

# LATIN AMERICA

The World This Week



## EARTHQUAKES ROCK PUERTO RICO

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## SWARM OF EARTHQUAKES LEAVES PUERTO RICANS FEELING UNEASY

Just over two years after category 5 Hurricane Maria hit the island of Puerto Rico, a swarm of earthquakes has brought renewed fear and damage. Beginning December 28, 2019, Puerto Rico has experienced a rise in seismic activity. The strongest of the earthquakes, a 6.4 on the Richter scale, occurred on January 7, 2020 at 4:24 a.m. The temblors have particularly impacted the southern part of the island, destroying many buildings and leaving families without homes.

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Much of the island of Puerto Rico has still not recovered from the destructive storm in 2017; it is now faced with more disaster. The swarm of earthquakes has left many islanders feeling uncertain and frightened. Many fear the possibility of even more severe earthquakes, as well as tsunamis. The earthquakes are said to occur due to the convergence of the North America and Caribbean tectonic plates.

With multiple temblors occurring on a daily basis, some are worried about the sustained damage to infrastructure, including homes and schools, many of which are not built to withstand the natural disasters. With no end in sight, many families are sleeping outside of their homes or traveling to the northern part of the island. Governor Wanda Vázquez has declared a state of emergency and set aside \$130 million for the damage. More aftershocks are expected.

## Venezuela's Guaidó Renews Oath to National Assembly

Opposition leader, Juan Guaidó has once again taken oath as head of the National Assembly. Venezuelan security forces attempted to blockade the congress on 7 January, leading to a standoff between opposing forces.

Former opposition ally Luis Parra was sworn in as the rival congressional chief, stating he received a majority of the votes, although Guaidó and his supporters dispute this claim. President Nicolás Maduro has recognised Parra as speaker, saying that the congress has a "new board of directors". Many see this is a strategy to further weaken Guaidó's reputation.

Guaidó was elected head of the congress in January 2019 and invoked Venezuela's constitution to become interim president after denouncing President Maduro as a "usurper". Guaidó is backed by much of the international community, but is accused by the Maduro regime of attempting a coup. Guaidó remains determined in his pursuit of freedom for Venezuela, but has seen a decline in support and popularity.

*"The current strategy from the administration is to create two National Assemblies," said Carlos Pina, political analyst. He added: "With this, Guaido will not be only perceived as the person who assumed the interim presidency in a 'self-sworn' manner, but also as the man who did the same with the presidency of the Assembly."*