



Latin America and the Caribbean

Andes

➔ **Colombia** “Total peace” policy advanced further as govt concluded fourth round of talks with ELN and announced expected start of formal dialogue with FARC dissidents.

Govt-ELN dialogue continued. 180-day ceasefire between National Liberation Army (ELN) and state security forces remained in place, as negotiators from group and govt 4 Sept concluded fourth round of talks in Venezuelan capital Caracas. Sides agreed to proceed with 25 regional consultations, though precise format remained unclear, and govt said it would improve conditions for ELN prisoners. Parties also agreed to undertake “dynamic humanitarian actions” in several areas of Chocó, Antioquia and Bolívar departments to improve conditions for conflict-affected communities.

FARC dissident faction agreed to formal dialogue with govt amid ongoing violence. Petro administration and dissident Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) faction known as FARC-EP Estado Mayor Central (FARC-EMC) 19 Sept announced formal negotiations and 10-month bilateral ceasefire starting 8 Oct. FARC-EMC violence continued, however; notably, dissidents 14 Sept attacked military patrol in La Argentina municipality, Huila department (south west), wounding four soldiers; 16 Sept killed four soldiers during clashes in Cumbitara municipality, Nariño department (Pacific coast); and 29 Sept killed another soldier in El Plateado town, Cauca department (south west). In first two weeks of Sept, violence between ELN and FARC-EMC in Puerto Rondón town, Arauca department (north west), forcibly confined hundreds of families.

Authorities released long-awaited drug policy. Justice Ministry 10 Sept announced new drug policy, promising to help small-hold coca farmers transition to alternative livelihoods, improve public health responses to drug consumption, and target senior traffickers and money launderers. Some aspects of document, such as authorisation to eradicate crops planted after signing of policy, raised concerns among some that, in practice, current approach won’t change. Meanwhile, Petro 9 Sept proposed Latin American alliance to fight drug trafficking.

Campaigning for Oct elections continued. Campaigning for local elections in Oct continued amid concerns poll may escalate political tensions in conflict-affected regions as armed and criminal groups seek to assert influence. Unknown assailants, for example, 28 Sept assassinated former mayor of Caloto town, Cauca; his son is currently candidate for same position.

➡ **Ecuador Unknown assailants killed municipal councillor amid spate of attacks on political figures throughout electoral period.**

One day after being reported missing, authorities 8 Sept found body of Bolívar Vera, municipal councillor from crime-ridden Durán city, in Guayas province. His death, which occurred one month ahead of presidential run-off on 15 Oct, marked latest in string of political assassinations during electoral period and triggered anger toward govt. Notably, Vera's political party Partido Social Cristiano 8 Sept criticised President Lasso's administration for failing to adequately protect civilians, while Durán city mayor denounced Lasso for not providing security for officials despite "countless" requests; Organization of American States Electoral Observation Mission 8 Sept said it "firmly repudiates any act of political violence that endangers the security of citizens and the ongoing electoral process".

➡ **Venezuela Govt-controlled National Electoral Council (CNE) offered support for upcoming primary, sharpening disagreements among opposition parties; govt, opposition and U.S held closed-door talks aimed at improving electoral conditions.**

CNE offer to provide support for primary sowed confusion within opposition. Process for opposition primary, due to be held on 22 Oct to select single nominee for 2024 presidential election, continued to face challenges. Notably, opposition parties disagreed on how to proceed if banned candidate, such as Frontrunner María Corina Machado, wins primary; Machado continued to insist that she will not cede candidacy if victorious, raising prospect of intra-opposition squabbling over result. Former vice-president of primary commission María Carolina Uzcátegui 7 Sept said conditions were not in place for successful election and urged opposition to consider accepting CNE involvement. Adding to confusion around process, CNE 22 Sept offered to provide technical/logistical support; primary organisers 25 Sept said they would consider accepting. CNE 28 Sept proposed postponement of vote to 19 Nov. Machado and others continued to oppose idea of CNE involvement, saying it favours President Maduro; Machado also rejected delay to vote. Meanwhile, govt continued to attack primary, 7 Sept launching investigation into its financing.

Efforts to push through deal on electoral conditions continued. Amid growing concern about competitiveness of 2024 elections, several closed-door meetings between govt and opposition, closely monitored by Washington, took place during month, aimed at reaching deal on sanctions relief in exchange for improved electoral conditions. Details unclear but bans on leading opposition politicians reportedly remained key stumbling block: U.S. argues that Maduro cannot choose his electoral opponent by eliminating other candidates, while govt insists Machado's support for U.S. intervention in Venezuela precludes her from being allowed to run.

Govt deepened ties with China. Maduro 8 Sept arrived in China for official visit; President Maduro and Chinese President Xi Jinping 13 Sept signed bilateral cooperation agreements in areas including economy, trade and tourism.

Central America and Mexico

➔ El Salvador Govt introduced initiative to combat poverty, while officials defended President Bukele's re-election bid.

