

3. Peace negotiations in America

- Four dialogue processes took place in the Americas: two in Colombia, one in Venezuela and one in Haiti, which account for 10% of the negotiations that took place during 2020.
- Turkey facilitated dialogue and an agreement between the Venezuelan Government and Venezuelan opposition leader and former presidential candidate Henrique Capriles.
- Despite pressure from the international community to resume the inter-Haitian national dialogue, it did not continue throughout the year or lead to significant agreements.
- The implementation of the peace agreement between the Government of Colombia and the FARC continued, though with serious difficulties due to the increasing violence in the country and the murder of human rights activists and defenders.

This chapter provides an analysis of the main peace processes and negotiations in the Americas in 2020, both the general characteristics and trends of the negotiations and the development of each case on both continents throughout the year, including references to the gender, peace and security agenda. In addition, at the beginning of the chapter there is a map identifying the countries in the Americas that hosted peace negotiations during 2020.

Table 3.1. Summary of peace processes and negotiations in America in 2020

Peace processes and negotiations	Negotiating actors	Third parties
Colombia (FARC)	Government, FARC	UN Verification Mission in Colombia, International Verification Component (Technical Secretariat of the Notables, University of Notre Dame's Kroc Institute)
Colombia (ELN)	Government, ELN	--
Haiti	Government, political and social opposition	Haitian Patriotic Initiative Committee, United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH), Apostolic Nunciature, Core Group (UN, OAS, EU and governments of Germany, Brazil, Canada, Spain and USA)
Venezuela	Government, political and social opposition	Norway, Turkey, International Contact Group

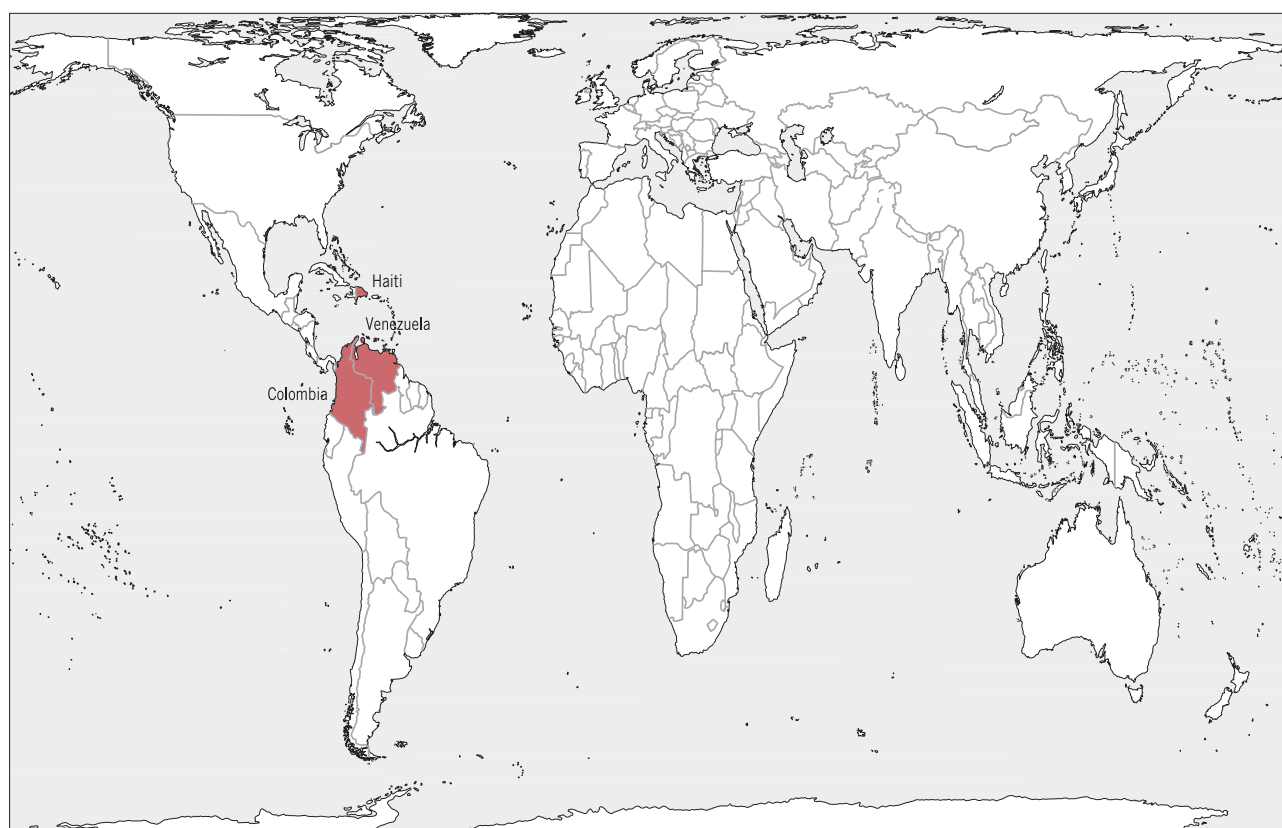
3.1 Negotiations in 2020: regional trends

