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## FEATURED Q&A

# Is Colombia Gaining the Upper Hand Against Traffickers?



The illegal drug trade and other forms of trafficking were high on the agenda this month when Colombian President Iván Duque met with U.S. President Donald Trump at the White House. // Photo: Colombian Government.

**Q** Colombian President Iván Duque met with his U.S. counterpart, Donald Trump, earlier this month at the White House, where discussion of anti-narcotics and illicit trafficking topped the agenda. Trump said the two countries were working together to combat all forms of trafficking. He singled out human trafficking, which he said had become “a very big problem.” How serious has illicit trafficking of goods and people become in Latin America and the Caribbean, and in Colombia specifically? How is the narcotics trade related to contraband of other products and forms of illicit trafficking? What are some of the most effective and innovative methods authorities are currently using to address the problem?

**A** Elvira Maria Restrepo, associate professor of international studies at The George Washington University's Elliott School of International Affairs: “According to Insight Crime’s 2020 predictions, organized crime (OC) will rise this year, as a result of the civil unrest and political chaos that is affecting many countries in the region, including Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Haiti, Nicaragua, Peru and Venezuela. This instability minimizes states’ capacity to control OC and reduces regional cooperation. Moreover, Venezuela’s chaos, coupled with its systemic corruption and dramatic humanitarian crisis, has incentivized OC’s expansion into narcotics, contraband and human trafficking. Since the breakdown of Colombia’s drug cartels in the mid-1990s, organized crime fragmented in operation into smaller groups and syndicates that are very difficult to combat given their transnational

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## TODAY'S NEWS

### POLITICAL

## Latin American Nations Tighten Restrictions as Virus Spreads

Several nations in Latin America and the Caribbean took action, including imposing new travel restrictions, amid the spread of coronavirus.

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### ECONOMIC

## Peru Sees Larger Economic Growth Than Expected for January

Peru’s economy expanded 2.98 percent year-on-year for January. Analysts said the impact of the coronavirus pandemic was not yet reflected in economic data.

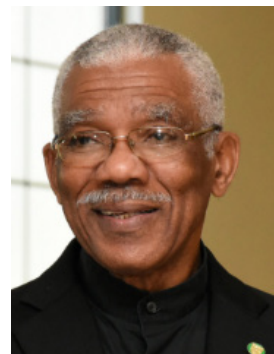
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### POLITICAL

## Guyana’s Gov’t, Opposition Agree on Vote Recount

Guyanese President David Granger agreed to a call by the 15-nation Caribbean Community, or Caricom, to allow a full recount of the vote from the country’s disputed March 2 national election.

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Granger // File Photo: Guyanese Government.

## POLITICAL NEWS

## Countries in Region Bar Entry as Coronavirus Spreads

Countries across Latin America took increasingly aggressive measures over the weekend, including barring nonresidents from entering, in efforts to stem the spread of coronavirus. On Friday, Venezuela, where residents have already endured years of political and economic crises, the vice president confirmed the country's first cases of the rapidly spreading respiratory illness, the Associated Press reported. A 52-year-old Venezuelan man who had recently visited Spain and a 41-year-old woman who had returned from a visit to the United States, Italy and Spain, had been diagnosed with the disease, Venezuelan Vice President Delcy Rodríguez announced. Upon the announcement, Venezuela immediately closed schools across the country, and opposition leader Juan Guaidó, whom dozens of countries recognize as Venezuela's legitimate president, called off planned street demonstrations. "We are declaring a state of alarm," President Nicolás Maduro said in a televised address, wearing a blue mask covering his mouth, Reuters reported. He urged people over age 65 to stay

home and said people should wear face masks, saying no one would be allowed to board trains without one. The coronavirus cases in Venezuela led Colombian President Iván Duque to announce that he was closing his country's border with Venezuela. Duque said that, as of today, Colombia would bar entry to anyone who is not a resident or national of Colombia and who has been in Europe or Asia over the past two weeks, Reuters reported. Additionally, Colombians who have traveled to Europe or Asia over the past 14 days will be required to self-isolate for two weeks. Colombia first reported a case of coronavirus on March 6, and the number of cases rose to 16 as of Friday. Elsewhere in South America, Ecuador on Sunday closed its borders to foreigners and gave Ecuadorean citizens and legal residents until the end of the day Monday to return. Argentina for 30 days barred entry to nonresidents who have traveled to a country hard-hit by the virus over the past two weeks. Bolivia banned passengers from China, South Korea, Italy and Spain from entering the country. In Chile, health officials quarantined more than 1,300 people aboard two cruise ships after an 85-year-old British citizen aboard one of the ships, the Silver Explorer, tested positive for coronavirus, Agence France-Presse reported. The man showed symptoms after disembarking in the far southern port of Caleta, 1,500 miles from Santiago, and was transferred to a hospital in

## NEWS BRIEFS

## Cuba Releases Dissident Following Criticism by Int'l Rights Groups

Cuban authorities released well-known dissident and artist Luis Manuel Otero from jail on Saturday following criticism by international rights groups and dozens of artists, including those traditionally aligned with the Communist government, over his arrest earlier this month, Reuters reported. Otero, whose performances criticize authorities, had been put in "preventive prison" on various charges, including insulting national symbols. His supporters have claimed they were fabricated charges to silence a vocal dissident.

