

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 13, 2026

Ms. Tania Reneaum Panszi
Executive Secretary
Inter-American Commission on Human Rights
1889 F Street NW
Washington, D.C., 20006
United States

Re: Human rights situation in extraterritorial security operations (PS 195-1864), United States of America

We write as members of Congress who have sought accountability and oversight for the Trump administration's lawless killings in the Caribbean Sea and Pacific Ocean. We have vocally opposed the administration's maritime airstrikes because they undermine fundamental human rights, including the rights to life and due process, and encroach on Congress's constitutional power to decide when, where, and against whom to use offensive military force. We thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Since September 2025, the Trump Administration has conducted at least 45 lethal airstrikes against individuals aboard small vessels in the Caribbean Sea and Pacific Ocean. To date these strikes have killed at least 157 people. The names and nationalities of most victims remain unknown. Each killing took place outside of any recognized armed conflict and without due process. We agree with the overwhelming consensus of legal experts: the administration has engaged in a prolonged campaign of extrajudicial killings, or, in simple terms, murders. The administration has systematically targeted civilians as a first resort and shirked its obligations under both international and domestic law.

The administration claims that these killings are a part of an armed conflict with a range of gangs and cartels. It claims that these gangs and cartels started the supposed conflict by launching an armed attack against the United States. But the administration's claims have no basis in law or in fact. Instead, the administration has misappropriated the language and tools of war to respond to alleged civil and criminal conduct — most notably unlawful migration and narcotics trafficking. Across its reports to Congress and its filings in war powers-related litigations, the administration has not once identified gang or cartel activity that resembles the kind of hostilities with an organized armed group that could give rise to an armed attack or conflict.

Because the law of war does not apply in this peacetime context, the United States' strikes in the Caribbean and Pacific violate international human rights law and U.S. criminal law. International human rights law and peacetime law-enforcement standards strictly limit the use of lethal force. Under no circumstances may the United States treat civilians as military targets. The United States may use lethal force only to protect against concrete, specific, imminent threats of death or serious physical injury, or after an individual has been convicted of a crime carrying the death penalty. Individuals merely suspected of transporting drugs may be interdicted, arrested, and ultimately prosecuted with public evidence and a full and fair hearing. They may not be summarily executed. As such, we share the concern of former U.S. military and state department lawyers that the killings in the Caribbean and Pacific run afoul of the U.S. criminal prohibition on murder under Title 18 of the U.S. Code, which is applicable to U.S. servicemembers under 10 U.S.C. § 918 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice. We also are deeply concerned that, due to the widespread and systematic nature of these strikes, administration officials may be asking U.S. servicemembers to undertake and bear responsibility for crimes against humanity.

These deprivations of the rights to life and due process lack a legal basis for an independent reason that is central to our role as members of Congress: under the U.S. Constitution, the legislature, not the president, has the sole prerogative to decide when, where, and against whom to use offensive military force. In giving the power to "declare war" to the Congress, the Constitution establishes that the decision to launch hostilities must be made through a deliberative process accountable to the people. The President of the United States's power as commander-in-chief is limited to repelling sudden attacks or undertaking campaigns authorized by Congress. The administration's military strikes in the Caribbean and Pacific have not been authorized by Congress.

U.S. laws like the War Powers Resolution of 1973 reaffirm this constitutional balance of power while creating specific constraints on presidential hostilities. Under the War Powers Resolution, the president may use defensive military force for up to 60 days when responding to a "national emergency created by an attack upon the United States." After this 60-day period, the president's hostilities must cease if he has not yet secured congressional authorization for a wider war. Not only were the administration's strikes undertaken in the absence of an attack upon the United States, but they have also well exceeded the 60-day threshold after which congressional approval is required for continued military action. Even if the United States had suffered an armed attack in September — and we, as lawmakers seated on Congress's foreign affairs, armed services, and intelligence committees, have seen no evidence suggesting that it did — the administration's authority to use military force consistent with U.S. law would have expired in November in the absence of democratic debate and congressional authorization.

Congress has pursued numerous responses to the boat strikes, including through oversight and attempts to invoke a mechanism in the War Powers Resolution that would terminate the

unlawful hostilities in the Caribbean Sea and Pacific Ocean. We have not seen sufficient legal and evidentiary basis for the strikes. There is growing bipartisan concern about the scope of and justification for the strikes, but all efforts to invoke the War Powers Resolution have failed. The challenges we have faced in securing transparency and achieving accountability underscore the importance of your respected Commission's contribution.

After more than six months of lethal U.S. airstrikes in the Caribbean and Pacific, we call on the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to scrutinize this administration's policy and help advance accountability in the international arena. Respect for the rule of law and the protection of fundamental human rights remains paramount. Upholding these obligations is essential to restoring credibility, safeguarding human rights, and reaffirming the United States' commitment to the rule of law. We welcome your support.

Sincerely,



Joaquin Castro
Member of Congress



Sara Jacobs
Member of Congress