In 2020, the Americas were the scene of four peace processes, one less than in 2019. As in previous years, two of the processes took place in Colombia, one in Venezuela and one in Haiti, while the talks in Nicaragua were terminated. The implementation of the peace agreement reached in 2016 between the Government of Colombia and the FARC continued in a process marked by obstacles and difficulties, but also by some progress and by the proper functioning of several of the institutions that emerged from the peace agreement, such as the Truth Commission and the Special Jurisdiction for Peace. The process between the Government and the ELN guerrilla group continued to be officially deadlocked, although calls for their resumption continued and a ceasefire was observed during the year motivated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the UN Secretary-General's call for a global cessation of hostilities to facilitate the fight against the coronavirus. In Venezuela and Haiti, attempts at dialogue between governments and the opposition continued to be political in nature and were aimed at solving the socio-political crises in both countries.

Regarding the **actors**, the participation of respective governments should be highlighted in all the different negotiating processes, although in Colombia, the Government did not negotiate directly with the ELN, since it continued to reject any formal negotiating process so long as the guerrilla group does not accept the conditions proposed by Bogotá. The ELN was the only active armed group in the Americas to demand a negotiating process to resolve the conflict. In the process to implement the agreement with the FARC, the main actors were the Government and the political party that emerged from the demobilisation of the FARC-EP guerrilla group as a result of the peace agreement. Both in Venezuela and in Haiti, the main protagonists of the negotiating processes were the respective governments and political and social opposition organisations.

Third parties played an important role in the negotiating processes in the Americas and participated actively in facilitating them. However, it should be noted that in the dialogue between the ELN and

Map 3.1. Peace negotiations in America in 2020



■ Countries with peace processes and negotiations in America in 2020

the Colombian Government, the breakdown of the formal peace negotiations led to the deactivation of the current facilitation scheme while the active process lasted, in which guarantor countries (Brazil, Norway, Cuba and Chile) and accompanying countries (Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, the Netherlands and Italy) had participated. In the implementation of the peace agreement between the Colombian Government and the FARC, the format of previous years was maintained in which the third parties in charge of verifying said implementation were the UN Verification Mission in Colombia and the International Component of Verification formed by the University of Notre Dame's Kroc Institute and the Notables, whose technical secretariat was held by the Colombian organisations CINEP and CERAC. In Venezuela, Norway and the International Contact Group continued to promote dialogue between the opposition and the Maduro Government. It is worth highlighting Turkey's involvement in the process, which included a visit to the country by Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, after which agreements were reached regarding prisoners and exiles. The Venezuelan process was characterised by a high degree of internationalisation and the involvement of multiple governments and international organisations, not only in facilitating dialogue, but also with their own political agendas. In other cases, a combination of local and international actors carried out different tasks to facilitate and support the negotiations. In Haiti, the actors who performed facilitation tasks acquired a more important

