

Latin America and the Caribbean

Andes

➔ Colombia Confrontations between armed actors and attacks against security forces and civilians ran high along border with Venezuela.

In Norte de Santander department (north east), bomb attacks 8 Sept left two soldiers dead at Tibú's airport, and next day killed woman and wounded several soldiers in department's capital Cúcuta; confrontations between armed groups sparked mass displacement from Cúcuta's Banco de Arena neighbourhood starting 11 Sept. Also in Norte de Santander, Gaitanista Drug Cartel (AGC) 11 Sept threatened social and union leaders who have organised local protests as part of national strike movement since April, including demobilised Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) combatants. In nearby Arauca department, bomb attack by guerrilla group National Liberation Army (ELN) 11 Sept left five soldiers dead. Conflicting reports emerged about abduction and alleged killing of colonel by FARC dissidents. Military 3 Sept claimed colonel abducted in April was killed by 10th Front of FARC dissidents in Venezuela; 28th Front of FARC dissidents 5 Sept released video of victim, accused military of making false claim to cover state's failure to rescue him. Meanwhile in Chocó department (west), heavy fighting between ELN and AGC 13 Sept confined 250 to 300 families to their homes in Medio San Juan town. In Nariño department (south west), suspected FARC dissidents 26 Sept killed at least five in Tumaco area. Military next day said troops had killed at least ten FARC dissidents in Morichal Nuevo municipality, Guainia department (south east). NGO Peace and Reconciliation Foundation 8 Sept recorded six deaths in 29 violent incidents associated with campaigning for 2022 presidential and legislative elections 13 March-23 Aug, warned violence may increase as voting draws closer. Advocacy group Global Witness 13 Sept recorded 65 land and environmental defenders killed in Colombia in 2020, highest number worldwide. Meanwhile, lawmakers 7 Sept passed \$4bn tax reform law, in final step of long-running efforts by President Duque's govt to get fiscal reform through Congress; bill's previous version had sparked deadly protests in April-June. On first anniversary of killing of civilian by police, hundreds 9 Sept took to streets in capital Bogotá to denounce police brutality.

➔ Venezuela Govt and main opposition alliance reached limited agreements in Norwegian-facilitated talks, and President Maduro joined regional summit in first trip abroad in many months.

Govt and opposition Unitary Platform made progress during second (3-6 Sept) and third (25-27 Sept) rounds of Norwegian-facilitated talks in Mexico City, reaching three partial agreements. First, parties reaffirmed country's sovereignty over Essequibo region disputed with Guyana and rejected jurisdiction of International Court of Justice. Second, they agreed to set up six-person committee, National Board of Social Care, with three representatives from each side to address humanitarian crisis, including shortage of COVID-19 vaccines, and four-person working group to review problems arising from "overcompliance" with U.S. sanctions. Third, they agreed to begin process of setting up "consultation mechanisms" with "social and political actors" not represented at negotiation table. In move that threatens to stir tensions, govt 14 Sept however said it wished to include in talks businessman Alex Saab who is

currently facing extradition from Cape Verde to U.S. on money-laundering charges; opposition delegation and U.S. quickly dismissed proposal. Govt delegation to talks 17 Sept publicly accused opposition of “sabotaging, conditioning and evading” terms agreed for talks; statement accused opposition leader Juan Guaidó of trying to break from his commitment to discuss return of country’s overseas assets, which have been under opposition control since 2019, to govt control. Chief Prosecutor Tarek William Saab 14 Sept had announced investigation into Guaidó for alleged treason and asset theft in relation to major overseas asset, Colombia-based chemical company Monómeros; opposition party Justice First 27 Sept announced it would no longer participate in Guaidó’s interim govt’s management of foreign assets. In first trip abroad since U.S. accused him of drug trafficking in early 2020, Maduro 18 Sept unexpectedly attended Community of Latin American and Caribbean States summit in Mexico City; Colombia, Uruguay and Paraguay presidents rejected his presence. UN fact-finding mission 16 Sept released new report, alleging country’s justice system does not provide protection to victims, but instead plays “significant role in the state’s repression of government opponents”. EU 29 Sept said it will send observers to regional and municipal elections set for Nov.

