

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

May 13, 2026

The Honorable Pete Hegseth
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Secretary Hegseth,

We are deeply concerned by reports of serious human rights violations and the bombing of what appear to have been civilian facilities during joint U.S.-Ecuador military operations conducted in northern Ecuador in early March. We write to request the immediate suspension of these operations until these incidents are fully investigated. In addition, we ask that you provide us with an explanation of the administration's legal justification for the involvement of U.S. Armed Forces in these operations, which have not been authorized by Congress.

On March 3, U.S. Southern Command issued a press release announcing joint military operations with the Ecuadorian armed forces targeting "designated terrorist organizations in Ecuador."¹ In a letter dated March 9, President Trump informed Congress that the U.S. had taken military action on March 6 "against the facilities of narco-terrorists affiliated with a designated terrorist organization," without identifying said organization.² However, the scope of U.S. military involvement in Ecuador remains unclear, both to Congress and the American public.

According to a detailed investigation published on March 24 by *The New York Times*, one site targeted in these joint operations appears to have been a civilian dairy and cattle farm with no known links to armed groups or drug trafficking.³ Witnesses report that, on March 3, Ecuadorian military personnel interrogated and assaulted unarmed civilians, burned homes and infrastructure, and subjected detainees to torture before the site was aerially bombarded on March 6.

¹ U.S. Southern Command, "Ecuadorian and U.S. Military Forces Launch Operations Against Narco-terrorists," press release, March 3, 2026. <https://www.southcom.mil/News/PressReleases/Article/4420523/ecuadorian-and-us-military-forces-launch-operations-against-narco-terrorists/>

² U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Notification of Military Action, H. Doc. 119-141, 119th Cong., 2nd sess. (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2026), <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CDOC-119hdoc141/html/CDOC-119hdoc141.htm>

³ Luis Ferré-Sadurní, José María León Cabrera, Annie Correal, and Eric Schmitt, "The U.S. Said It Helped Bomb a Drug Camp. It Was a Dairy Farm," *New York Times*, March 24, 2026. <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/03/24/world/americas/us-ecuador-drug-camp-bombing-dairy-farm.html>

These operations took place along the Ecuador-Colombia border, a highly sensitive and volatile region. Military action in this area carries significant risks of triggering cross-border tensions that could ignite a broader regional armed confrontation. Indeed, in mid-March, the discovery of an unexploded Ecuadorian bomb that was found on the Colombian side of the border caused a diplomatic crisis between the two countries.⁴

Statements made by Department of Defense officials suggest that the U.S. military was heavily involved in the operations:

- On March 17, Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense and Americas Security Affairs Joseph Humire testified before the House Armed Services Committee that “On March 3, the [Department of War] supported, at the request of Ecuador, bilateral kinetic actions against cartel targets along the Colombia-Ecuador border. The joint effort, named ‘Operation Total Extermination,’ is the start of a military offensive by Ecuador against transnational criminal organizations with the support of the U.S.”⁵
- On March 19, General Francis L. Donovan, Commander of SOUTHCOM, testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee that “special operations forces, including both ground forces and air forces, could quickly plan with the Ecuadorians to ensure that any use of force fell within our requirements. [I was] very impressed on how the Ecuadorians operated on both those operations... very professional planning. I took part in both, observing both.”⁶

Beyond these recent incidents, we are concerned that our military is deepening its ties with the Government of Ecuador, even as it undergoes an alarming authoritarian and anti-democratic drift.⁷ Throughout his time in office, President Daniel Noboa has overseen the violent repression of Indigenous-led protests,⁸ publicly threatened the Constitutional Court,⁹ and frozen the bank

⁴ Julie Turkewitz and Genevieve Glatsky, “Colombia and Ecuador Trade Accusations After Border Bombing,” New York Times, March 17, 2026. <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/03/17/world/americas/colombia-ecuador-bomb-petro-noboa.html>

⁵ Joseph M. Humire, “Statement by Joseph M. Humire, Performing the Duties of the Assistant Secretary of War for Homeland Defense and Americas Security Affairs, Before the Committee on Armed Services, U.S. House of Representatives, on U.S. Military Posture & National Security Challenges in the Western Hemisphere,” March 17, 2026. PDF file. https://armedservices.house.gov/uploadedfiles/ptdo_asw_hdasa_writen_posture_statement.pdf