role than in previous years in the search for a solution to the country's political crisis, with the involvement of both local and international actors. The Haitian Patriotic Initiative Committee, the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH), the Apostolic Nunciature and the Core Group (UN, OAS, EU and the governments of Germany, Brazil, Canada, Spain and the USA) were the central actors there. Some international facilitators worked closely with local actors, as in the case of the Apostolic Nunciature and the Haitian Episcopal Conference. Cooperation between international and local actors also took place in Colombia, as established by the 2016 peace agreement itself.

The different **negotiating agendas** in the Americas were closely related to the particular aspects of each context, although all of them were connected to the governance of the different countries. In the Haitian crisis, aspects of the country's institutional and political operation were the central issues around which differences between the Government and the opposition revolved, such as the convenience or inconvenience of constitutional reform and the holding of new elections. In Venezuela, both the electoral issue and the situation of exiled and imprisoned opposition figures dominated much of the agenda in the different meetings held. In Colombia, the process with the FARC was focused on the implementation of the peace agreement and the fulfilment of the different commitments, but a large part of the agenda was shaped by the security situation in the country, given the growing number of murders of social leaders,

human rights defenders and former FARC combatants. The Colombian Government held to its position of not resuming peace talks with the ELN so long as the armed group did not comply with the demands for a unilateral end to the violence and an end to kidnappings.

Regarding the **evolution** of the different negotiating processes, there was little notable progress for yet another year and all the processes in the Americas were in a highly fragile situation as a consequence of the serious political and social crises that the different countries were going through. Thus, the different processes faced significant obstacles and even situations of permanent impasse, as in the case of the talks between the ELN and the Colombian Government, suspended since 2019. The positive response of the armed group to the UN Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire during the COVID-19 pandemic did not serve to reactivate the peace process, given the government's rejection of the armed group's proposal. As in previous years, some negotiations took place in contexts of violence (such as in Colombia and Haiti) and continued to be affected by serious mistrust between the parties and towards the facilitating actors, once again shaping attempts to overcome the different crises.

Regarding the **women, peace and security agenda**, gender equality continued to be excluded from most negotiating processes and was only relevant in the implementation of the peace agreement in Colombia. Colombian women's organisations remained active in the implementation process and exercised leadership to ensure that the rights of women and the LGBTBI population were not excluded from said implementation. Its participation in the Comprehensive System of Truth, Justice and Reparation is especially noteworthy. However, as in previous years, the gender gap between implementation of the peace agreement as a whole and the specific provisions related to the gender approach was verified, as the Kroc Institute found in its follow-up report on the implementation of said focus. There was no significant participation or inclusion of gender agendas in the rest of the negotiating processes that took place in the Americas.

3.2 Case study analysis

North America, Central America and the Caribbean

Haiti	
Negotiating actors	Government, political and social opposition
Third parties	Haitian Patriotic Initiative Committee, United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH), Apostolic Nunciature, Core Group (UN, OAS, EU and governments of Germany, Brazil, Canada, Spain and USA)
Relevant agreements	--

Summary:

In recent years, especially after former President Jean Bertrand Aristide left the country in February 2004 and the subsequent deployment of the UN peacekeeping mission (MINUSTAH), there have been several attempts at consultation and dialogue between various political and social sectors to cope with the institutional fragility, political-social polarisation and economic and security crisis facing the country. Yet none of these initiatives, most of which have had international support, have turned into meaningful agreements or have led to permanent or stable spaces or mechanisms for negotiation. Though President Jovenel Moïse's mandate has been controversial since its inception after he was accused of electoral fraud in the 2015 election, his attempts to create a national dialogue in 2019 came in response to the deepening crisis in mid-2018 and the outbreak of protests and episodes of violence in 2019.

