

Latin America and the Caribbean

➤ **Colombia** Amid political violence ahead of Oct local elections, tensions with Venezuela continued over its alleged support of Colombian guerrillas. Following late-Aug return to arms by three former senior commanders of Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), govt continued to accuse Venezuelan govt of harbouring, assisting and training Colombian guerrilla groups. FM Trujillo 11 Sept said govt has proof Venezuelan President Maduro violated 2001 UN Security Council resolution banning support for terrorist groups at Organization of American States meeting in bid to activate regional defence Rio Treaty, which could lead to stronger regional sanctions, blockade or military offensive; President Duque presented evidence at UN General Assembly 25 Sept. Venezuela accused Colombia of attempting to recruit Venezuelan soldiers to sabotage its air defence systems, reportedly responding with military drills near border since 10 Sept; UN Sec-Gen Guterres 11 Sept asked govts to initiate dialogue to de-escalate tensions. Transitional justice mechanism Special Jurisdiction for Peace 13 Sept officially expelled leading members of new FARC dissent group Jesús Santrich and alias “El Paisa”, will no longer receive protections of 2016 peace agreement. Political violence increased ahead of 27 Oct local elections, including unknown assailants 15 Sept murdering Bernardo Betancourt Orozco, mayoral candidate for Tibú in Catatumbo (north east), seventh candidate killed since campaigning began 27 July; Duque 16 Sept said govt will reinforce candidates’ protection, but National Protection Unit director 18 Sept told Congress he had run out of resources. UN humanitarian agency 12 Sept reported clashes between army and National Liberation Army (ELN) which started 22 Aug had confined 3,816 people in municipalities of Medio San Juan and Istmina, Chocó (west); ELN 12 Sept killed soldier in attack on troops in La Gabarra municipality, Norte de Santander (north east). Clashes between army and the Gaitanista criminal group in Bajo Cauca region, Antioquia (north west), killed four soldiers 3 Sept. Security Council 12 Sept voted unanimously to extend mandate of UN verification mission to oversee implementation of peace accord.

➤ **El Salvador** Debates continued over future anti-corruption body, while govt increased anti-migration efforts. UN Sec-Gen’s spokesperson 2 Sept said govt requested UN support in creating International Commission against Impunity in El Salvador (CICIES). Govt and Organization of American States (OAS) 6 Sept signed letter of intent on creating CICIES within three months; OAS Sec Gen Luis Almagro 24 Sept appointed Guatemalan Ronalth Ochaeta as interim CICIES chief. Civil society and opposition representatives criticised CICIES for apparent govt efforts to bypass parliamentary ratification and over plans for body to work closer with national police than Attorney General (AG)’s office. Govt 2 Sept lifted state of emergency in prison system, which had entailed tough isolation measures for imprisoned gang members in recent months. AG 21 Sept announced 2,311 reports of disappearances 1 Jan-16 Sept, average of nine per day. Following 28 Aug govt-U.S. letter of intent to strengthen cooperation on migration and security,

Ministry of Justice and Public Security 12 Sept announced creation of border patrol unit, composed of 800 police and 300 migration officials, to tackle illegal immigration and human trafficking. Govt and U.S. 20 Sept signed asylum cooperation agreement, authorising U.S. to transfer asylum seekers to El Salvador while their cases are being reviewed by U.S. authorities.