⁶ U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services, “Hearings to Examine United States Southern Command and United States Northern Command in Review of the Defense Authorization Request for Fiscal Year 2027 and the Future Years Defense Program,” streamed March 19, 2026. YouTube video, 58:42, <https://www.youtube.com/live/u8Ojb1zz9s0?t=3522s>

⁷ Stephan Kueffner, “Ecuador’s Noboa Tightens Grip on Political Parties, Courts, Media,” Bloomberg, April 22, 2026. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2026-04-22/ecuador-s-noboa-tightens-grip-on-political-parties-courts-media>

⁸ United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Ecuador: UN Experts Raise Alarm over Targeting Indigenous Leaders and Human Rights Defenders,” press release, March 27, 2026.

[https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/03/ecuador-un-experts-raise-alarm-over-targeting-indigenous-leaders-and-;](https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/03/ecuador-un-experts-raise-alarm-over-targeting-indigenous-leaders-and-) Amnesty International, “Ecuador: Alert Over Repression of Protests, Judicial Independence and Enforced Disappearances,” October 9, 2025, <https://www.amnestyusa.org/press-releases/ecuador-alert-over-repression-of-protests-judicial-independence-and-enforced-disappearances/>

⁹ United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Ecuador: Interference with Constitutional Court Threatens Rule of Law and Safeguards,” press release, August 15, 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/08/ecuador-interference-constitutional-court-threatens-rule-law-and-safeguards>

accounts of civil society organizations.¹⁰ His allies in key institutions, including the Attorney General's Office, have also pursued questionable cases against his political opponents, resulting in the dissolution of two parties¹¹ and a nine-month ban on the country's largest opposition party,¹² as well as the arrest of the mayor of Guayaquil, a prominent government critic, in advance of upcoming local elections.¹³

All the while, Ecuadorians have endured more than two years of a prolonged state of emergency, marked by the military's domestic deployment to combat so-called "narco-terrorists." This militarized strategy has failed to reduce drug trafficking or violence;¹⁴ Ecuador recorded its highest homicide rate on record last year.¹⁵ Instead, the military has been credibly accused of widespread human rights abuses.¹⁶ With investigative reporting now linking President Noboa's family business to drug trafficking and the same illicit networks he claims to be fighting, an independent and transparent investigation into these allegations is warranted.¹⁷

Furthermore, if U.S. forces provide new or continued security assistance to units that engaged in acts such as torture, extrajudicial killings, or enforced disappearances, and there is no credible investigation or prosecution underway, this would constitute a violation of the Leahy Laws, which prohibit assistance to foreign security forces credibly implicated in gross human rights violations without effective steps to bring those responsible to justice.

In light of these serious concerns, we request that the Department of Defense provide, without delay, the following information:

1. A full account of any U.S. involvement—direct or indirect—in the March 3 and March 6 operations in San Martín, including execute orders, intelligence-sharing, planning,

¹⁰ Human Rights Watch, "Ecuador: Government Freezes Groups' Bank Accounts," December 9, 2025.

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/12/09/ecuador-government-freezes-groups-bank-accounts>

¹¹ Stephan Kueffner, "Ecuador Dissolves Two Political Parties Ahead of Local Elections," Bloomberg, April 27, 2026.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2026-04-27/ecuador-dissolves-two-political-parties-ahead-of-local-elections>

¹² José María León Cabrera, "La justicia electoral suspende al partido de Rafael Correa en Ecuador," El País, March 12, 2026.

<https://elpais.com/america/2026-03-13/la-justicia-electoral-suspende-al-partido-de-rafael-correa-en-ecuador.html>

¹³ The Associated Press, "The Mayor of Ecuador's Largest Port Arrested on Money Laundering and Tax Evasion Charges,"

Associated Press, February 10, 2026. <https://apnews.com/article/ecuador-mayor-arrest-guayaquil-charges-aa0f14525d7973e752e98e3df28bf0ec>

¹⁴ International Crisis Group, Paradise Lost: Ecuador's Battle with Organised Crime, Latin America Report No. 109 (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2025), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/rpt/latin-america-caribbean/ecuador/109-paradise-lost-ecuadors-battle-organised-crime>