During the first few months of the year, the Government and various opposition and civil society groups continued the talks that had already started in late 2019, but they did not reach any significant agreement or continue throughout the rest of the year, despite repeated calls by the international community for the inter-Haitian national dialogue to resume. These calls were especially insistent at the beginning of the year, coinciding with the deepening of the political and institutional crisis in the country. After the postponement of the parliamentary and municipal elections scheduled for November 2019, in mid-January President Jovenel Moïse announced that the terms of several members of both houses of Parliament had expired, immediately stripping them of their representative functions and blocking their access to Congress with the security forces since then. This decision meant that two-thirds of the Senate seats were empty, so from mid-January the president governed mainly through presidential decrees. This situation provoked concern among the international community and was criticised by various sectors of the opposition and civil society, deploring what they consider a dictatorial drift by Moïse. In these circumstances, OAS Secretary-General Luis Almagro paid a visit to the country, stressing the importance of cross-cutting political dialogue and a national unity Government to overcome the political crisis. Almagro also publicly declared that he agreed with Moïse on the need to reform the Constitution, electoral reforms and a firmer fight against corruption, which was one of the catalysts for the massive protests that took place in 2019. At the end of January, the Haitian Patriotic Initiative Committee convened a round of dialogue between the country's president and representatives of opposition political groups and civil society, such as the Conference of Rectors and Presidents of Universities of Haiti. This meeting was supported and facilitated by the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) and the Apostolic Nunciature, which provided its facilities for the meeting. In full coordination with the Episcopal Conference of Haiti, the Apostolic Nunciature issued a statement clearly asserting its political neutrality. The main objective of the meeting was to reach a consensus on a wide-ranging political agreement that would pave the way for structural reforms. However, various media outlets and some of the organisations participating in

the meeting declared that it ended without agreement. As such, the Core Group (made up of the UN, the OAS, the EU and the governments of Germany, Brazil, Canada, Spain and the US) regretted the lack of progress in the national dialogue. However, the Government issued a statement indicating that the parties participating in the talks had reached an agreement on the need to draft a new Constitution, establish a Constituent Assembly and create a road map with the participation of the United Nations and the OAS.

Despite the lack of agreement, a new round of negotiations was held between 11 and 14 February at the Apostolic Nunciature, with the sessions organised and facilitated by the same organisations. On this occasion, there was also no agreement between the parties. According to some, several of the political parties called for Moïse's resignation, while others claimed that the current presidential mandate does not end in February 2022, as the Government argues, but a year earlier. Furthermore, trust between the Government and certain opposition parties was greatly eroded by Moïse's decision to end the term of various members of Parliament by decree, some of whom sued Moïse, and to govern by government decree. Despite the lack of agreements, the BINUH stated that at the end of February, informal meetings were held between representatives of the president and a smaller number of political parties. **Faced with impasse in the national dialogue, Moïse appointed a new prime minister (Joseph Jouthe) and a new government at the beginning of March and continued with his political agenda, which mainly focused on two issues: the drafting of a new Constitution and the holding of the legislative elections that did not take place in 2019.** Regarding this last point, in August, after the Government announced its intention to hold the aforementioned legislative, municipal and presidential elections during 2021, more than 300 political parties and civil society groups rejected the plan and declared their intention not to participate. At the end of November, the Core Group urged the Government to accelerate preparations for the elections and to specify an electoral calendar in order to restore institutional normality in the country. Regarding the reform of the Constitution, in late October Moïse charged the Independent Consultative Committee with preparing the text, which was supposed to be submitted to public debate by December and to a referendum in the first quarter of 2021, prior to the legislative, presidential and municipal elections. Moïse said that if the population rejected the new Constitution, the Government would organise the elections under the current Constitution. A good part of the political opposition and many civil society organisations opposed such a constitutional reform, saying that it was illegal or that it was only intended to establish a presidential regime and benefit Moïse's political aspirations.

