

Latin America and the Caribbean

Andes

➔ **Colombia Inter-American rights body accused authorities of excessive force in handling of anti-govt protests, while transitional justice mechanism brought charges against military personnel for first time.**

Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 7 July condemned authorities' "excessive and disproportionate use of force...including lethal force" to suppress anti-govt protests that kicked off in late April, said security forces arbitrarily detained civilians and engaged in ethnic discrimination, and recommended transfer of National Police from defence to interior ministry. President Duque same day rejected accusations. Thousands 20 July marched in several cities including capital Bogotá, Medellín and Cali in bid to revive street protests, demanding police reform and greater economic assistance amid COVID-19 pandemic; ombudsman's office next day said clashes between protesters and police had left 24 civilians and 26 security personnel injured, while police reported 70 people arrested. Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP, established under peace deal between govt and Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) to handle cases deriving from conflict) 6 July accused ten military personnel and one civilian of involvement in killings of at least 120 civilians in Catatumbo region, Norte de Santander department (east), between Jan 2007 and Aug 2008; move marks first time JEP has indicted soldiers in connection with so-called "false positives" scandal, in which soldiers murdered civilians and classified them as rebels killed in combat. Civil society monitor Indepaz reported alarming rate of violence against social leaders, with at least 18 killed 1-25 July. Guerrilla group National Liberation Army (ELN) and FARC dissidents early July reportedly clashed in Bolívar department (north), leaving seven killed. Govt forces 5-6 July killed at least five FARC dissidents in airstrike in Caquetá department (south). Ombudsman's office 29 July requested govt protection for 1,300 minors among 4,100 displaced people fleeing clashes between armed groups in Ituango municipality, Antioquia department (north west) since 22 July. Authorities 22 July said they had arrested ten individuals for alleged involvement in June attacks on military base and Duque's helicopter, said orders came from FARC dissidents operating from Venezuela; suspects include one former military officer and one National Protection Unit official.

➔ **Venezuela President Maduro launched fresh crackdown on opposition in wake of deadly clashes between gangs and govt forces.**

Security forces 7-11 July launched offensive against organised crime gangs that control parts of capital Caracas; govt 10 July said fighting had left at least 26 dead, including four security officers and several civilians, and 38 injured; Maduro same day accused opposition and neighbouring Colombia of having armed and financed gangs to overthrow or assassinate him. Intelligence service 12 July arrested Freddy Guevara, close ally of mainstream opposition leader Juan Guaidó, on charges of terrorism and treason in relation to 7-11 July violence; Guaidó same day claimed armed security officers tried to detain him at his home in Caracas. Authorities in following days issued arrest warrants against several members of Guaidó's Voluntad Popular party over accusations of involvement in 7-11 July gang violence and 14 July

arrested three family members of one of them, Javier González, prompting party official Emilio Graterón to take refuge in Chilean embassy 17 July. Meanwhile, Maduro 13 July and 24 July said he was willing, under certain conditions, to negotiate with opposition in Aug with view to resolving political crisis. Earlier in month, police 2 July detained NGO Fundaredes Director Javier Tarazona and two other Fundaredes activists in Falcón state (north west), after NGO alleged links between govt officials and armed groups from Colombia; UN human rights chief Michelle Bachelet 5 July condemned “worrying example” of restriction of civil space. Washington 12 July announced minor relaxation of sanctions, allowing Venezuela to import liquid petroleum gas. EU mission 8 July arrived in Caracas to assess conditions to deploy observation mission ahead of Nov regional and local elections. Maduro 4 July gave World Health Organization’s COVAX vaccine-sharing program “ultimatum” to send doses or return money paid by Venezuela. Following April deal with govt, UN World Food Programme 6 July began distributing meals to schoolchildren. Tensions with Colombia remained high. Bogotá 22 July said Venezuela-based Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia dissidents were behind June assassination attempt on President Duque; Duque 26 July called on EU to declare Maduro’s govt “promoter of terrorism”.