## Peru Sees Larger Economic Expansion Than Expected for January

Peru's economy expanded 2.98 percent year-on-year in January, above market expectations of 2.4 percent, thanks to a boost in public investment, the government said today, Reuters reported. The Andean country had posted growth of 1.12 percent in December and 1.74 percent in January of last year. Analysts said the economic impact of the global coronavirus outbreak would likely not be reflected in the data until February.

## Paraguayan Court Refuses to Release Brazilian Soccer Star Ronaldinho

A Paraguayan appeals court on Friday rejected a request from lawyers to release Brazilian soccer superstar Ronaldinho from pre-trial detention in relation to a fake passport investigation, Agence France-Presse reported. Ronaldinho and his brother, Roberto de Assis Moreira, have been held in jail for a week, accused of entering Paraguay using fake documentation. Judges ruled that the two men were at risk of fleeing and obstructing the probe.

## FEATURED Q&amp;A / Continued from page 1

nature and online operations. Cocaine is still the number-one product coming from Colombia (its demand is on the rise in the United States), and most OC is the result of the drug trafficking industry and the armed conflict. The connection between drug and human trafficking is less direct and harder to measure, given its unknown scope in the region. However, a recent UNODC report claims that human trafficking has increased in the Andean region due to Venezuela's hopeless diaspora; but overall, it is more concentrated in Central America and the Caribbean. Colombia signed a peace accord in 2016 with the FARC and introduced many innovative ways to deal with OC, including

the rural reform and voluntary substitution programs for illicit drugs. Unfortunately, Duque's government has delayed their implementation. The Special Jurisdiction for Peace is beginning to adjudicate cases, and there is hope that it will shed light into the deep connections between the country's political and economic elites and OC. In addition, many leaders in the region are proposing alternative ways to the failed U.S.-led prohibition policy and are advocating for public health and 'follow the money' approaches. Since drug traffic is the axis of OC in the region, these are innovative steps to address the problem."

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the city of Coyhaique, where he tested positive for coronavirus. In Central America, Guatemalan President Alejandro Giammattei said Friday that the country would restrict arrivals from the United States and Canada, Reuters reported. In the Caribbean, Haitian Prime Minister Jouthe Joseph announced Sunday that the country would close its border with the Dominican Republic, making an exception for merchandise, the Voice of America reported. As of Sunday, Haiti had no confirmed cases of Covid-19, but the Dominican Republic had 11.

## Guyana's Gov't, Opposition Agree on Vote Recount

Guyana's government and opposition have agreed to a complete recount of votes in the March 2 national election, which was tainted by complaints of fraud, the Associated Press reported Sunday. The country's electoral commission on Friday ruled that incumbent President David Granger had won a second five-year term, but international observers warned that the vote might not be seen as legitimate, prompting Granger a day later to accept a call by the 15-nation Caribbean Community, or Caricom, for a full recount. A Caricom team arrived in Guyana on Sunday to supervise the new counting process. Earlier last week, the country's Supreme Court ordered a recount in one of the country's voting regions, Region Four, after declaring there had been "substantial noncompliance" with the electoral results reported. The opposition PPP party had accused the government of tampering with the vote in favor of Granger. Observer groups, including the Organization of American States and the Commonwealth, raised doubt about the ballot-counting process, and the United States has hinted at possible economic sanctions and visa revocations if any president takes office without a valid recount, the AP reported. On Saturday, the OAS said its observer mission had left Guyana over concerns regarding the "fairness and transparency" of the vote count, as did the U.S., E.U. and Canadian ambassadors, France 24 reported.

## COMINGS & GOINGS

### OdysseyRe Appoints Marcano Senior VP and Chief Underwriting Officer for Latin America

Odyssey Reinsurance on March 10 announced it had appointed Alberto Marcano as senior vice president and chief underwriting officer for treaty in its Latin America division. He succeeds Andrew Dickson, who was named head of surety for Hudson Insurance Group, Odyssey's U.S. insurance unit. Marcano has more than 30 years of reinsurance experience in the region. He joined OdysseyRe in 2011 as vice president and senior treaty underwriter, focusing on clients in the Caribbean and Colombia. Marcano is based in Miami and will report to OdysseyRe's Latin America chief executive officer, Phillippe Mallier.