With the support of the United Nations and the Apostolic Nunciature, the Haitian Patriotic Initiative Committee convened a round of talks in January between the president and representatives of opposition political groups and civil society

Faced with the international community's insistence (mainly the BINUH and the Core Group) that the national dialogue must resume as the only way to solve the serious crisis gripping the country, in late October Moïse declared that he had been negotiating the elections and a referendum to approve a new Constitution with the main political forces of the opposition for three months and that the dialogue was at a very advanced stage. However, the Democratic Opposition, a platform that brings together several opposition parties, categorically denied such claims and demanded that the president resume a genuine, inclusive and sincere national dialogue.

South America

Colombia (FARC)	
Negotiating actors	Government, FARC
Third parties	UN Verification Mission in Colombia, International Verification Component (Technical Secretariat of the Notables, University of Notre Dame's Kroc Institute)
Relevant agreements	The Havana peace agreement (2016)
Summary: Since the founding of the first guerrilla groups in 1964 there have been several negotiation attempts. In the early 1990s several small groups were demobilized, but not the FARC and the ELN, which are the two most important. In 1998, President Pastrana authorized the demilitarization of a large region of Colombia, around the area of San Vicente del Caguán, in order to conduct negotiations with the FARC, which lasted until 2002 and were unsuccessful. In 2012, and after several months of secret negotiations in Cuba, new talks began with the FARC in Cuba based on a specific agenda and including citizen participation mechanisms. After four years of negotiations, a historic peace agreement for the Colombian people was signed in late 2016.	

The process to implement the peace agreement signed between the FARC and the Colombian Government in 2016 continued to face multiple difficulties due to the impact of violence and obstacles set up by Bogotá. Many former FARC combatants were killed (242 since the signing of the peace agreement in 2016 according to the FARC party, 19 between June and September 2020, according to United Nations figures), which led hundreds of former combatants to demonstrate in November, demanding government protection. The continued armed activity of dissident FARC groups also represented a serious obstacle to the smooth running of the peace process, as well as the armed conflict with the ELN and with criminal armed groups. Furthermore, the killing of social leaders and human rights activists continued to hinder the consolidation of peace in the country. About 1,100 have been assassinated

since the peace agreement was signed, 695 during the government of Iván Duque.¹ The work of many of these leaders is linked to the implementation of the peace agreement. However, the different institutions that emerged from the agreement continued their work, such as those that are part of the Comprehensive System of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition like the Truth Commission, which collects testimonies and public acts of recognition to the victims, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) and the Unit for the Search of Disappeared Persons. Cases addressed by the JEP during 2020 included that of the Valle deputies, for which the former FARC commander Héctor Julio Villarraga Cristancho appeared, acknowledging his responsibility for the kidnapping and murder of 11 deputies.

The Kroc Institute presented its fourth follow-up report on the implementation of the peace agreement, which found that during 2019 there was less progress in implementation than in previous years.² Particularly important was the progress made regarding the end of the conflict and the victims, since the Comprehensive System of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition was fully operational. The situation of former FARC combatants was particularly worrying, since the Kroc Institute found that only 24% of former FARC-EP guerrilla members were participating in one of the productive projects approved by the National Reincorporation Council. Moreover, in December 2019, some of the support provided to the combatants after the end of the conflict was suspended, such as basic monthly income. The Kroc Institute pointed out that some initial progress was made on comprehensive rural reform. The implementation of political participation and the solution to the problem of illicit crops were what made the least progress and suffered the most difficulties.

