

## Latin America and the Caribbean

➔ **Colombia** Iván Duque from Democratic Centre party sworn in as new president 7 Aug; in his speech advocated corrections to peace agreement with Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and stated that govt would take 30 days to study negotiations with National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrilla group before making decision on whether to continue them, prompting fears that ELN violence could increase upon end of negotiations. ELN 3 Aug kidnapped two civilians and four soldiers in Chocó (north west), stating they would be willing to free them as “humanitarian gesture” to new govt, and are willing to continue peace talks; Duque 10 Aug said govt would not be intimidated by kidnappings. ELN suspected of killing nine people in El Tarra, Catatumbo region (north east) 30 July, including former FARC members who had joined dissident groups. FARC dissident violence continued in Tumaco (south west) with clashes displacing 650 residents in city 1 Aug. Police 5 Aug captured second-in-command of Gaitán Self-Defence Forces (AGC, country’s largest drug trafficking group), alias Nicolás, in Antioquia province (north west). Duque 16 Aug announced 100-day police plan focusing on ten crimes that most affect citizen security including kidnapping and homicide. Clashes between ELN and AGC in Chocó during first weeks of Aug trapped some 3,700 indigenous people in their communities; police 26 Aug reported child killed and two indigenous women injured in ELN-AGC clash in Juradó. Senators formerly belonging to FARC 22 Aug proposed their first ever bill which would give lenient treatment to small-scale drug growing farmers who are willing to substitute their crops. Referendum on introducing tougher anti-corruption laws failed to pass 25 Aug due to turnout falling just short of required threshold, despite nearly 99% of voters supporting proposals.

➔ **El Salvador** National Assembly 16 Aug voted to make permanent the controversial “extraordinary measures” in place in some prisons, including extreme isolation of jailed gang members; vote entrenches security policy based on tough law enforcement, and seen by observers as likely to deepen crisis in country’s jails and make possibility of dialogue with gangs more remote; also prompted criminal gangs to increase attacks against police and military in protest. Police chief Howard Cotto 7 Aug claimed murder of six police officers two weeks before vote were part of gang strategy to push for suspension of “extraordinary measures”, bringing total officers killed in 2018 to fourteen. Human rights groups continued to voice concern over measures including extreme isolation of jailed gang members. 61 MS-13 gang members, including national leaders, were condemned to over 100 years’ prison 21 Aug after arrest in July 2016 “Operation Jaque”. Attorney General 28 Aug launched operation against MS-13 with 50 arrests. Month saw some progress in fight against corruption as former President Saca 7 Aug pleaded guilty to embezzlement scheme amounting to over \$300mn during his govt, becoming first former Salvadoran head of state to face prison for corruption. Govt 21 Aug established diplomatic relations with China, ending support for Taiwan (see Taiwan Strait).

➔ **Guatemala** Attorney General (AG) Consuelo Porras and International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) 11 Aug requested for third time that Supreme Court and Congress lift immunity of President Morales so he can face charges of illicit electoral financing. Supreme Court 22 August allowed pre-trial to begin. Porras and CICIG 14 Aug issued thirteen arrest warrants against politicians

and business figures; police apprehended five despite govt obstruction. CICIG and Supreme Electoral Court 16 Aug signed agreement to jointly combat illicit financing in 2019 general election. Morales 31 Aug announced he will not renew CICIG mandate, which will end Sept 2019. Former AG Thelma Aldana late July confirmed willingness to stand as candidate in 2019 presidential elections. Trend of rising homicide rates continued with authorities reporting 23% increase in murders 16 June-1 Aug; 40 civil society organisations 19 Aug denounced killings of at least nineteen human rights activists and journalists in 2018; indigenous leader Juana Raymundo found dead 28 July with signs of torture. Experts 25 July voiced concern that increasingly active “citizens’ security groups” could turn into armed criminal organisations, and officials called on public not to fund them. Interior ministry 6 Aug reported only 53 of 2,000 minors separated from families by U.S. immigration authorities have returned from U.S..

➡ **Haiti** Following July protests over increased fuel prices that left twenty dead, President Moïse 6 Aug appointed Jean-Henry Céant as new PM. Instances of unrest continued; unidentified attackers reportedly threw grenades and fired shots at parliament 20 Aug and at home of senate president 29 Aug. Shootout between Haitian civilians and Dominican soldiers at border crossing Carrizal 19 Aug left six civilians and one soldier wounded; PM Céant accused Dominican forces of violating Haitian territory. Dominican National Plan for Regularization of Foreigners expired 26 Aug leaving nearly 200,000 Haitians at risk of deportation, raising concerns over possible escalation of tensions.

➡ **Honduras** UN-backed political dialogue between govt and opposition, led by four mediators from region, began 28 Aug, aimed at finding solution to post-electoral crisis following Nov 2017 general election. Party representatives to discuss four main issues: presidential re-election, human rights, constitutional reform, and electoral reform. Following two-month delay, President Hernández 13 Aug finally issued executive order stating govt’s commitment to participate in dialogue. Talks remained tense with lack of confidence in process on all sides; main opposition group left-wing Libre party still absent. Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2 Aug completed trip investigating human rights situation and researching 2017 post-election violence.