Southern Cone and Brazil

➔ **Brazil Political tensions persisted as President Bolsonaro made incendiary remarks toward Supreme Court, which fuelled alarm among politicians.** As Bolsonaro 7 Sept gave speech in São Paulo city indicating he would not abide anymore by Supreme Court’s rulings, thousands of Bolsonaro supporters gathered in São Paulo, Brasilia and Rio de Janeiro cities; notably, right-wing activists en route to Congress and Supreme Court in capital Brasilia broke through barriers, had minor clashes with police. Hundreds of truck drivers next day blocked roads in 15 states in support of president and demanding Supreme Court judges’ impeachment. Bolsonaro 9 Sept asked truck drivers to open roads and said in conciliatory statement that he spoke “in the heat of the moment”, never meant to attack Supreme Court. Datafolha poll of 3667 Brazilians 17 Sept showed disapproval rates of president reached 53%, and ex-president ‘Lula’ Da Silva favourite to win 2022 elections. Bolsonaro 9 Sept prohibited social media from removing posts that violate misinformation rules; Senate and Supreme Court 15 Sept however nullified decision. Worst drought in almost a century 7 Sept forced govt to increase electricity prices by 7%; energy ministry warned of likely blackouts while cities, including Nova Friburgo and Petrópolis, started rationing water consumption.

Central America and Mexico

➔ **El Salvador First signs of discontent surfaced as President Bukele launched Bitcoin and continued to concentrate power in executive branch.** Supreme Court’s Constitutional Chamber 3 Sept ruled presidents can serve two consecutive terms, tossing aside constitutional ban on re-election of incumbents and paving way for Bukele to stand for re-election in 2024; U.S. Interim Chargé d’Affaires in El Salvador Jean Manes next day condemned ruling and branded El Salvador “a democracy in decline”; U.S. State Dept 20 Sept denied U.S. entry to all

five Constitutional Chamber's magistrates. Govt 16 Sept said VP Félix Ulloa had submitted final proposal for constitutional changes to Bukele, including extension of presidential terms from five to six years and replacement of electoral tribunal. After Legislative Assembly late Aug approved judicial reform that mandates retirement of judges and prosecutors when they turn 60 or have completed 30 years of service, judges' associations early Sept protested in capital San Salvador, said reform part of govt's effort to assert control over judicial branch; Supreme Court 26 Sept however swore in 98 new judges. As El Salvador 7 Sept became first country worldwide to make Bitcoin legal tender, over 1,000 people marched in capital San Salvador to denounce cryptocurrency's alleged flaws; protesters set fire to tyres. In one of largest anti-govt demonstrations in recent years, at least 8,000 people 15 Sept protested in capital against Bitcoin introduction and Bukele's authoritarian tendencies; Bukele same day accused foreign powers of funding protesters and threatened to clamp down on future marches. Police 9 Sept detained former Justice and Public Security Minister Mauricio Ramírez Landaverde on corruption allegations, along with several former public officials.

➔ **Honduras Political tensions ran high ahead of general elections scheduled for Nov, and deportation of Honduran migrants from Mexico and U.S. continued.** Violence against politicians continued. Unidentified gunman 6 Sept shot and injured mayoral candidate for opposition Liberty and Refoundation Party (LIBRE) in San Luis municipality, Santa Bárbara department. Unidentified gunmen 21 Sept reportedly kidnapped and later killed ruling National Party of Honduras official and former municipal councillor of San Luis municipality, Comayagua department. CID-Gallup opinion poll which surveyed 1,288 people 10 Sept found ruling-party presidential candidate, Tegucigalpa Mayor Nasry Asfura, holds narrow lead with 21% voting intentions, followed by LIBRE candidate Xiomara Castro, and other prominent opposition candidate Salvador Nasralla, both at 18%; absent procedural law that lays out clear mechanisms to settle electoral disputes and defines legal jurisdictions, tight race could trigger post-electoral crisis. Meanwhile, upward trend in deportations of Honduran nationals from Mexico and U.S. continued. Consular and Migration Observatory of Honduras 7 Sept said 36,833 Hondurans had been deported back to their country between 1 Jan and 31 Aug – compared to 28,182 during same period last year.

➔ **Mexico High-level criminal violence persisted, with activists at particular risk, while authorities relaunched economic dialogue with U.S., including on migration issues.** In Morelos state's Cuernavaca city (centre), unidentified assailants killed environmental activist Rodrigo Morales Vázquez 2 Sept and social activist Alejandro García Zagal 7 Sept. In Chihuahua state (north), armed attack 7 Sept left nine dead in Cuauhtémoc municipality; Juárez Cartel's La Línea faction 22 Sept reportedly killed six people in clash with Sinaloa Cartel. In Michoacán state (west), Jalisco Cartel New Generation throughout month attempted to take control of Michoacán-Jalisco border town of Tepalcatepec, with explosives-equipped drones now being reportedly used and threats specifically targeting civilians. Notably, during 14-15 Sept cartel offensive, gang members killed five individuals manning checkpoint; several people, including two national guardsmen, also injured during fighting. In Coahuila state (north east), soldiers 16 Sept killed nine people who had according to official sources attacked police officers in Hidalgo municipality. In suspected extortion-related attack in Guanajuato state