Gender, peace and security

The gender approach continued to be a cross-cutting part of the entire implementation process. Several initiatives took place as part of the Truth Commission's work, such as the listening sessions on reproductive violence in the armed conflict in which testimonies of the victims of this violence were heard and it was recognised as a systematic practice as part of the armed conflict perpetrated by both the FARC and government forces. Furthermore, the Fundación Círculo de Estudios published the report *Derecho de Vozs: informe sobre 479 casos de violencia sexual por motivo del conflicto armado en Colombia* ("Right to Voice: report on 479

cases of sexual violence caused by the armed conflict in Colombia"). Women's organisations demanded that the JEP open a macro process for cases of sexual violence committed during the armed conflict. The Kroc

Institute also issued its follow-up report on the implementation of the gender approach in the peace agreement, noting that there is still a gap with respect to the gender provisions of the agreement, whose degree of implementation is less than that of the agreement as a whole. The main progress was made in processes that allowed the participation of women, the LGTBI and indigenous people in the Comprehensive System of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition, although not as much headway was made in other points of the agreement as had been achieved in participation. Especially serious was the situation of security and protection guarantees, given the many threats and attacks against female human rights activists and leaders. A platform of civil society organisations called GPAZ also evaluated the implementation of the gender approach, noting a slowdown in implementation.³

Colombia (ELN)	
Negotiating actors	Government, ELN
Third parties	Guarantor countries (Brazil, Norway, Cuba and Chile), accompanying countries (Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, the Netherlands and Italy)
Relevant agreements	"Heaven's Door" Agreement (1988)
Summary: Since the ELN emerged in 1964, various negotiating processes have tried to bring peace to the country. The first negotiations between the Colombian government and the ELN date from 1991 (Caracas and Tlaxcala). In 1998, both parties signed a peace agreement in Madrid that envisaged holding a national convention. That same year, the "Puerta del Cielo" agreement between the ELN and civil society activists was signed in Mainz, Germany, focused on humanitarian aspects. In 1999, the Colombian government and the ELN resumed meetings in Cuba, which ended in June 2000. The government of Álvaro Uribe resumed peace negotiations with the ELN in Cuba between 2005 and 2007, though no results were achieved. At the end of 2012, the ELN showed its willingness to open new negotiations with President Juan Manuel Santos, appointing a negotiating commission, and exploratory meetings were held. Formal peace negotiations began in 2017, which broke off in 2019 after a serious attack by the ELN in Bogotá.	

The peace process between the Government of Colombia and the ELN guerrilla group remained at an impasse throughout the year, after its suspension in 2019.

1. Indepaz, *Posacuerdo traumático: coletazos en la transición desde el acuerdo de paz al posconflicto*, Indepaz, diciembre de 2020.
2. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies. *Tres años después de la firma del Acuerdo Final de Colombia: hacia la transformación territorial. Diciembre 2018 a noviembre 2019*. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies.
3. GPAZ, *La paz avanza con las mujeres. Observaciones sobre la incorporación del enfoque de género en el Acuerdo de Paz*, GPAZ – 2019, GPAZ, 2020.

Despite repeated calls by the ELN to resume the peace negotiations, the government of Iván Duque refused, arguing that the armed group had not complied with the conditions that it had established for doing so. Thus, Bogotá said that the ELN's armed and criminal activity had continued unabated and that not all the hostages held by the guerrilla group had been released, so dialogue was not viable. The ELN carried out various initiatives throughout the year aimed at promoting a peace process. The most important took place on 31 March with the announcement of a unilateral ceasefire during the month of April, in response to the UN Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire during the coronavirus pandemic. The ELN described this as a "humanitarian" gesture while urging the Government to resume dialogue with its negotiators in Havana and suspend its military operations. However, Peace Commissioner Miguel Ceballos said that the announcement was not enough and that more concrete actions were necessary. The Government's failure to reciprocate during the announcement of the ceasefire prompted the ELN to state that it would not extend it, though in July the negotiating team in Havana presented a proposal to the Government for a three-month bilateral ceasefire that "would create a climate of humanitarian détente, favourable to restarting the peace talks". This proposal was rejected by the Government and Pablo Beltrán, the head of the ELN negotiating team in Havana, said that there would be no more unilateral ceasefires. Previously, in June, the ELN had released eight hostages with the support of the ICRC, one of the Government's preconditions for restarting the negotiations, although the Government asserted that kidnapped people were still being held by the armed group. The calls to restart the negotiations were repeated in the final months of the year without the Duque Government changing its position, citing the ELN's failure to meet the required conditions.

