

August 11, 2026

Maria Pena
Chargé d'Affairs
Embassy of the Republic of Ecuador
2535 15th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20009

Dear Ms. Pena,

Between March 1 and 6, 2026, soldiers of the Ecuadorian and United States armed forces carried out a violent counternarcotics operation in the remote village of San Martin located on the banks of the San Miguel River bordering Colombia.

What happened is the subject of multiple reports by journalists and human rights organizations who either visited the site or spoke and toured the property remotely with the registered owner, an Ecuadorian farmer who raised cows, pigs, and chickens.

According to villagers who were present, on March 1, Ecuadorian soldiers disembarked from helicopters and burned two houses. On March 3, the Ecuadorian military bombed one of these houses. Interviews and satellite imagery analysis reportedly indicate that the houses had been long abandoned. That same day, soldiers arrested four of the farmer's Colombian workers at gunpoint.¹ The workers were taken, reportedly with their shirts covering their heads, by helicopter to a military base. They later described being subjected to torture, including beatings, suffocation, electric shocks, threats of mutilation, and mock executions. We are not aware of any evidence that any of the men had a criminal record. A prosecutor ordered their release after the military failed to provide evidence of criminal activity or about the circumstances of their arrests.

On March 6, the Ecuadorian military returned and in a joint military operation with the United States bombed the farmer's property, destroying several wooden structures.² Public reporting

¹ *The U.S. Said It Helped Bomb a Drug Camp. It Was a Dairy Farm.*, New York Times (March 24, 2026) (online at <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/03/24/world/americas/us-ecuador-drug-camp-bombing-dairy-farm.html>); *A Dangerous Partnership: Abuses, Unanswered Questions, and US-Ecuador Security Cooperation* (Human Rights Watch: New York, 2026).

² *Joint US operation bombed farms, homes in Ecuador, says complaint*, USA Today (March 24, 2026) (online at <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2026/03/24/ecuador-farmers-bombed-military-us-joint-operation/89195234007/>)

does not confirm that the Ecuadoran military acted alone in striking these targets nor indicate that any cocaine or other illegal drugs, or any evidence of drug trafficking was found. We are aware that the Ecuadorian – Colombian border is a dangerous area known for illegal mining and cocaine trafficking. We have supported U.S. assistance for Ecuador to counter these threats. However, also well-documented is a pattern of gross human rights violations by the Ecuadorian military. Reputable U.S., Ecuadoran, and international human rights monitors report that the human rights record of the Ecuadorian military has deteriorated significantly since the government declared an “armed conflict” against organized crime in January 2024. According to Freedom House, “the deployment of the armed forces for public security and prison control, known as ‘Plan Fenix,’ has been linked to cases of extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances, torture, and arbitrary detentions.” Amnesty International and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights have cited multiple cases of enforced disappearances by the Ecuadoran military.³

Given the sharp discrepancy between the versions of events of your government and the U.S. Department of Defense, and the people who live and work in San Martin who were present during the operation, we request your assistance in obtaining answers to the following questions no later than 15 days after receipt of this letter:

1. Since March 1, has anyone from your government been to the site or spoken to the owner of the property, the workers, or any of the inhabitants of San Martin?
2. What capabilities did the United States provide in support of the joint operation? Which U.S. agency or agencies provided the intelligence to the Ecuadoran military that was used to conduct the operation, and what did that intelligence consist of? Did the intelligence include information from current local inhabitants or recent surveillance footage of the site? What was the chain of command connecting U.S. and Ecuadorian forces? What measures were taken to avoid harm to innocent people present in the area?
3. Was any evidence of illicit drug production or trafficking, or other criminal activity discovered as a result of the operation?
4. What steps is your government taking to conduct a credible, thorough investigation

³ *Ecuador’s Fight Against Transnational Crime is Eroding Human Rights*. Freedom House (July 17, 2025) (online at <https://freedomhouse.org/article/ecuadors-fight-against-transnational-crime-eroding-human-rights>)

Ecuador 2025. Amnesty International (April 21, 2026) (online at <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/americas/south-america/ecuador/report-ecuador/>)

IACHR grants precautionary measures in favor of 26 missing persons and women who are looking for missing persons in Ecuador. Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (December 30, 2025) (online at https://www.oas.org/en/IACHR/jsForm/?File=/en/iachr/media_center/PReleases/2025/286.asp)

of what happened? How is the U.S. military collaborating with the Ecuadorian Attorney General's investigation?

5. If the intelligence provided by the U.S. Government was faulty and the version of events described by the farmer, the workers, and villagers is accurate, will your government compensate the farmer for his losses and the farm workers for the abuses they suffered?

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Peter Welch
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Jacky Rosen
United States Senator