### Flow Names First Woman as Head of Tech Operations Head For Jamaica, Cayman Islands

Communications and entertainment firm Flow on March 10 announced the appointment of Susanna O'Sullivan as the company's senior director of technology operations for Jamaica and the Cayman Islands. It is the first time a woman has been named to head the technology operations division in any of Liberty Latin America's markets. O'Sullivan has previous experience in the telecommunications industry in roles ranging from information technology to network delivery to program management, according to the statement.

### King & Spalding Announces New International Arbitration Partners With Latin America Focus

King & Spalding on Feb. 25 announced that three international arbitration partners had joined the law firm, with a specific focus on Latin America. Javier Rubinstein will be based in the firm's Chicago office, while Lauren Friedman and Lucila Hemmingsen will work from New York. All three lawyers, who previously practiced together at Kirkland & Ellis, will work on matters spanning international commercial and investment arbitration matters, the statement said. The team will focus on expanding the firm's commercial and investor-state work in Latin America and Europe, it added.

### Associated Press Names Byrne to Regional Role

The Associated Press on March 3 named Paul Byrne, its news director for southern South America, to a new regional role as its deputy news director for newsgathering for Latin America and the Caribbean, the wire service reported March 3. "With experience as both a video journalist and manager, Paul is perfectly positioned to drive AP video content from Latin America," said the AP's news director for Latin America, Paul Chandler. "He will work hard to match and exceed customer demands for live and edited stories, drawing on his vision for coverage in a very competitive market." Byrne became the wire service's interim news director for southern South America in 2018 before filling that role in a more formal capacity last year. Before joining the Associated Press, Byrne freelanced for The Guardian, the BBC and RTE.

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**A** **Gimena Sánchez-Garzoli, director for the Andes at the Washington Office on Latin America:** “On March 2, Trump and Duque met to reaffirm the two countries’ bilateral agenda. While addressing the high rate of coca cultivation and halving coca cultivation/production by 2023 topped the agenda, human trafficking was also mentioned. Rather than focusing on the comprehensive 2016 peace agreement, addressing many of the underlying causes of conflict fueled by the drug trade and helping coca farmers switch to licit economies, the presidents focused

“**Colombia is a Tier-One country when it comes to human trafficking...**”

— **Gimena Sánchez-Garzoli**

on ineffective anti-drug strategies including aerial herbicide spraying, which causes health and environmental harm. Colombia is a Tier-One country when it comes to human trafficking, with internally displaced persons, Afro-Colombians, indigenous people and others living in areas where illegal groups dominate. The problem increasingly targets Venezuelan migrant women and minors. In October 2019, a trafficking ring run by a criminal group called ‘La Mona,’ which trafficked minors, drugged them and forced them into prostitution for around \$17, was dismantled. The desperate straits faced by Venezuelans fleeing hunger and precarious economic situations coupled with their entry into Colombia in areas where illegal armed groups and criminal bands persist makes it likely that this situation will worsen. Colombia has an inter-agency committee composed of 16 government entities focused on prevention. However, there remains a gap in coordination and rapid implementation of relief to victims. An integral approach to illicit economies and networks that looks at drugs, contraband, labor exploitation and trafficking and illegal mining through one lens is

needed in order to dismantle the corruption and networks more effectively.”

**A** **Adam Blackwell, vice president for international at Development Services Group and former Canadian ambassador to the**

**Dominican Republic:** “I have long advocated for a global focus on all forms of the illicit economy. It is the size of a large G7 country, leveraging the hyper-connectivity of our global society to rapidly expand its business and to mask its activities from authorities. Transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) use their connections, networks and routes from one product to facilitate the movement of another and are highly adaptive in adjusting to law enforcement activities. To have any chance of making a dent in these activities, it is essential to focus on all aspects of the illicit economy and all forms of trafficking, from the demand and the supply side. While all jurisdictions struggle with TCOs, Colombia, with help from the United States and others, has done many of the right things. Colombia helped create and hosts an organization called Ameripol, or the Police Community of the Americas. Colombia recognized that combating TCOs required a competent, transnational and coordinated response and has invested heavily in helping other countries adopt and implement promising practices. One of the most innovative practices in Colombia was to develop (ISO) international standards and commensurate training for the national police. This is a work in progress, but it is a best practice that should be emulated. Colombia has one of the most advanced credibility assessment programs, including polygraph testing for law enforcement authorities. As always, these advances are handicapped by the corrupting influences of the TCOs and porous borders such as the one with Venezuela.”

*The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at [gkuleta@thedialogue.org](mailto:gkuleta@thedialogue.org).*

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