



Opening Remarks by Jamil Dakwar, Director of the ACLU Human Rights Program

Inter-American Commission Hearing on the United States' Unlawful Strikes on Naval Vessels and Extrajudicial Killings in the Caribbean Sea and Pacific Ocean

March 13, 2026

195<sup>th</sup> Period of Sessions, Guatemala City

My name is Jamil Dakwar and I'm the director of the ACLU Human Rights Program. I want to thank the Commission for holding this critical hearing that has high stakes not only for the United States, but for the entire region.

This hearing occurs when the United States is also engaging in an illegal war in the Middle East, and while the President of the United States is violating the U.S. Constitution and defying international law.

This hearing carries utmost significance because it is about holding the United States to the same international legal standards that apply to every country in the region. No country, no matter how powerful, has the right to engage in illegal military strikes that cause death, violence, and harm to people and communities.

As of March 12, 2026, the United States has launched 45 armed attacks against boats mostly in international waters, killing an estimated 157 people with only 3 known survivors and 9 others missing. While this hearing will not focus on any particular lethal strike or individual victims or survivors, we must remember that all of these individuals have names, families, and lives that will never be the same.

The United States has not conducted these strikes pursuant to any congressional authorization, as required under domestic law. Instead, the government has acted unilaterally and in violation of international law on the

use of force. And federal officials, including the President and his Secretary of Defense, have publicized videos of the boat strikes, boasting and celebrating their own roles in killing defenseless people. As you will hear from our delegation and two UN independent experts today, these are premeditated and intentional extrajudicial killings that lack any plausible legal justifications. Thus, they were simply murders, ordered by individuals at the highest levels of government and obeyed by military officers in the chain of command.

Before I turn to our presentations, I want to reiterate the recommendations that we made to the Commission:

- **Declare** that the U.S policy of conducting lethal strikes on civilian vessels violates international law, including laws of the Inter-American human rights system.
- **Request** the disclosure of secret opinion from the Justice Department’s Office of Legal Counsel (OLC) on which the US government is relying to justify its ongoing illegal strikes.
- **Conduct an investigation** into the U.S. lethal strikes that documents and reports on the human rights implications of the policy on victims and survivors, their families and communities, and OAS member states. We propose the establishment of an Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts (GIEI), as the Commission has done in 2014 (Mexico), 2018 (Nicaragua), and 2019 (Bolivia).
- **Convene a special meeting** with OAS member states affected by the U.S. policy, and make recommendations on their obligations (1) to refrain from aiding or abetting or otherwise being complicit in the U.S. government’s violations of international law; and (2) to assist in search and rescue operations for any survivors of U.S. lethal strikes.
- **Consider requesting an advisory opinion** from the Inter-American Court of Human Rights on the illegality of the United States’ lethal strikes policy, including the United States use of “narco-terrorism” designations to justify its gross violations of international law.

We will first watch a video statement from the United Nations special rapporteur on human rights and counter terrorism, professor Ben Saul. After that, we will hear from my colleagues who present different aspects of United States policies and actions, and their devastating human rights impacts and incompatibility with domestic and international law.

Thank you!