Southern Cone and Brazil

➔ **Brazil** Amid preparations for 2022 elections, tensions between armed forces and Congress resurfaced and President Bolsonaro claimed electronic voting allows fraud. Defence minister, retired Gen. Walter Braga Netto, 7 July released statement alongside army, navy and air force commanders condemning Senator Omar Aziz’s speech in which he denounced “rotten side of the military” involved in corruption, and saying he would not accept such attacks; Aziz chairs parliamentary commission investigating Bolsonaro’s handling of coronavirus pandemic. Air force commander Carlos Almeida Baptista 9 July reiterated condemnation of Aziz but denied any coup threat, saying “armed men do not make threats”. Bolsonaro 7 July said 2022 elections could be at risk if Congress does not pass electoral reforms ensuring all ballots are printed, claiming past use of electronic voting system had been marred by fraud; 10 July suggested Luís Roberto Barroso, Supreme Court judge and Supreme Electoral Court president, had personal interest in preventing electoral transparency. Newspaper *Estado de São Paulo* 22 July alleged Braga Netto had sent message to Arthur Lira, head of lower house of Congress, saying 2022 elections would only be held if electoral reform is approved; Braga Netto denied claim.

Central America and Mexico

➔ **El Salvador** President Bukele’s power grab became more evident as newly appointed judicial authorities scaled up prosecution against opposition; independent media also under attack. Attorney General’s Office 2 July raided opposition party ARENA’s headquarters in capital San Salvador and seized party’s assets and funds worth \$3.9mn, in alleged attempt to recover funds donated by Taiwan in 2003-2004; 22 July issued arrest warrants against three high-

level opposition party Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front officials, including former President Salvador Sánchez Cerén, and detained five former ministers and deputy ministers on embezzlement charges; 25 July extended accusations against another two individuals. Meanwhile, authorities restricted space for independent media. Notably, migration authorities 6 and 9 July reportedly denied work permit to two foreign journalists of online news outlet El Faro; NGO Committee to Protect Journalists 12 July said denial of work permits “sends a clear signal that critical journalism is on shaky ground”. Bukele 19 July said 20,000 more soldiers will be recruited in next five years, doubling size of armed forces, to combat armed gangs. U.S. State Dept 1 July imposed visa restrictions on 14 Salvadoran public figures, including four senior members of current administration and two former ministers under Bukele, over accusations of corruption, obstructing justice, or undermining democracy; Bukele next day denounced move “motivated by political purposes”.

➡ **Guatemala Tensions ran high over govt’s handling of COVID-19 pandemic and following dismissal of chief prosecutor against corruption.** Amid growing discontent with govt’s handling of COVID-19, particularly in relation to test and vaccine procurement, around 300 protesters 10 July demonstrated in capital Guatemala City demanding resignation of President Giammattei. Giammattei 12 July vowed to crack down on “illegal demonstrations”, accused protesters of “spreading the virus”, and next day issued decree empowering police to break up any protest not complying with health security measures. VP Guillermo Castillo 14 July criticised move, saying govt should “get more vaccines... rather than limiting constitutional rights”. Meanwhile, attorney general 23 July dismissed top anti-corruption prosecutor, Special Prosecutor’s Office Against Impunity (FECCI) head Juan Francisco Sandoval, accusing him of “abuses”; FECCI, which was created to tackle investigations initially spearheaded by UN-backed International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala, disbanded by Guatemalan government in 2019, recently faced several legal challenges seeking to revoke its mandate. Sandoval immediately said he would challenge “illegal dismissal”, 24 July fled to neighbouring El Salvador “to safeguard his life”. Hundreds same day protested Sandoval’s removal outside presidential palace in Guatemala City and reiterated call for Giammattei’s resignation. Following calls for national strike by main indigenous and student groups, thousands 29-30 July marched and blocked highways across country, particularly in Totonicapán department (west). U.S. Sec State Antony Blinken 25 July said Sandoval’s dismissal “undermines the rule of law”, and Washington 27 July announced temporary suspension of programmatic cooperation with Attorney General’s Office.