Bukele launched phase six of his security plan amid ongoing anti-gang efforts. Legislative Assembly 12 Sept extended state of exception for 18th time upon Defence Minister Monroy's request. Bukele 15 Sept announced phase six of his anti-gang Territorial Control Plan, dubbed "integration"; under this phase, authorities will create Directorate for National Integration to combat poverty with budget of \$30mn; several other bodies, including Salvadoran Institute of Professional Formation and National Youth Institute, will now fall under Directorate for National Integration. Bukele 19 Sept defended anti-gang efforts at UN, saying security "results" were "irrefutable". Several media sources late Sept reported confidential police document from 1 Sept showed nearly 43,000 people allegedly connected to gangs yet to be detained.

Govt defended Bukele's re-election bid. As Feb 2024 polls drew closer, ruling party Nuevas Ideas' continued to face accusations that its nomination of Bukele and VP Félix Ulloa as presidential and vice-presidential candidates violates constitutional ban on consecutive presidential re-election. Ulloa continued to describe re-election attempt as "second mandate" rather than re-election. Electoral authorities appear set on allowing Bukele's re-run after Supreme Electoral Tribunal Magistrate Noel Orellana 31 Aug said only four of five magistrate votes are required to allow Bukele's re-run; just one magistrate has said he will vote "in accordance with the constitution".

➔ Guatemala Judicial efforts to hinder transition process after Bernardo Arévalo's surprise electoral victory continued, eliciting domestic and international condemnation.

Judicial attacks on Arévalo, his party and electoral authorities persisted. Following electoral victory of Bernardo Arévalo and his centre-left Semilla Movement in Aug, judicial efforts to derail transition continued, led by Attorney General Consuelo Porrás, head of Special Prosecutor's Office Against Impunity Rafael Curruchiche, and Judge Fredy Orellana. Notably, Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE), who late Aug confirmed Arévalo's victory and has since sought to advance transition, 1 Sept said Public Prosecutor's Office had opened four different investigations against them. TSE 3 Sept announced it had temporarily revoked suspension order issued by Judge Orellana late Aug against Semilla. Judicial authorities 12-13 Sept and 29 Sept raided electoral centre. Video 13 Sept surfaced showing prosecutors opening boxes containing votes and counting ballots during raids; Arévalo accused Attorney General's office of plotting against him, while Curruchiche claimed boxes were opened as part of investigation into accusation Semilla falsified signatures for legal status.

Civil society denounced judicial persecution. Amid widely held assumption that judiciary is working with powerful political and business figures to prevent Arévalo from taking power, Guatemalans 2 Sept protested in Constitutional Plaza of capital Guatemala City to demand Porrás' and Curruchiche's resignation. Indigenous

groups 18-19 Sept blocked roads and streets in capital, demanding removal of Porras, Curruchiche and Orellana.

International community stepped up pressure to preserve election result. European parliament 14 Sept denounced “repeated attempts to suspend the Semilla movement”, while some deputies proposed provisional suspension of commerce with Guatemala. U.S. official same day said Washington could impose sanctions and reduce aid to country unless election result is respected.

➔ **Honduras Country faced institutional crisis over vacant Attorney General role, and govt defended tough security measures.**

Constitutional and political crisis continued over vote for new Attorney General. Ruling Libre Party and opposition National Party failed to agree on candidate to replace Attorney General Oscar Chinchilla, whose mandate ended 31 Aug. Opposition have blocked Libre’s choice in response to passing of controversial amnesty law that they claim benefits members of ruling party and persecutes opposition; govt, meanwhile, accuses National Party of preventing appointment to protect themselves from possible future criminal charges. Libre 7 Sept appointed Secretary of Parliament Carlos Zelaya to lead negotiations with opposition, who announced Congress would convene only after agreement on issue; some opposition congress members 27 Sept warned legislative paralysis could continue into 2024. Meanwhile, Chinchilla 1 Sept left Honduras for Nicaragua amid corruption allegations.

Stringent security measures remained in place. Amid ongoing state of exception, authorities 6 Sept claimed period June-Sept saw 40% reduction of homicides compared to same period in 2022; police data, however, showed multiple-homicides (where at least 3 people are killed in one incident) increased by 34% compared with same period in 2022. Meanwhile, military police commander Ramiro Fernando Muñoz 10 Sept declared civil society would soon be able to verify human rights situation inside prisons, which have been under military control since June, and acknowledged allegations of abuses levelled against his agents; Muñoz also warned that there are no effective rehabilitation programs in place as prisons are under reconstruction.

➔ **Mexico Criminal violence remained rampant, political parties announced presidential candidates in upcoming election, and authorities spotlighted uptick in migration.**

Violence continued at high levels. In Guerrero state (south), armed men purportedly belonging to La Familia Michoacana criminal group 9 Sept shot dead state attorney Víctor Manuel Salas Cuadra in Coyuca de Catalán city; unknown assailants 12 Sept shot dead federal attorney’s office representative Fernando García Fernández in state capital Chilpancingo. In Tamaulipas state (centre), navy troops 4 Sept killed four alleged aggressors in Matamoros city; four civilians also injured. In Sinaloa state (centre), clashes 8 Sep between criminal groups killed five in El Rosario town. Govt 25 Sept sent 1,500 troops to Frontera Comalapa region of Chiapas state (south) following media reports of fighting between Sinaloa and Jalisco Cartels. Meanwhile, govt 15 Sept extradited Ovidio Guzmán, son and principal heir of former Sinaloa Cartel leader Joaquín Guzmán, to U.S. on organised crime and fentanyl trafficking charges.

