all 128 members; while deputies, mainly from opposition National Party, insisted vote for National Congress Head should be repeated, Libre and PSH rejected demand. U.S. 14 Feb requested former President Hernández be extradited on drug-trafficking and related weapon charges; 7 Feb said Hernández's U.S. visa had been revoked and that he had been included in Engel List of corrupt Central American actors since 1 July 2021. Hernández 15 Feb said he would surrender voluntarily; authorities however same day arrested him and Hernández next day appeared before judge who confirmed temporary detention; judge following case 21 Feb admitted defence's request to turn detention into house arrest; Supreme Court 24 Feb however rejected house arrest's request. Trujillo local court 9 Feb found six Guapinol (east) environmental activists arrested in 2019 guilty of aggravated damages on a private mining company and illegal detention of their security chief; NGO Amnesty International and UN special rapporteur on human rights defenders same day strongly condemned ruling; Supreme Court 10 Feb overruled decision and ordered activists' release. Congress 2 Feb passed amnesty law for state employees of Mel Zelaya's administration who faced politically motivated judicial prosecution; Zelaya is President Castro's husband and was deposed in coup d'état in 2009; critics noted amnesty also covered those accused of embezzlement. Castro 17 Feb asked UN to set up International Commission against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras to help national authorities prosecute corrupt practices.

➡ **Mexico Targeted killings of journalists prompted local outcry, armed group violence continued unabated, and U.S. authorities temporarily halted avocado import after security incident.** Deadly attacks on journalists continued throughout month, with a total of at least six journalists killed since Jan: suspected gang members 5 Feb killed former journalist Ernesto Islas Flores outside his house in Tijuana city, Baja California state (north west); unidentified gunmen 10 Feb shot dead journalist Heber Lopez in Oaxaca state (south). President López Obrador 11 Feb illegally revealed financial information about journalist Carlos Loret; Loret is among those who reported alleged conflict of interest in president's family, including case involving one of López Obrador's sons. In response to attacks on journalists, dozens of reporters 14 Feb launched protest at Chamber of Deputies session; series of protests across country urging govt to put an end to violence on journalists followed in subsequent weeks. Meanwhile, armed groups violence continued across country. Notably, clashes 5 Feb erupted between criminal gangs in Zacatecas state (centre north), killing 16; three separate armed attacks 2, 3, 6 Feb killed ten in Juchitán de Zaragoza, Oaxaca state (south).

Authorities 7 Feb found body of Enrique Velázquez Orozco, mayor of Contepec municipality, Michoacán state (centre), who had disappeared two days earlier; 10 Feb found four plastic bags with human remains in front of govt building in Yehualtepec municipality, Puebla state (centre). In Tapachula city, Chiapas state (south), hundreds of migrants 3 Feb protested against slow pace of visa approvals and threatened to form new caravan; National Human Rights Commission 5 Feb asked immigration authorities to speed up regularisation processes to allow nearly 2,000 migrants to regularise their stay or travel free from detention. Mexico representative of UN refugee agency 11 Feb urged Mexico to find alternatives to migrant detention or asylum. In unprecedented step, U.S. 12 Feb suspended avocado imports from Michoacán state after U.S. health inspector reportedly received threatening phone call; authorities 18 Feb lifted ban.

➔ **Nicaragua Authorities continued trials of dozens of opponents in closed-door trials and cancelled status of several universities and NGOs sparking international condemnation.** Public prosecutors 1 Feb resumed trials of around 40 opposition figures and activists arrested in run-up to 7 Nov 2021 presidential election; at least 26 found guilty of conspiracy and undermining national integrity after closed door trials, including three presidential hopefuls. Death of former Sandinista guerrilla fighter Hugo Torres in prison on 12 Feb put conditions of political prisoners in spotlight. While officials said Torres' death resulted from illness, prisoners' relatives had previously raised concerns about his poor detention conditions; UN High Commissioner for Human Rights 13 Feb said Torres had been subjected to "criminal trial without guarantees" in "inhumane" conditions; EU 14 Feb called for independent investigation, and U.S. same day called for all political prisoners to be released; Organization of American States 18 Feb passed resolution denouncing "human suffering" and requested release of political prisoners. Prosecutor's office same day granted house arrest to three other political prisoners with precarious health conditions, and 24 Feb to another two. National Assembly 2 Feb cancelled legal status of five Nicaraguan universities and 11 NGOs for allegedly contravening transparency norms; 15 Feb cancelled status of six more NGOs and 16 Feb of six international NGOs; 23 Feb cancelled licenses of two more universities. National Assembly 7 Feb approved creation of three state universities, from assets of cancelled universities. Interior ministry 3 Feb said seven foreign academic programs shut down. Economist Investigative Unit 9 Feb released Democracy Index showing Nicaragua as one of most undemocratic countries after falling 20 places. Coalition comprising 16 national and international organisations, Collective 46/2, 25 Feb called on UN Human Rights Council to establish accountability mechanism in Nicaragua. Nicaragua 6 Feb denounced violation of maritime space by El Salvador naval force in Gulf of Fonseca, deemed it provocative; El Salvador next day affirmed space under its sovereignty.

Caribbean

➔ **Haiti Interim PM Henry held on to power despite mandate expiration; political negotiations with civil society proposing transitional govt failed, fuelling political instability amid gang insecurity.** Interim PM Henry 7 Feb rejected critics' argument that his term had

expired on 7 Feb (date when former President Moïse's term would have ended) and stated elections were only solution to political impasse. Representatives from Montana Accord (who have proposed two-year transitional plan that includes five-member presidential college and a prime minister) 11 Feb met Henry behind closed doors; follow-up meeting due to be held 14 Feb however did not take place, Montana Accord Monitoring Office same day said negotiations would resume if several preconditions are in place including suspension of new Provisional Electoral Council and Henry's collaboration in Moïse's assassination investigation. Local media 4 Feb said Judge Chavannes Étienne now in charge of overseeing investigation, follows Judge Garry Orélien's resignation in Jan. U.S.-based TV channel CNN 8 Feb revealed Orélien had said in Autumn 2021 recording that Henry is "connected" with mastermind of Moïse's killing. FM Jean Victor Génésis 10 Feb rejected allegations of Henry's involvement in assassination; Étienne same day withdrew from case, citing concerns for his life. Meanwhile, gang violence continued. Notably, unknown assailants 4-6 Feb killed at least ten people and gangs kidnapped at least 20 others in capital Port-au-Prince and in Croix-des-Bouquets, including University rector and former Education Minister Gérard Dorcély, who was held in captivity for more than two weeks. Henry 14 Feb said he is committed to taking back control of Port-au-Prince's Martissant neighbourhood including through clearing gang-controlled section of main road connecting capital to southern peninsula; police 21 Feb arrested five members of "400 Mawozo" gang. Amid rising inflation, factory workers primarily in the garment sector mid-month demonstrated to call for increased salaries; govt 21 Feb announced hikes in minimum wage; police 23 Feb reportedly opened fire on demonstrators in Port-au-Prince calling for higher minimum wage, leaving one journalist dead. Meanwhile, Dominican govt 20 Feb began building wall at its border with Haiti to stop irregular migration and smuggling.