➡ **Honduras Uncertainty persisted over electoral process, opposition to tax-free economic zones continued, and U.S. sanctioned officials for alleged corruption.** National Electoral Council 13 July warned general elections scheduled for Nov are at risk since Congress has not yet approved funds to implement provisions foreseen in May electoral reforms. Opposition to govt’s plan to install more tax-free Zones for Employment and Economic Development (ZEDEs) continued to mount. Several social and peasant organisations 14 July staged rallies in capital Tegucigalpa and La Ceiba city (north) to demand that all municipalities be declared free of ZEDEs, arguing that they do not produce employment and could lead to displacement of vulnerable populations. National Anti-Corruption Council 19

July presented legislative proposal to repeal current ZEDEs law. Unidentified gunmen 6 July killed peasant and human rights defender Juan Manuel Moncada in Colón department (north); UN human rights office in Honduras 8 July called for prompt and impartial investigation and urged govt to take “necessary measures” to protect peasant leaders and rights defenders. Tegucigalpa High Court 5 July found former head of construction firm DESA, David Castillo, guilty of masterminding killing of environmental activist Berta Cáceres in 2016; Cáceres had led opposition to DESA’s dam project. U.S. State Dept 1 July imposed visa restrictions on 21 senior Honduran politicians, including 13 lawmakers, over accusations of corruption, obstructing justice, or undermining democracy; 20 July announced visa restrictions on former President Pepe Lobo and his immediate relatives for alleged corruption.

➡ **Mexico** **Criminal groups continued to fight for control of trafficking routes in several states.** In Zacatecas state (centre north), clashes between alleged members of Jalisco Cartel New Generation (CJNG) and Sinaloa Cartel 1 July left 30 dead outside San Juan Capistrano town. In Chiapas state (south), suspected CJNG members 7 July killed five Sinaloa Cartel members, including son of former cartel chief in Chiapas, in drive-by shooting in state capital Tuxtla Gutiérrez. Also in Chiapas, unidentified armed men 5 July shot and killed indigenous leader and human rights defender Simón Pedro Pérez López in Simojovel town; clashes 7 July erupted between drug-trafficking gangs and newly formed self-defence group in Chenalhó and Pentalhó municipalities, and gunmen 9 July ambushed military and police officers on their way to Pentalhó, leaving nine injured; suspected self-defence group 26 July raided Pentalhó and abducted 21 people; violence in area reportedly displaced thousands throughout month. Meanwhile in Tamaulipas state (north), three warring Gulf Cartel factions 26 July announced truce. Entire municipal administration-elect of Penjamillo municipality, Michoacán state (centre), 1 July announced it would not assume office; move comes after suspected criminal group kidnapped mayor-elect and killed two of his close collaborators following 6 June elections. In Mexico state (centre), federal authorities 5 July arrested former high-ranking federal police officer Luís Cárdenas Palomino over torture allegations. Meanwhile, Mexican news outlet Latinus 8 July released video reportedly showing President López Obrador’s brother Martín Jesús receiving large amount of cash from state official in 2015, when López Obrador’s National Regeneration Movement first participated in elections; Latinus said cash was never reported to electoral authorities, and could amount to campaign finance violation; López Obrador next day said video was part of smear campaign to discredit him.

➡ **Nicaragua** **Despite new sanctions against President Ortega’s close allies, detentions of opposition and civil society leaders continued ahead of Nov general elections; tensions mounted within opposition.** Security forces 5 July arrested three rural (*campesino*) leaders, including presidential hopeful Medardo Mairena, and two student activists for allegedly undermining country’s sovereignty; 24 July placed another presidential hopeful, Noel Vidaurre, and journalist Jaime Arellano under house arrest; 27-29 July arrested opposition umbrella organisation Blue and White National Unity leader José Antonio Peraza, former FM Francisco Aguirre Sacasa and human rights defender María Oviedo. EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell 6 July threatened “more restrictive” measures against Ortega’s govt, while EU Parliament 8 July approved resolution asking for immediate release of all political prisoners, calling on EU Council to expand

sanctions against Ortega and his inner circle. U.S. State Dept 12 July imposed visa restrictions on 100 members of National Assembly and judicial system for allegedly “undermining democracy”. Canada 14 July imposed economic sanctions on 15 govt officials in response to “systematic human rights violations”. Meanwhile, friction mounted among opposition forces. Citizens for Freedom (CxL) party, allied with other opposition group Civic Alliance, 26 July said it will appoint its own VP, Óscar Sobalvarro, as presidential candidate (which it did 28 July). Following announcement, several prominent Civic Alliance figures, as well as Civic Alliance local chapters, said they will not run for parliament for CxL.