Parties selected female candidates for 2024 presidential election. Ruling MORENA party 6 Sept announced former Mexico City mayor Claudia Sheinbaum as party's candidate for poll. Former FM Ebrard, who came second in internal vote, raised concerns over irregularities and asked for re-run; President López Obrador next day backed Sheinbaum's candidacy. With opposition block Frente Amplio por México late Aug announcing Xochitl Galvez as its candidate, 2024 race will mark first time two women compete for Mexico's highest office.

Migration flows increased. Migratory authority 14 Sept said it expected to receive record 150,000 asylum claims during 2023, noting uptick in arrivals during Aug and Sept, particularly from Cuba, Haiti and Honduras. Authorities same day found 350 Central American migrants in trailer suffering from oxygen shortage in Veracruz state (east). International Organization of Migration 12 Sept announced 686 deaths in 2022 by persons trying to cross Mexico-U.S. border, making it most lethal land migration route worldwide.

➡ **Nicaragua** **Govt continued to stifle dissent and bolster ties with Russia and China amid worsening economic situation.**

Repression of opposition, Catholic church and others continued. NGO Mechanism for the Recognition of Political Prisoners 9 Sept identified 89 political prisoners in country. Police 8 Sept arrested priest Osman José Amador Guillén after he expressed support for political prisoner Bishop Rolando Álvarez. Govt 19 Sept announced it had access to all student data from defunct Jesuit-run Central American University, raising concerns about potential harassment of student activists. Fears about treatment of media also increased after army chief 4 Sept labelled all journalists "mercenaries"; according to civil society report 11 Sept, 1,329 violations of press freedom were recorded in Nicaragua over past five years. Meanwhile, UN 11 Sept denounced increased violence against indigenous people in Nicaragua; unidentified settlers next day killed indigenous person in Mayangna Sauni As indigenous area on northern Caribbean coast; authorities 29 Sept arrested Brooklyn Rivera, only indigenous parliament representative, at his home in Bilwi city, Puerto Cabezas (north) on unknown charges.

Managua bolstered ties with China and Russia amid deteriorating economy. Report published by UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean 8 Sept highlighted 6% decrease in exports in first six months of 2023, leading to thousands of job losses. Govt continued to strengthen ties with China and Russia in its search for economic lifeline. Notably, parliament 1 Sept ratified free trade agreement with China; Ortega 12 Sept acknowledged Russian military base in Nicaragua is training security forces to fight opposition.

Caribbean

↓ **Haiti** **Dominican Republic closed its border with Haiti over canal dispute, which risks aggravating ever-worsening humanitarian crisis; gang violence in capital forced thousands to flee.**

Dominican Republic closed border with Haiti. Dominican Republic 15 Sept shut all land, air and sea borders with Haiti over dispute about construction of canal by

farmers on Haitian side of Massacre River; decision risks harming both countries' economies when living conditions in Haiti have already deteriorated; UN Haiti expert William O'Neill 18 Sept warned closure would have "dire" humanitarian consequences. Tensions had been escalating in weeks prior to decision. Notably, Dominican govt late Aug raised concerns about potential negative effects of canal on environment and agricultural producers in both countries.

Gang assaults in capital Port-au-Prince triggered mass displacement. Gangs in G-pèp coalition continued offensives in various parts of Port-au-Prince in attempt to expand foothold toward centre. Armed assailants allegedly led by gang leader alias Kempès 6 Sept attempted to invade Solino neighbourhood in downtown Port-au-Prince, prompting civilians to set up roadblocks. Gang violence fuelled new waves of displacement. Notably, International Organisation for Migration 5 Sept reported that gang operations in capital had displaced over 20,000 since mid Aug; alleged members of Canaan gang 22 Sept staged attacks in Saut d'Eau commune and 25 Sept assaulted Mirebalais commune, both near capital, displacing over 10,000 people. Meanwhile, leader of G9 gang coalition Jimmy 'Barbecue' Chérizier 18, 19 Sept organised demonstrations, pledging to overthrow acting PM Henry.

Dialogue to resolve political crisis stalled. CARICOM (body of Caribbean nations) experts 4-10 Sept visited Haiti in third attempt to progress govt-opposition negotiations. Civil society platform Montana Accord 5 Sept called for Henry's resignation, however; Henry dismissed calls and continued attending CARICOM-facilitated discussions. CARICOM mediators 11 Sept said tone of negotiations had hardened. Engagés pour le Développement party led by former PM Joseph organised demonstration in Port-au-Prince 17 Sept, during which Joseph announced party was leaving dialogue to join social movements calling for Henry's resignation.

In another important development. UN Security Council members early Sept received first draft of resolution authorising multilateral security mission for Haiti, 2 Oct approved force (await next month's edition for full coverage).