

# Latin America and the Caribbean

➔ **Colombia** President Duque's objections to Special Jurisdiction for Peace (SJP), transitional justice mechanism created under 2016 peace deal with Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) to handle cases deriving from govt-FARC conflict, fuelled concerns over impact on wider peace deal, while violence along Pacific Coast continued at high levels, particularly involving National Liberation Army (ELN). Duque in live televised address 10 March announced objections to six articles from law establishing SJP. Congress due to consider Duque objections and vote on them or modify SJP; observers voiced concerns that objections could lead to changes to SJP that would overload it with cases or undermine former FARC members' confidence in transitional justice, and ultimately boost FARC dissident group recruitment. Opposition responded with speech and protests in Bogotá and other cities 18 March, attended by thousands. Constitutional Court announced it will review objections 20 June, regardless of outcome in Congress. In north east, ELN guerrilla group continued attacks on security forces including ambush on soldiers in Catatumbo 9 March, killing three soldiers and two civilians. ELN 8 March carried out numerous attacks in Arauca (east) to coincide with Duque's visit to region, including improvised explosive devices (IED) that wounded five soldiers, attack on police station in town of Fortúl, and reportedly killing an engineer it had previously kidnapped. Fighting broke out 11 March between ELN and Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (AGC, country's main drug trafficking group) in Chocó (west), trapping indigenous tribes in their territory, blocking access to food and leading to death of five children from starvation. High levels of violence along Pacific coast continued as clashes between armed groups that began 28 Feb caused displacement of 150 families from Tumaco into Ecuador. Political killings of community activists continued; armed group known as "Accountants" 17 March reportedly killed Argemiro López, local community leader of coca substitution processes, in La Guayacana, Nariño (south west).

➔ **El Salvador** UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet 6 March criticised proposed National Reconciliation Law, which Legislative Assembly began discussing in Feb, warning that if it was approved it would grant amnesty to those who may be "responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity" during 1980-1992 civil war, violating victims' right to justice and reparation. Homicide rate remained lower than in 2018, with police chief 23 March announcing 659 murders since beginning of year, down from 870 in same period in 2018. Regional focus on migration continued with Northern Triangle and U.S. govts 27 March signing agreement to deter international crime and curb irregular migration; U.S. State Department 30 March announced end of aid to region, day after President Trump claimed Northern Triangle countries had "set up" migrant caravans.

➔ **Guatemala** Political tensions continued over International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), particularly its role in corruption case involving family of President Morales, against whom CICIG has also been preparing possible charges over illicit electoral financing. Attorney general's office 6 March appealed to Constitutional Court to overturn Appeal Court's Feb ruling that removed CICIG as plaintiff in corruption case of Morales' brother and son, amid govt's attempts to ensure CICIG plays no further parts in national affairs. Inter-American

Court of Human Rights 12 March publicly ordered govt to abandon controversial amnesty bill which would pardon crimes committed during 1960-1996 civil war, which also drew heavy criticism from other domestic and international actors. Group of lawmakers 13 March walked out during third and final reading of bill, forcing its suspension. Govt 12 March confirmed it had dismissed security head overseeing security for at-risk judges following concerns over his appointment in Jan and request from International Commission of Jurists. Regional focus on migration continued with Northern Triangle and U.S. govts 27 March signing agreement to deter international crime and curb irregular migration; however U.S. State Department 30 March announced end of aid to region, day after President Trump claimed Northern Triangle countries had “set up” migrant caravans.

➡ **Haiti** Political tensions remained high following Feb anti-govt demonstrations and unrest that left some 26 dead, with fears that ongoing calls to topple govt could lead to more violent protests. Opposition grouping Le Secteur Démocratique et Populaire 4 March held funeral in capital Port-au-Prince for four protesters killed during uprisings, leading to fresh protests and clashes with police who fired tear gas; further anti-govt protests 29 March. Amid executive paralysis, rising inflation and continued protests, parliament 18 March removed PM Céant in no-confidence vote; President Moïse 21 March named Jean-Michel Lapin as interim PM. In attempt to placate political tensions, Moïse late Feb announced national dialogue committee with mandate until May 2019, however, parts of opposition rejected initiative; several opposition parties proposed 36-month transition period including creation of constituent assembly to redraw constitution and creation of electoral council to promote electoral reforms and ensure free elections. Gang insecurity continued as violent clashes broke out between armed groups 13 March in La Saline neighbourhood of Port-au-Prince, leaving six dead. UN Sec-Gen Guterres 1 March recommended creation of special political mission for Haiti once UN police force’s mandate ends Oct 2019.

➡ **Honduras** In attempt to bolster public security, president’s chief of staff 7 March announced govt preparing bill to increase size of military police and seeking ways to strengthen National Police and National Anti-Gang Force. Following Dec agreements resulting from UN-led dialogue, and after president of Congress put forward motion in support of new National Electoral Council which would be responsible for all administrative, technical and logistical aspects of elections with aim of increasing transparency, Congress received draft bill from Supreme Electoral Tribunal 27 Feb. Experts from Organization of American States (OAS) 25 March arrived in country to provide technical support on reforms. Regional focus on migration continued with Northern Triangle and U.S. govts 27 March signing agreement to deter international crime and curb irregular migration; however U.S. State Department 30 March announced end of aid to region, day after President Trump claimed Northern Triangle countries had “set up” migrant caravans.

