

## Latin America and the Caribbean

➔ **Colombia** Political tensions continued over role of transitional justice mechanism of 2016 peace deal with Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), while violence between armed groups led to mass displacement. Special Jurisdiction for Peace (SJP), created under peace deal to handle cases deriving from govt-FARC conflict, 15 May ruled against imprisonment and extradition to U.S. of ex-FARC commander Jesús Santrich, arrested on drug trafficking charges in joint U.S.-Colombia operation April 2018; SJP ruled evidence did not establish that Santrich had committed trafficking crimes after 1 Dec 2016, date FARC demobilisation began. Police 17 May re-arrested Santrich immediately after his release following attorney general's office distribution of video allegedly showing Santrich committing crimes post-demobilisation date. Santrich released 30 May on Supreme Court's order. Attorney general, deputy attorney general and justice minister resigned in protest at SJP's decision to not extradite Santrich. Constitutional Court 29 May ruled Congress had rejected President Duque's objections against SJP, obliging him to sign law regarding functioning of SJP. Duque 24 May announced appointment of independent commission to review military orders and operational instructions following *New York Times* report 18 May alleging military leaders had set targets for army including number of deaths or surrenders of enemy combatants. Conflicts between armed groups displaced or confined over 2,000 during month. FARC dissident groups 2 May clashed in Nariño (south west), displacing over 200 and putting Dec truce between various dissident groups under strain. In Juradó, Chocó (west), fighting between Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (AGC, country's main drug trafficking group) and National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrilla group displaced over 900 people and confined 800 within their communities between late April and mid May. Other violence continued; unknown attackers 14 May attacked judicial commission in Tibú, Norte de Santander (north east), killing two members of commission and wounding five policemen. Attacks on activists increased with almost ten killed during month, mainly in Putumayo (south west), Bolívar (north), Antioquia (north west) and Arauca (east) departments.

➔ **El Salvador** Gang-related violence remained high amid continuing anti-gang and anti-corruption operations. National Police 20 May reported 1,236 homicides since start of year, 13% less than same period in 2018, however homicide rate on rise since April. Gang attacks on police increased including police officer killed in San Juan Nonualco, La Paz (centre) 17 May, 19th police officer killed in 2019. In ongoing anti-gang operations, Attorney General 16 May issued 274 arrest warrants in attempts to attack criminal groups' structures, including targeting collaborators in police and judicial institutions. Legislative Assembly 27 May resumed debate on controversial National Reconciliation bill with input from civil society; critics allege new law would entail amnesty for war crimes during 1980-1992 civil war.

➔ **Guatemala** Political manoeuvring and hostilities continued ahead of 16 June presidential election with cancellation of numerous candidacies, amid fears of political violence and attacks on candidates. In most prominent series of rulings widely believed to be politically motivated, constitutional court (CC) 15 May rejected Movimiento Semilla party's appeal to allow former attorney general and anti-

corruption figure Thelma Aldana to stand as its candidate in presidential elections, following contested legal ruling revoking her candidacy in April. Aldana late April revealed U.S. intelligence had informed her of plot to assassinate her, raising concerns over potential political violence around election. CC 17 May provisionally suspended court ruling that rejected prosecutors' request to lift immunity of presidential candidate for Unidad Nacional de la Esperanza (UNE) party Sandra Torres, who leads pre-election polls, over allegations of illicit electoral financing in 2015; however Torres allowed to continue campaigning until CC reaches definitive resolution, raising concerns over alleged institutional effort to block challenges against her. Interior Ministry 6 May revealed several mayoral and federal candidates requested police protection after receiving death threats.

➡ **Haiti** Amid worsening economic situation and continued allegations of corruption, Progressive Opposition Forces (FOP) alliance 6 May announced new campaign to oust President Moïse and establish interim govt which would coordinate national dialogue and appoint new head of state; opposition also critical of new PM Lapin's cabinet for including six members from heavily-criticised previous cabinet. Gang insecurity remained high with reports of collusion between govt figures and organised crime groups; in Artibonite department (centre), police 13 May arrested 53 members of gang led by Arnel Joseph, reported to have links to numerous state officials including a senator and former PM Céant. Police also alleged two senior officials – former mayor of Port-au-Prince and executive director of Interior Ministry – partly planned Nov 2018 mass killing in La Saline neighbourhood of capital.

↓ **Honduras** Political tensions flared as protesters led demonstrations and strikes throughout month against govt's planned reforms. Following April unrest in response to reforms to health and education systems that could potentially lead to mass dismissals, protests continued 1 May; police and protesters clashed, leaving dozens injured. Govt 6 May announced it would not suspend ten executive decrees as health and education unions demanded, called instead for dialogue; protests and clashes continued including protesters setting alight entrance to U.S. embassy in Tegucigalpa 31 May. Govt 15 May renewed Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) judges' mandate; opposition Libre party criticised move as TSE accused of electoral fraud in 2017 and two electoral bodies, created as part of UN-led dialogue in 2018 to oversee electoral cycles and settle election related disputes, remained non-operational; Libre members 21 May protested govt decisions on mandate as well as decrees on health and education in Congress, prompting scuffles between members of Congress. Police reported 305 murders 1-26 May, compared to 241 same period in 2018. Amid continued regional focus on migration, U.S. border patrol early May revealed it had detained since Oct 2018 133,258 Honduran nationals who had attempted to enter U.S.