¹⁵ InSight Crime, "InSight Crime's 2025 Homicide Round-Up," InSight Crime, January 2026,

<https://insightcrime.org/news/insight-crime-2025-homicide-round-up/#h-ecuador-31-2>

¹⁶ United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR), "UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances Publishes Findings on Ecuador, Iraq, Malawi and Samoa," March 25, 2026. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/03/un-committee-enforced-disappearances-publishes-findings-ecuador-iraq-malawi>; Amnesty International, "It Was the Military I Saw Them: Enforced Disappearances in Ecuador at the Hands of the Armed Forces," MR 28/0258/2025, September 2025

¹⁷ Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), "Cocaine and Bananas: How Balkan Traffickers Used Fruit Shipments From the Ecuadorian President's Family Firm to Smuggle Drugs," December 4, 2025.

<https://www.occrp.org/en/project/the-crime-messenger/cocaine-and-bananas-how-balkan-traffickers-used-fruit-shipments-from-the-ecuadorian-presidents-family-firm-to-smuggle-drugs>

logistical or aerial support, U.S. personnel or asset deployment, as well as any kinetic actions by U.S. forces, such as airstrikes.

2. A detailed explanation of the legal justification and authorities for U.S. military operations in Ecuador, including whether the Department regards these operations as occurring in an armed conflict governed by the law of war.
3. Identification of all Ecuadorian military units involved in these operations and documentation of any vetting conducted under the Leahy Laws.
4. Any information available to the Department regarding credible allegations of human rights abuses committed during these operations, and what actions have been taken in response.
5. Any information available to the Department regarding allegations of links between Ecuadorian officials and illicit networks, including those involving the president and companies linked to his family, and whether such information has informed U.S. policy decisions.
6. A comprehensive review of U.S. security assistance to and security cooperation with Ecuador over the past five years, including its legal basis, scope, and oversight mechanisms given the above concerns.

The United States cannot credibly claim to promote the rule of law while supporting or enabling abusive practices abroad. Nor can it afford to escalate military operations in a volatile border region without mandatory Congressional authorization, clear safeguards, accountability, and respect for human rights.

We expect a prompt and complete response no later than May 22, 2026.

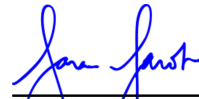
Sincerely,



Jesús G. "Chuy" García
Member of Congress



Greg Casar
Member of Congress




Sara Jacobs
Member of Congress



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress



Joaquin Castro

Ranking Member
Subcommittee on the Western
Hemisphere
House Committee on Foreign
Affairs



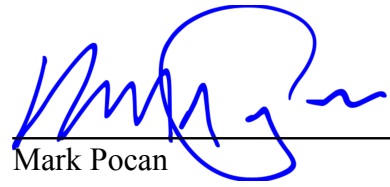
Jasmine Crockett

Member of Congress



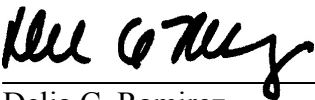
Rashida Tlaib

Member of Congress



Mark Pocan

Member of Congress



Delia C. Ramirez

Member of Congress



Ro Khanna

Member of Congress



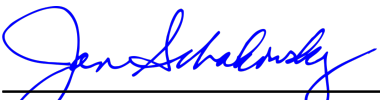
Eleanor Holmes Norton

Member of Congress



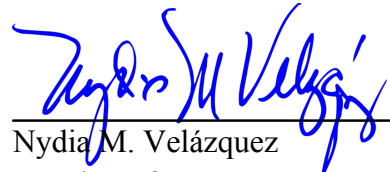
Adelta S. Grijalva

Member of Congress



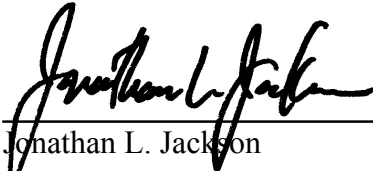
Jan Schakowsky

Member of Congress

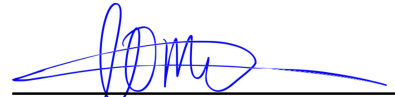


Nydia M. Velázquez

Member of Congress



Jonathan L. Jackson
Member of Congress



Ilhan Omar
Member of Congress



Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Member of Congress



Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress



Summer L. Lee
Member of Congress