➡ **Mexico** New govt of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) unveiled plans to tackle criminal and conflict-related violence, and from 7 Aug held first of series of regional National Pacification and Reconciliation Fora soliciting public opinion, with promise to design security and peacebuilding policies to be announced in Nov in strict adherence to demands voiced in meetings. Some participants already rejected request from govt to “forgive but not forget”, calling for “truth” including identification of whereabouts of disappeared, and punishment of perpetrators, including state forces. Church 16 Aug announced it would participate in fora. Congress in largest opium-producing state Guerrero (south) 18 Aug passed motion supporting legislation of poppy cultivation and calling on federal authorities to legislate; AMLO govt announced it would consider de-penalising poppy cultivation and processing for domestic pharmaceutical industry, pending UN approval, and aim to de-penalise marijuana production, sale and consumption to curb organised crime revenues. AMLO’s nominee for public security secretary 15 Aug said he expects better trained and paid police to take over security provision from

army; military force to be used as last resort; that “going after kingpins” would be less of a priority than targeting gang financing; and that goal is 30-50% homicide reduction in three years. Other priorities include social and economic programs tackling root cause of organised crime, and reparations/support for victims. AMLO 1 Aug reiterated various federal institutions would be moved from capital to regions to stimulate regional growth; but some early AMLO appointments, including Manuel Bartlett, accused of previous corruption and implication in murder cases, as head of electricity commission, prompted criticism. High levels of criminal violence and conflict continued, with 2018 reportedly on course to be most violent year since records began in 1997. Security forces and crime groups, chiefly “Viagras”, clashed throughout month in Michoacán (west) during govt anti-gang “Operation Cleansing”, prompting backlash from group in form of road blocks using stolen and destroyed vehicles. Mexico and U.S. 27 Aug announced “preliminary agreement” in bilateral trade which alleviates fears of end of NAFTA trade agreement, but so far excludes Canada.

➡ **Nicaragua** Protestors 15 Aug marched in capital Managua demanding release of hundreds of people arrested in crackdown on anti-govt protests since April; over 400 people reported to have been killed during suppression of protests, which govt continued to label as “coup” attempts. Organization of American States 2 Aug approved creation of working group on Nicaragua; govt 15 Aug labelled working group as “interventionist”, said it was “not welcome”. UN Human Rights Commission (HRC) 29 Aug issued report condemning govt for widespread human rights violations. Govt rejected report, accusing UN of being an “instrument of a policy of death, terror, lie and infamy”, and on 31 Aug expelled HRC team. Former VP and erstwhile Ortega ally Sergio Ramírez 18 Aug criticised govt response to protests and said levels of violence are worse than during Sandinista Revolution. Nicaraguan Association for Human Rights 6 Aug announced temporary closure of its Managua office following death threats and harassment by armed men. Thousands demonstrated across country in support of doctors 24 Aug after Medical Association 22 Aug denounced govt’s sacking of 240 of its members in apparent retaliation for supporting protests. Thousands continue to flee unrest with neighbouring Costa Rica confirming 23,000 Nicaraguans applied for asylum since June; thousands of Costa Ricans 25 Aug marched in support of Nicaraguan migrants in capital San José after anti-immigrant protests in city turned violent 18 Aug. Parliament 14 Aug approved 9.2% reduction of national budget due to economic impact of anti-govt unrest and govt repression, steepest cut in past decade.

↓ **Venezuela** Apparent attempt to assassinate President Maduro shook country, while govt’s new economic reform package widely expected to worsen economic and humanitarian crisis and intensify exodus of Venezuelans to neighbouring countries. Two drones carrying explosives blew up – one within 50 metres of Maduro – 4 Aug during military parade in Caracas; govt said seven soldiers injured; group calling themselves “Soldados de Franelas” claimed responsibility on social media without giving evidence. Maduro claimed outgoing Colombian President Santos was responsible; Santos dismissed as “ridiculous”. Security forces 7 Aug arrested opposition MP Juan Requesens, with govt claiming he helped leader of attack under orders from exiled opposition leader Julio Borges; Requesens’ family and colleagues alleged he was drugged to force televised confession. Govt charged Requesens with crimes including attempted assassination and treason, which he denied in court, and

8 Aug issued warrant for arrest of Borges, who denies involvement. Govt 20 Aug implemented delayed currency reform, cutting five zeroes off bolívar to create new “sovereign bolívar”; three days earlier, Maduro announced “magical” economic package, involving pegging new currency to Petro “crypto-currency” backed by oil reserves (representing an effective devaluation of 95%), and 35-fold increase in minimum wage, initially to be partly subsidised by govt; generated widespread concerns that measures will accelerate hyper-inflation crisis and cripple businesses. Several opposition parties 21 Aug held nationwide “general strike”, but response patchy. So-called “Supreme Court in exile” 15 Aug found Maduro guilty of corruption, sentenced him to jail term; National Assembly 21 Aug ratified sentence, calling on security forces to arrest him, in apparent manoeuvre by parts of opposition, principally in exile, to name alternative govt and seek military intervention. Venezuelans continued to flee country causing backlash in neighbouring countries; Peru and Ecuador announced entry restrictions while incident in Brazil 18 Aug saw residents in border town Pacaraima attack Venezuelans, prompting 1,200 to flee back across border. UN 24 Aug warned of exodus from Venezuela heading to “crisis moment” for region.