➡ **Mexico** Amid high levels of violence and concerns over militarisation of public security, National Guard (NG), controversial main instrument of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO)'s security plan, commenced operations. Govt deployed NG in municipalities of Minatitlán and Coatzacoalcos in Veracruz state (Gulf Coast), Salina Cruz in Oaxaca (south), Tijuana in Baja California (north) and Cancún in Quintana Roo (south east), amid reports of lack of cooperation between municipal, state and federal forces. NG due to be composed of army, navy and federal police, but navy and police rejected 10 May transfers of their officers citing lack of

legal basis. Public security secretary Alfonso Durazo 17 May said deployment of NG would combine with investment in local and state police. Criminal group-related violence remained high; in Veracruz, armed attack on market in Coatepec killed five 17 May. As govt continued operations to curb oil siphoning, suspected siphoners 4 May killed one navy officer and injured three in attack in Xicotepec, Puebla (centre). Journalist Telésforo Santiago Enríquez murdered in San Agustín, Oaxaca 2 May and journalist Francisco Romero murdered in Playa del Carmen, Quintana Roo 16 May; eleven media professionals murdered since AMLO's term began Dec 2018. Targeted killings of activists continued; indigenous activists José Lucio Bartolo Faustino and Modesto Verales Sebastián murdered in Chilapa, Guerrero (south) 5 May, and environmental activist Leonel Díaz Urbano murdered in Zacapoaxtla, Puebla 10 May. AMLO 7 May announced he would ask for U.S. payments to combat drug trafficking and organised crime to be rechannelled toward regional development to address root causes of insecurity and migration; U.S. President Trump 30 May announced 5% tariff on all goods from Mexico rising 5% each month until country curbs illegal migration.

➔ 🇳🇮\* **Nicaragua** Govt and opposition talks stalled, fuelling concerns over deterioration in political situation in June, as deadline for govt's release of political prisoners expires and govt faces possible further international isolation and sanctions. Amid govt intransigence over release of 242 political prisoners on govt and opposition lists, opposition platform Blue and White National Unity 7 May called on Civic Alliance to withdraw from talks. Political prisoner Eddy Montes died during prison riot 16 May; Civic Alliance called for impartial investigation with international involvement, while Organization of American States (OAS) Permanent Council 21 May convened to discuss Nicaragua following death. Civic Alliance 20 May withdrew from talks until release of all prisoners and called for national strike, though govt same day released 100 political prisoners; 90-day window for release of prisoners expires 18 June, raising concerns over possible end to dialogue. Repression continued with flawed trials of opposition protesters resuming 2 May; Permanent Commission on Human Rights 8 May denounced re-arrest of at least twelve protesters who had been released, while human rights association Nicaragua Nunca+ 6 May reported cases of torture of political prisoners, including electrocution and nail extraction. OAS General Assembly due to meet 26 June in Colombia, amid reports that Nicaragua may be expelled from organisation. UN Human Rights Council 15 May discussed Nicaragua and presented 259 recommendations, which govt rejected. Amid ongoing deterioration in economic situation, U.S. Sec State Pompeo due to report to Congress with suggestions for further sanctions 20 June.

➔ 🇻🇪 **Venezuela** Political crisis continued as govt cracked down on opposition in wake of failed April uprisings, while divisions in opposition resurfaced over whether to negotiate with govt. Following opposition leader and "interim President" Juan Guaidó's unsuccessful 30 April appeal to security forces to remove President Maduro, opposition supporters 1 May held further anti-govt demonstrations in Caracas and elsewhere; demonstrators clashed with security forces, with one woman shot dead and dozens injured. Guaidó promised further protests and series of strikes. State security (Sebin) 8 May detained deputy president of opposition controlled-National Assembly. Pro-govt National Constituent Assembly (ANC) revoked parliamentary immunity of at least fourteen MPs; four MPs took refuge in embassies,

one fled country and four allegedly went into hiding; govt suppression has led to arrest, flight or refuge in foreign embassies of 15 of opposition's 112 MPs since 30 April uprising. Maduro 20 May announced plan to bring forward parliamentary (AN) elections, previously due Dec 2020; govt same day extended ANC's two-year term until 31 Dec 2020. In efforts to open negotiations to end crisis, govt and opposition representations met in Oslo for confidential talks facilitated by Norway mid-May; talks ended 29 May, reportedly without agreement. Some in opposition criticised talks after details were leaked. Guaidó admitted authorising delegation but insisted there would be no negotiations unless Maduro stepped down. International Contact Group, headed by EU and Uruguay, extended its mandate beyond original 90-day deadline during meeting in Costa Rica 6-7 May, and visited Caracas 16-17 May, meeting with Maduro and Guaidó. Effect of U.S. sanctions and economic crisis continued to be felt with severe petrol shortages in much of country mid-May, including in Caracas.