The ELN observed a month-long ceasefire in response to the UN Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire during the coronavirus pandemic

Venezuela	
Negotiating actors	Government, political and social opposition
Third parties	Norway, Turkey International Contact Group
Relevant agreements	--

Summary:

Faced with the worsening political and social crisis that Venezuela experienced after the death in 2013 of President Hugo Chávez, the leader of the so-called Bolivarian Revolution, his successor Nicolás Maduro's narrow victory in the presidential election of April 2013 and the protests staged in the early months of 2014, which caused the death of around 40 people, in March 2014 the government said it was willing to accept talks with the opposition facilitated by UNASUR or the Vatican, but categorically rejected any mediation by the OAS. Shortly after Pope Francis called for dialogue and a group of UNASUR foreign ministers visited Venezuela and held many meetings, preliminary

talks began between Caracas and the opposition Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD) in April 2014, to which the Secretary of State of the Vatican, the former Apostolic Nuncio to Venezuela, as well as the foreign ministers of Brazil, Colombia and Ecuador, were invited as witnesses in good faith. Although the talks were interrupted in May 2014 due to developments in the political situation, both UNASUR and the Vatican continued to facilitate through Apostolic Nuncio Aldo Giordano. In May 2016, shortly after a visit to Venezuela by the former leaders of Spain (Jose Luis Rodríguez Zapatero), Panama (Martín Torrijos) and the Dominican Republic (Leonel Fernández) at the request of UNASUR, the Venezuelan government and opposition met in the Dominican Republic with the three aforementioned ex-leaders and UNASUR representatives. After a meeting between Maduro and Pope Francis in October, both parties met again in Venezuela under the auspices of the Pope's new special envoy, Emil Paul Tscherrig. In late 2017, both sides decided to resume the talks in the Dominican Republic starting in December, accompanied by several countries chosen by both parties (Chile, Mexico and Paraguay by the opposition and Nicaragua, Bolivia and San Vicente and the Grenadines by the government). Although some agreements were reached during the several rounds of negotiations that took place between December 2017 and February 2018, Maduro's unilateral call for a presidential election for 2018 brought them to a standstill and caused the withdrawal of several of the accompanying countries designated by the opposition to facilitate them.

Many meetings were held between the Government and some opposition parties during the year as part of the National Dialogue Roundtable; some direct meetings were held between Maduro's Government and two-time former presidential candidate Henri Capriles, with the facilitation of the Government of Turkey; and some attempts were made to resume the Norwegian-facilitated negotiating process between the Government and the opposition led by Juan Guaidó, president of the National Assembly and recognised by 59 countries as president of the republic. Regarding this last point, at the end of July a delegation

from the Government of Norway travelled to the country and met with the Government and the opposition to assess the conditions for resuming the negotiations. Juan Guaidó acknowledged the meeting with the Government of Norway, but added that the negotiations facilitated by Norway came to an end in September 2019 and categorically ruled out any possibility of resuming the dialogue with the Government. Similarly, other opposition leaders regretted that the previous negotiating processes (a dozen, according to the opposition), only served to gain time for the ruling party, to strengthen it, to demobilise the citizenry and to delegitimise and divide the opposition. However, Maduro claimed that the negotiations were being resumed and that the head of the Government's negotiating team in Norway and Barbados, Jorge Rodríguez, was in contact with the Oslo for this purpose. Previously, in June, Jorge Rodríguez had revealed that discreet contacts between the Government and the main opposition parties, known as G4 (Acción Democrática, Voluntad Popular, Primero