Caribbean

↓ Cuba Security forces cracked down on largest anti-govt protests in decades amid worsening economic crisis and COVID-19 pandemic.

Thousands 11 July protested across country including in capital Havana and Santiago city, calling for President Díaz-Canel to step down; demonstrators voiced anger over shortages of food and medicines, restriction of civil liberties and authorities’ handling of COVID-19 pandemic amid record surge in cases; security forces accused protesters of looting and vandalising shops, and rights group Cubalex reported 100 protesters, activists and journalists detained nationwide. Díaz-Canel next day blamed protests on “economic asphyxiation” from U.S., said U.S.-financed “counter-revolutionaries” were fomenting unrest. U.S. President Biden 12 July said U.S. “stands firmly with the people of Cuba” in their quest for “freedom from an authoritarian regime”, and Mexican President López Obrador same day called on U.S. to “suspend the blockade of Cuba” as “humanitarian gesture.” Renewed protest 12 July erupted in Havana suburb of La Guinera, leaving one dead and several injured, including security forces officers. Internet watchdog NetBlocks 13 July said govt had restricted access to social media and messaging platforms, while Conference of Catholic Bishops of Cuba same day defended demonstrators’ right to “publicly express” needs, urging govt to listen. Díaz-Canel next day acknowledged for first time shortcomings in govt’s handling of shortages. Thousands 17 July attended govt-organised rally in Havana to support Cuban revolution and denounce U.S. embargo. Cuban Institute for the Freedom of Expression and the Press mid-July said at least 47 journalists had been arrested since protests started; judicial authorities said 59 people had been tried by 24 July for taking part in protests, while Cubalex estimated that nearly 700 had been arrested by 26 July, 157 of whom had been released. U.S. 22 July imposed sanctions, including asset freezes and travel bans, on Security Minister Gen. Alvaro López Mier and a special forces unit for alleged human rights violations during protests.

↓ Haiti Assassination of President Moïse plunged country into political turmoil.

Acting PM Claude Joseph 7 July said well-trained commando broke into Moïse’s residence in capital Port-au-Prince overnight, killing him and wounding his wife. Police 7-8 July reportedly confronted suspects in Port-au-Prince, killing three Colombian nationals and detaining 20 other individuals, most of them former Colombian military officers. Joseph 7 July claimed he was “in charge” of country, declared state of emergency and closed Port-au-Prince airport; also requested U.S. and UN to send troops to help protect key infrastructures; U.S. President Biden 15 July turned down request and UN official mid-month said UN

Security Council did not intend to discuss request. Ariel Henry, who had been appointed by Moïse as new PM early July but not formally sworn in, 8 July claimed he was rightful PM and asked Joseph to return to his post as FM. Police 11 July arrested Florida-based Haitian Doctor Christian Sanon – who had returned to Haiti in June – on accusations of masterminding Moïse’s assassination; authorities 13 July issued arrest warrants for several other individuals suspected of masterminding attack, including one former senator, and police chief 14 July said precautionary measures had been put in place against 24 police officers assigned to presidential security; police 26 July arrested head of Moïse’s security team and issued arrest warrant for former Supreme Court judge. Core Group, comprising representatives from UN Sec-Gen office, U.S., EU, France, Germany, Canada, Brazil, Spain and Organization of American States, 17 July urged Henry to form “consensual and inclusive” govt. Joseph 19 July announced he would step down as PM; Henry next day sworn in as PM and acting president. Violent protests 23 July marred Moïse’s funeral in northern city of Cap-Haïtien, with police firing tear gas to disperse hundreds of protesters demanding justice for Moïse. Henry 28 July vowed to hold presidential and legislative elections, slated for Sept, “as quickly as possible”. Meanwhile, Haitians by month’s end made up majority of over 10,000 U.S.-bound migrants stranded in Colombia’s Necocli municipality following reopening of South American borders.