➡ **Mexico** Amid record levels of violence, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO)’s National Peace and Security Plan to fight crime moved toward becoming law, though details on strategy and operations, transparency and accountability not yet announced. All state congresses by 14 March had given approval for constitutional reform that allows armed forces to remain active in public security for another five years and enables creation of National Guard, controversial

main instrument of security plan; concerns remain over militarisation of public security. Criminal violence continued unabated, most prominently Jalisco Cartel New Generation (CJNG), which continues to push for expansion and territorial consolidation in centre of country, and was blamed for two high-profile incidents during month: 9 March attack on night club in Salamanca, Guanajuato state (centre), killing fifteen, and discovery of 27 bodies in Guadalajara, Jalisco (west) 14 March. CJNG also in violent competition with other armed groups including Sinaloa Cartel over smuggling routes in Tijuana, Baja California state (north) and against multiple groups for control of extortion, trafficking and oil-siphoning in Veracruz state (Gulf coast). Mexican NGO 12 March released report detailing Tijuana as world's deadliest city, with Acapulco in Guerrero state (south) in second place. Attacks on security forces continued; in Tierra Blanca (centre), CJNG 14 March ambushed state police, killing one officer, and attacked state police HQ with grenades. Migrants travelling through Mexico on way to U.S. continued to face risks, particular in border state Tamaulipas, where around 20 migrants were kidnapped from bus outside San Fernando 7 March. Federal govt subsequently announced it had dismissed 30 local agents of National Migratory Institute, acknowledging corruption. Journalist Santiago Barroso murdered in San Luis Río Colorado, Sonora (north) 15 March, and journalist Omar Iván Camacho murdered in Salvador Alvarado, Sinaloa (north) 24 March, fifth killed in 2019.

➡ **Nicaragua** Despite progress in dialogue between govt and opposition, political situation remained tense as govt continued repression and faced further international isolation. Following 27 Feb resumption of govt talks with opposition Civic Alliance, parties 5 March agreed on roadmap for technical and procedural issues in negotiations, and agreed to invite Episcopal Conference (CEN) to act as witness, but CEN 8 March refused. On invitation of govt 14 March, Organization of American States (OAS) appointed Luis Ángel Rosadilla as special representative to explore possibilities for OAS to act as guarantor, conditioning Rosadilla's participation on release of political prisoners. Govt 20 March agreed to release all political prisoners over three-month period, with International Committee of the Red Cross overseeing release, to restart negotiation with opposition. Opposition representative 29 March reported govt agreed to restore protest and press freedoms and disarm paramilitary groups. However repression continued as human rights defenders reported govt continued detaining opponents. Opposition Blue and White National Unity (UNAB) 16 March held unauthorised protests in Managua; police violently repressed demonstrations, wounding eight people, arresting more than 100 including two Civic Alliance negotiators, and harassing journalists covering protests, though detainees were released same day; UNAB 30 March said police had suppressed protest in Managua, with ten demonstrators detained and several injured. Govt's international isolation increased; European Parliament 14 March adopted resolution calling on EU to impose targeted sanctions against govt officials and suspend country's Association Agreement with EU, which gives Nicaragua preferential trade access. U.S. envoy Todd Robinson 18 March stated U.S. had not ruled out any options, including military action; U.S. Sec State Mike Pompeo 27 March aired possibility of further sanctions. Economic conditions continued to deteriorate.

↓ **Venezuela** Govt and opposition maintained hardline stances amid ongoing international efforts to end political crisis, while nationwide electricity blackouts

signalled devastating effects of failing to resolve it. Opposition leader and “interim President” Juan Guaidó, recognised by U.S. and allies, returned to Venezuela 4 March following regional tour, arriving at Caracas airport despite speculation he would be arrested. Police 21 March arrested Guaidó’s chief of staff Roberto Marrero, later charged in connection with alleged “terrorist plot”; U.S. Sec State Pompeo warned of “consequences”, although U.S. officials downplayed likelihood of military intervention. Massive electric grid failure 7 March left around 90% of country without power, with Caracas suffering blackout for two days and other areas for over a week; blackout led to cut-off in water supplies and communications, unknown number of deaths in hospitals as back-generators failed, and outbreaks of looting, particularly in Maracaibo city (north west). President Maduro’s govt blamed sabotage by U.S. and local allies, although experts reportedly blamed fire underneath power lines and faulty maintenance. Widespread and lengthy blackouts returned 25 March, which this time govt blamed on “sniper”, and again 29 March. Two Russian military planes landed 23 March, reportedly carrying military equipment and dozens of troops; Russia cited fulfilment of existing military contracts, but U.S. President Trump 27 March said Russia must “get out”. International Federation of the Red Cross 29 March said it had reached agreement with govt and opposition to begin mass aid relief mid-April. Amid increasing tensions with international actors backing Guaidó, govt 6 March declared German ambassador (who accompanied Guaidó on his return from airport in official vehicle) persona non grata, giving him 48 hours to leave. U.S. 14 March removed last diplomats from Venezuela and closed embassy; FM Arreaza said govt expelled them while Pompeo said their presence had been “constraint” on U.S. policy. International Contact Group, headed by EU and Uruguay, met at ministerial level in Quito, Ecuador 28 March, sent mission to Caracas mid-March primarily to discuss humanitarian assistance; Contact Group has given itself until May to determine whether mediated settlement is possible.