➡ **Guatemala** Political tensions continued over end of anti-corruption body and migration agreement with U.S.. UN-backed International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG)'s mandate ended 3 Sept, amid concern among observers over impact on anti-corruption efforts; President-elect Giammattei gave no further details of his planned new anti-corruption body, due to start operations Jan 2020. Congress 24 Sept created commission to investigate possible irregularities in CICIG's work. Constitutional Court 10 Sept revoked its July ruling that declared Guatemala could not become "Safe Third Country" following July agreement with U.S., which foresees that migrants who file asylum requests in U.S. can be transferred to Guatemala while their cases are being reviewed. Earlier, Giammattei 5 Sept told U.S. Sec State Pompeo during visit to Washington DC that he disagrees with pact, and requested that his cabinet observes talks between outgoing govt of President Morales and U.S.; Giammattei 8 Sept said Morales prevented him from observing talks, and warned that he would not implement agreement if cut out of process. Morales 4 Sept decreed 30-day state of emergency in 22 municipalities in north east after three soldiers died in ambush by drug traffickers near border with Belize. Interior Minister Degenhart 18 Sept reported country now officially cocaine-producing after police and U.S. anti-narcotic specialists found coca plantations and laboratories in east, in areas close to Livingston and El Estor.

↓ **Haiti** Amid widespread public anger over fuel shortages, political tensions increased over tumultuous parliamentary attempts to ratify cabinet and continued opposition calls for President Moïse to resign. Congress 3 Sept approved nomination of PM Michel and his cabinet despite group of opposition deputies vandalising lower house in unsuccessful bid to prevent ratification. Ratification process moved to Senate, which cancelled vote 11 Sept after opposition senators accompanied by dozens of armed militants, led by gang leader Jean Dimens, occupied chamber. Opposition Senator Saurel Jacinthe same day alleged Michel offered several lawmakers thousands of dollars to vote in his favour; Senator Willot Joseph 13 Sept admitted he accepted \$100,000 bribe from PM; vote again postponed. Widespread public unrest at fuel shortages continued; demonstrators 2 Sept marched in Port-au-Prince and 17 Sept blocked several roads in capital, demanding President Moïse's resignation; police 27 Sept reporting four people shot dead in demonstrations 16-25 Sept; mass anti-govt protest held in Port-au-Prince 30 Sept. Senator Féthière 23 Sept shot and injured photojournalist and security guard as he tried to leave parliamentary grounds through protesting crowd. As tensions mounted, Moïse 25 Sept delivered address to the nation at 2am calling for dialogue and unity. Opposition leader André Michel rejected

dialogue offer; Moïse cancelled his trip to UN General Assembly but still refused to resign.

➡ **Honduras** Despite progress in electoral reforms, civil unrest continued causing disruption across country. Thousands of anti-govt protesters, summoned by left-wing Libre party, marched toward centre of capital Tegucigalpa on Independence Day 15 Sept; police and protesters clashed; four reportedly injured. Protests took place 3 and 9 Sept against construction of residential complex in La Tigra forest reserve, with police using tear gas to disperse residents blocking four access roads to Tegucigalpa. Electoral reforms progressed; Congress 10 Sept appointed members of newly-created National Electoral Council, Electoral Justice Tribunal and National Registry of Persons to digitalise voter registry. Debate over new penal code continued as Supreme Court 15 Sept declared 70-75 articles of new code should be reviewed. President Hernández 25 Sept signed asylum cooperation deal with U.S., similar to those of El Salvador and Guatemala, allowing U.S. to deport to Honduras migrants who had passed through country on way to U.S..

➡ **Mexico** Amid continued record homicide levels, govt announced further measures to curb insecurity. Criminal-related conflict remained high as Jalisco Cartel New Generation (CJNG) early Sept attacked border between Michoacán (centre) and Jalisco (west) states following reported falling-out between leaders of CJNG and supposed self-defence groups in area. CJNG also present in Guanajuato (centre), where violence remained high including unidentified attackers 18 Sept injuring state delegate for National Intelligence Centre and killing bodyguard, and next day armed assailant ambushing and killing five state prison agents. Concern over 2014 case of disappearance of Ayotzinapa teaching college students continued after series of suspects acquitted and released, including a leader of Guerreros Unidos crime group 3 Sept and 24 former police, as judges ruled evidence against them insufficient and obtained under torture; govt 19 Sept announced new investigation, said it would target judicial corruption. President López Obrador 9 Sept presented budget with 257bn pesos for social programs to reactive rural economies and provide alternatives to joining gangs, and 204bn pesos for public security including National Guard, controversial main instrument of security plan. López Obrador 15 Sept sent to Congress proposal for amnesty law for low-level, non-violent offences including drug crimes and abortion, while Congress discussed law to legalise marijuana, due to be passed late Oct. Amid regional focus on migration, FM Ebrard 6 Sept said govt had more than halved detentions at U.S. border from 144,266 in May to 63,989 in Aug; U.S. President Trump 11 Sept hailed “incredible progress”.