(centre), package containing explosive device 19 Sept killed two civilians in Salamanca city; development illustrates escalating use of explosives by criminal groups. During visit of FM Marcelo Ebrard to U.S. capital Washington DC, Mexico and U.S. 9 Sept agreed to relaunch bilateral High-Level Economic Dialogue, which among other measures seeks to foment economic development in southern Mexico and Central America to curb migration. Violence against migrants continued. Notably, armed groups 13 Sept abducted and same day released 38 people, including 22 Haitians and Cubans, in Matehuala city, San Luis Potosí state. Migrants also continued to seek to cross border to U.S. under perilous circumstances: reports 16 Sept revealed that over 10,000 mostly Haitian migrants awaited in dire conditions under bridge outside U.S. city of Del Rio, in hope of being processed by U.S. immigration authorities. In Chiapas state (south), around 1,000 mostly Haitian migrants 28 Sept gathered in Tapachula city to request asylum appointments. Govt 29 Sept sent 70 Haitian migrants back to Haiti in what it described as “voluntary return” flight.

➔ **Nicaragua** **Repression against opposition leaders continued ahead of legislative and presidential elections due in Nov.** Prosecutor’s Office 8 Sept issued arrest warrants against award-winning novelist Sergio Ramírez on charges of “money laundering”, “incitement to hatred” and “conspiracy” to destabilise country; Ramírez has been living in exile since June. Police 20 Sept arrested sociologist Irving Larios in capital Managua over conspiracy accusations. After authorities 31 Aug-3 Sept for first time allowed families to visit detained opposition and civil society figures in “El Nuevo Chipote” prison in capital Managua, relatives of 19 prisoners 7 Sept denounced mistreatments, including isolation, hunger and lack of medical care. Inter-American Court of Human Rights 9 Sept requested Managua’s authorisation to enter country to assess situation of group of detained opposition and civil society leaders. UN human rights chief Michelle Bachelet 13 Sept urged govt to cease “persecution of the opposition, the press and civil society”; in joint statement to UN Human Rights Council, 50 countries 14 Sept questioned legitimacy of elections set for 7 Nov. U.S. Sec State Antony Blinken 15 Sept said Ortega’s govt was taking Nicaragua “down the grim path of authoritarianism”; U.S. govt late Sept pulled its Defense Attache Lt. Col. Roger Antonio Carvajal Santamaria out of Nicaragua after he made comments complimentary of Nicaragua’s military. Meanwhile violence against civil society activists continued to run high. Unidentified gunmen 11 Sept shot and seriously injured Joao Maldonado, political activist and well-known figure of 2018 anti-govt demonstrations, in neighbouring Costa Rica; attack came one day before planned protest against Ortega in Costa Rica’s capital San José. Advocacy group Global Witness 13 Sept said country had highest reported per capita rate of violence against environmental activists in 2020, with 12 killed – rising from five in 2019.

Caribbean

➔ **Haiti** **Political crisis deepened as chief public prosecutor sought to charge PM Ariel Henry for potential role in President Moïse’s killing and authorities postponed elections indefinitely.** Chief Public Prosecutor Bedford Claude 10 Sept asked Henry to testify in Moïse’s assassination case after fresh information revealed Henry had called key suspect Joseph Badio twice on day of

killing. Ombudsman-like govt agency Office of Citizen Protection next day requested Henry's resignation over possible links to assassination. Claude 14 Sept requested judge investigating Moïse's murder to charge Henry with alleged involvement in case, asked migration authorities to prohibit Henry from leaving country. Henry later same day fired Claude alleging "serious administrative offence", appointed Frantz Louis Juste as new chief prosecutor. Henry 15 Sept replaced Justice Minister Rockefeller Vincent with Interior Minister Liszt Quitel; Council of Ministers Sec Gen Renald Lubrice same day resigned, stating he could not serve someone who "does not intend to cooperate with justice." Independent Advisory Committee tasked with writing new constitution 8 Sept presented new draft constitution to Henry; Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) president same day said 108 political parties registered to participate in legislative elections set for Nov. Henry 27 Sept dismissed CEP, promised to form new, non-partisan CEP; next day postponed elections indefinitely, said he planned to hold constitutional referendum before Feb 2022 and presidential and legislative elections in following months. Gang violence continued, resulting in many gas stations in and around capital Port-au-Prince being closed 1-10 Sept; G9 gang alliance leader Jimmy Chérizier 9 Sept announced truce to allow flow of fuel. Henry and National Police chief Léon Charles 6 Sept pledged to counter spike in gang violence after attack previous day killed several people in Port-au-Prince. After U.S. administration 19 Sept began deporting Haitian migrants from Texas state to Port-au-Prince, U.S. Special Envoy to Haiti Daniel Foote 22 Sept resigned in protest, citing "inhumane, counterproductive decision".