Justicia and Un Nuevo Tiempo), continued even after the negotiations were interrupted in Barbados at the end of 2019. The Government withdrew from them in August, accusing the opposition of promoting the introduction of sanctions against Venezuela, and the opposition withdrew in September, accusing Caracas of not obstructing the calling for presidential elections. According to Rodríguez, continuity in the meetings paved the way for a resumption of dialogue and negotiations as of February 2020. **According to Caracas, between February and June 2020, there were 19 meetings between the Government and the opposition led by Guaidó, including two meetings in which he participated personally with the leaders of the G4.** Caracas also noted that from September 2019 to June 2020, there had been another 67 meetings between the Government and opposition parties not belonging to the aforementioned G4. Although the opposition led by Guaidó refused to initiate negotiations with the Government for the rest of the year, in early December, a few days before the legislative elections, Maduro again mentioned the possibility of negotiations with the opposition mediated by Norway, which he thanked for its work in recent years, and with the participation of former Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, who has facilitated talks in the past. Thus, Maduro said that Jorge Rodríguez had met with the Government of Norway and that the ground was being laid for resuming the talks. In mid-December, after the legislative elections, the foreign minister of Norway (whose Government recognises Guaidó as the country's president) called for free and fair elections and declared that respect for democratic principles is necessary for peace and stability. At the end of the year, Maduro urged the newly elected US President Joe Biden to start dialogue. According to several analysts, Biden intends to take a very different approach from that of his predecessor in office, ultimately aimed at forcing a political transition in the country, and will prioritise easing the sanctions against it in exchange for decisive steps to hold free and competitive elections.

The second negotiating process between the Government and the opposition was led by former presidential candidate Henrique Capriles and opposition leader Stalin González (Un Nuevo Tiempo) and facilitated by the Government of Turkey. Following a visit to the country in mid-August by Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, in early September Caracas, **Capriles and Turkey separately announced the release of 50 imprisoned opposition figures and the dismissal of legal proceedings against 60 asylum seekers and exiles, many of whom are MPs. Maduro declared that what he called a presidential pardon for these 110 people was aimed at facilitating greater participation in the elections**

and promoting national reconciliation. Capriles stated that the negotiations that led to such an agreement had been coordinated with the EU and had begun after a meeting in the Dominican Republic between the Turkish foreign minister and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. Capriles said that the current political situation in Venezuela, in which Maduro maintains de facto power and governance of the country and in which the term of the current National Assembly, made up mainly of the opposition, will end in early January 2021, requires solutions and political negotiations. Capriles indicated that his negotiations with the Government sought to improve the conditions in which the legislative elections are held in December to avoid the absolute control of Parliament by the ruling party, and more specifically the postponement of the same to allow for electoral observation by the United Nations and the EU. In early September, Capriles encouraged his candidates to register for the elections (he could not run personally because he had been disqualified) and called for high turnout in them. However, at the end of September, after verifying that both the EU and the United Nations had declined to observe the elections because the necessary conditions were not in place, he reversed his decision to participate in the parliamentary elections. Guaidó criticised the negotiations between the Government and Capriles and González and declared that they were not known to or authorised by the interim Government, the National Assembly or the coalition of 27 opposition parties that had agreed not to participate in the elections.

Finally, **many meetings of the National Dialogue Roundtable were held during the year, a negotiating format that includes several minority opposition parties** (Cambiamos Movimiento Democrático, Soluciones para Venezuela, Avanzada Progresista and that was made public in September 2019 (after the collapse of the negotiations facilitated by Norway in Barbados) with the signing of six agreements on the release of political prisoners, the reinstatement of pro-Government MPs to the National Assembly, the denunciation of the sanctions and, more importantly, the renewal of the National Electoral Council. According to both parties, the negotiations that took place in 2020 were mainly aimed at ensuring fair and credible elections, expanding turnout and achieving greater international participation in their supervision. The main agreements reached throughout 2020 include confirmation of the new National Electoral Council, which was appointed in mid-June by the Supreme Court (with an official majority) after verifying that the National Assembly (which holds the constitutional right to renew the body) had incurred an institutional omission, generating protests from the opposition and various governments.