➡ **Nicaragua** Tensions continued amid govt hostility toward domestic opposition and international actors. Repression of political opponents remained high; govt supporters 7 Sept attacked car of head of private sector association in León. Group of apparently pro-govt armed motorcyclists 18 Sept followed and harassed a member of political council of opposition platform Blue and White National Unity (UNAB), who had just returned to

country following months in exile. Articulation of Social Movements (UNAB member) 10 Sept alleged at least 24 political opponents, 23 of them male, killed extrajudicially Jan-July, predominately in Jinotega department (north). UNAB and Civic Alliance 21 Sept jointly called for anti-govt march in Managua despite police refusal to give permission; mass police deployment impeded it. Amid doubts about army's position on crisis, head of military General Avilés 3 Sept vowed loyalty to President Ortega and claimed NGOs asked him to carry out coup in 2018, though provided no evidence. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Bachelet 10 Sept presented report to Human Rights Council alleging numerous human rights violations including gov't's suppression of protests, "excessive force" by National Police and "arbitrary arrests"; Nicaraguan representative at council rejected report and denounced lack of impartiality. Despite gov't and Organization of American States (OAS) meeting late-Aug to discuss possible resumption of work on electoral reforms, gov't 14 Sept denied entry to members of high-level OAS delegation; OAS released statement regretting gov't's decision. Following late Aug army killing of Nicaraguan citizen in unclear circumstances in Costa Rican territory, both gov'ts continued to trade accusations.

↓ **Venezuela** Gov't-opposition talks suspended, while relations with Colombia continued to deteriorate. Following gov't's suspension of Norwegian-mediated talks in Barbados in Aug, opposition led by "interim President" Juan Guaidó 15 Sept announced it was pulling out of dialogue, saying "Barbados mechanism is exhausted". Opposition next day revealed plan proposed to gov't which included President Maduro and Guaidó stepping down from posts while a gov't council – including opposition, gov't and armed forces representatives – presided over free presidential elections; opposition stated lack of gov't response prevented return to negotiations. Gov't next day announced it had been talking secretly and separately to group of minor opposition parties, including Avanzada Progresista led by former governor and 2018 presidential candidate Henri Falcón, and had reached initial agreement; agreement would see pro-gov't MPs return to parliament, new electoral authority formed and release of some political prisoners. Day after 16 Sept public signing of agreement, gov't released National Assembly (AN) VP Edgar Zambrano from military prison; pro-gov't MPs returned to AN 24 Sept. Guaidó-led opposition dismissed agreement as "pantomime", accusing Maduro of negotiating in bad faith; AN 17 Sept passed motion ratifying Guaidó as "interim President" until free elections are held. Relations with Colombia deteriorated over alleged Venezuelan support for Colombian guerrillas, while gov't accused Colombia of trying to recruit Venezuelan soldiers to sabotage air defence system, reportedly responding with military drills at border since 10 Sept (see Colombia). Gov't accused Guaidó of links to Colombian paramilitaries after photos were published of him 12 Sept with "Rastrojos" gang leaders. Organization of American States Permanent Council 11 Sept agreed to activation of regional defence Rio Treaty, with FMs from eighteen signatory countries 23 Sept meeting in New York; resolution focused on capture/extradition/punishment of regime associates involved in terrorism and/or organised crime. International Contact Group

met same day. UN Human Rights Council 27 Sept voted to send “international-fact finding mission” to country to “investigate extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances” and other human rights abuses since 2014.