

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 11, 2026

Secretary Pete Hegseth
The Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Hegseth,

On March 6, 2026, your department released a statement that it had conducted a joint counternarcotics operation earlier that day with the Ecuadorian military. The statement included the following: “We commend President Noboa, the Government of Ecuador, and the brave troops of Ecuador’s defense and security forces for their partnership in the successful operation against a narco-terrorist supply complex today, disrupting their operations and logistics.”¹ The Administration’s March 9 Notification of Military Action notes that “United States Armed Forces partnered with Ecuadorian Armed Forces to strike on March 6, 2026, the facilities of narco-terrorists affiliated with a designated terrorist organization Although present . . . United States ground forces did not come into contact with hostile forces.”² The Administration has not publicly identified the target of the strike nor its precise role in the operation.

The operation occurred in the remote village of San Martin, which consists of about two dozen impoverished families located in the Amazon jungle on the banks of the San Miguel River bordering Ecuador and Colombia. The registered owner of one of the properties that was bombed is an Ecuadorian farmer who raised cows, pigs, and chickens.³ What happened is the subject of multiple detailed reports by journalists and human rights organizations who either visited the site or spoke with and toured the property remotely with the owner.

According to villagers who were present, on March 1, Ecuadorian soldiers disembarked from helicopters and burned two houses, which according to satellite imagery had been long abandoned. On March 3, the Ecuadorian military bombed one of the houses.⁴ On that day, the soldiers arrested four of the farmer’s Colombian workers at gunpoint. The workers were taken from the farm, 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 criminal records. A prosecutor reportedly ordered their release after the military failed

¹ Sean Parnell (@SeanParnellASW), X (Mar. 6, 2026, at 16:17 ET), <https://x.com/SeanParnellASW/status/2030030098443948129>

² Donald J. Trump, Notification of Military Action, H.R. Doc. No. 119-141, at 1 (2026)

³ 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>)

⁴ A Dangerous Partnership: Abuses, Unanswered Questions, and US-Ecuador Security Cooperation (Human Rights Watch: New York, 2026).

to provide evidence of criminal activity or about the circumstances of their arrests.

Then on March 6, the Ecuadorian military, in coordination with your department, bombed several wooden structures on the farmer's property. This bombing was the subject of press reports and your department's public statement on that day, acknowledging "partnership in the successful operation" without identifying specific U.S. capabilities involved in the strike.⁵ Public reporting has not indicated 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. However, also well-documented is a pattern of gross human rights violations by the Ecuadorian military. Reputable U.S., Ecuadorian, and international human rights monitors report that the human rights record of the Ecuadorian military has deteriorated significantly since the Ecuadorian government announced an "armed conflict" against organized crime in January 2024. According to Freedom House, in Ecuador, "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 dozens of cases of enforced disappearances by the Ecuadorian military.⁶

Given the sharp discrepancy between the versions of your department and the Ecuadorian military, and the people who live and work in San Martin, we request your answers to the following questions no later than 15 days after receipt of this letter:

1. Since the operation, has anyone from the U.S. Government been to the site or spoken to the owner of the property, the workers, or any of the inhabitants of San Martin?
2. Was any evidence of the production or trafficking of illicit drugs, or other criminal activity, discovered as a result of the operation? If so, what evidence?
3. Which narco-terrorist organization was the intended target of the operation? The Ecuadorian military claimed the target was Comandos de la Frontera, an organized crime group that has operated for years on both sides of the Colombia-Ecuador border. Is that accurate, and has Comandos de la Frontera been designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization and/or a Designated Terrorist Organization?
4. What U.S. capabilities were provided as part of the operation and were any U.S. Government personnel involved in the operation? Were any U.S. Government funds

⁵ 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/>)

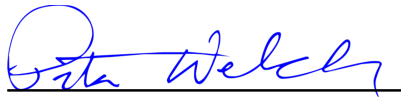
⁶ See Alejandra Argueta, Ecuador's Fight Against Transnational Crime Is Eroding Human Rights, Freedom House (July 17, 2025), <https://freedomhouse.org/article/ecuadors-fight-against-transnational-crime-eroding-human-rights>; Amnesty Int'l, Ecuador 2025 (Apr. 21, 2026), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/americas/south-america/ecuador/report-ecuador/>; Press Release, Inter-Am. Comm'n H.R., IACHR Grants Precautionary Measures in Favor of 26 Missing Persons and 6 Women Who Are Looking for Missing Persons in Ecuador, No. 286/25 (Dec. 30, 2025), https://www.oas.org/en/IACHR/jsForm/?File=/en/iachr/media_center/PReleases/2025/286.asp.

used for any purpose related to the operation? Were any U.S.-origin aircraft or munitions used for any purpose related to the operation? If so, pursuant to what legal authority were they used? 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?

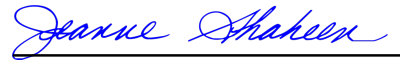
5. Which U.S. agency or agencies provided the intelligence the Ecuadorian authorities say they received from the United States that was used to conduct the operation, and did that intelligence include information from current local inhabitants or recent surveillance footage of the site? Please provide a detailed summary of the intelligence used, in classified form if warranted.
6. Has anyone from your department reviewed the intelligence Ecuadorian authorities say they received from the United States since March 1 to confirm its accuracy?
7. What steps is your department taking to conduct a credible, thorough investigation of what happened?

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



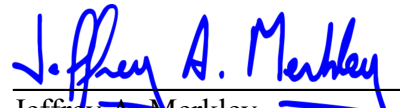
Peter Welch
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Adam B. Schiff
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



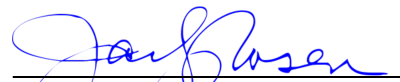
Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Jacky Rosen
United States Senator