

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 11, 2026

The Honorable Marco Rubio
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
Washington, D.C.20520

The Honorable Pete Hegseth
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
Washington D.C. 20301

The Honorable Markwayne Mullin
Secretary of Homeland Security
2707 Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20528

Admiral Kevin Lunday
Commandant, United States Coast Guard
2703 Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue SE
Washington, D.C. 20593

Dear Secretary Rubio, Secretary Hegseth, Secretary Mullin, and Admiral Lunday:

We write to demand a full accounting of U.S. government involvement in three incidents involving Ecuadorian fishing vessels in the Eastern Pacific Ocean between January and April 2026. These incidents have resulted in eight persons still missing or unaccounted for, credible survivor accounts of arbitrary or unlawful detention, abuse, and extrajudicial use of force by U.S. personnel, and the formal intervention of the United Nations Committee on Enforced Disappearances.

According to the testimony of survivors, their attorneys, and their relatives, personnel operating from a blue U.S.-flagged patrol ship are alleged to have boarded and detained crew from two vessels, the *Negra Francisca Duarte II* on March 17 and the *Don Maca* on March 26, following what they described as attacks by uncrewed aerial vehicles (UAVs). A third vessel, the *Fiorella*, disappeared on January 20 shortly after the captain made a phone call to his family describing UAVs, a U.S. Coast Guard vessel, and a U.S. aircraft following the crew – an account later corroborated verbally by the two survivors.

On April 13, 2026, the United Nations Committee on Enforced Disappearances issued Urgent Actions Nos. 2293–2300/2026 concerning the eight missing crew members of the Vessel *Fiorella*. The Committee specifically noted the alleged involvement of U.S. forces and called upon Ecuador and the United States to cooperate under Articles 14 and 15 of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. The Committee set a response deadline of April 27, 2026.

While Ecuador has provided a response to the United Nations Committee on Enforced Disappearances, the response does not fully address the issues raised in the Committee’s inquiry. Ecuador’s response indicates that a formal search was activated on January 22, 2026 — two days after the *Fiorella*’s disappearance — but provides no detail on the scope of that search, including whether any vessels were dispatched to the last known coordinates. There is currently no public

indication that the United States has responded to the United Nations Committee on Enforced Disappearances' requests for information prior to or since the deadline.

The incidents, further described below, involve Ecuadorian-flagged fishing vessels operating in the Eastern Pacific or in the Exclusive Economic Zone of Ecuador and raise serious questions about the legal basis for the United States' use of force against civilian vessels, the detention and transfer of foreign nationals to third countries, and the whereabouts of eight crew members who remain missing or unaccounted for.

- On **January 20, 2026**, the **fishing vessel Fiorella** lost communication approximately 270 nautical miles off Manta, Ecuador. According to reporting, the captain's final call home and a message sent via satellite equipment described a U.S. aircraft, a UAV, and a blue patrol ship following the vessel from January 17 to January 20. The boat has never been located, and eight crew members remain missing.
- On **March 17, 2026**, the **vessel Negra Francisca Duarte II** was struck by a UAV between 170 and 235 nautical miles from the Galápagos Islands in Ecuador, according to different reports. Survivors reported being hooded, handcuffed, and held for over 18 hours on the deck of a blue patrol ship bearing the word "Spear" on its hull before being transferred to El Salvador and repatriated to Ecuador on commercial flights after being issued emergency passports. All 16 crew members are accounted for.
- On **March 26, 2026**, the **vessel Don Maca** was struck by a UAV approximately 700 to 800 nautical miles north of Manta, Ecuador. Survivors alleged they were hooded and held for eight days by U.S. forces before being transferred to El Salvador and repatriated to Ecuador.

Based on these events and consistent with Congress's oversight responsibility over U.S. operations abroad, we request the following information:

1. During a meeting of the House Armed Services Committee on June 4, 2026, in response to amendment Log6137 to the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2027 offered by Representative Bill Keating of Massachusetts, the Chairman of the Committee, Representative Mike Rogers of Alabama, read into the record what he characterized as a statement from the Department of Defense:

“Regarding the alleged boarding of an Ecuadorian vessel named Don Maca, the U.S. did not board the Don Maca and conducted no kinetic strikes against it. The Ecuadorian government has publicly stated that the U.S. had no involvement in this incident. Regarding an incident on January 20th involving a vessel named Fiorella, the Department is unaware of any strikes against such a vessel and did not conduct strikes against any vessel on January 20th. Regarding an alleged incident on March 17th involving a vessel named Francisca, the Department is unaware of any strikes against such vessel and did not conduct any strikes against any vessel on March 17th.”

Can the Department of Defense confirm that these statements accurately and fully represent DoD's and SOUTHCOM's knowledge of and involvement in these incidents, and that no U.S. government entity — including but not limited to the Drug Enforcement Administration, U.S. Coast Guard, Customs and Border Protection, or any intelligence agency or contractor acting under U.S. authority — had any involvement? If not, please provide information on which United States government entities were involved in these incidents.

If the United States was involved in these incidents, we ask that you answer the following questions:

2. Please name the United States government personnel or entities — including vessels, aircraft, unmanned aerial systems, or personnel operating under any authority, including any bilateral agreement with Ecuador — that have engaged, surveilled, boarded, attacked, or otherwise interacted with the Fiorella (last contact January 20, 2026), the Negra Francisca Duarte II (incident March 17, 2026), or the Don Maca (incident on or about March 25, 2026)? Please answer separately for each vessel.
3. Were any of the three vessels searched for contraband prior to any use of force or detention? If contraband was found, please identify it. If no contraband was found, what legal justification existed for the use of force, destruction of the vessels, and detention of crew members?
4. Were any of the crew members from the three vessels at any point held in U.S. custody or in the custody of El Salvador's government pursuant to any agreement with the United States? If so: (a) on what legal basis were they held; (b) were they allowed access to counsel, consular officials, or any form of judicial or administrative review; (c) what is their current status; and (d) did the United States government make any payments to El Salvador in connection with their detention or transfer? Did any U.S. or Salvadoran officials instruct these survivors on what they could or could not disclose publicly or ask them to sign non-disclosure agreements?
5. What is the current status and whereabouts of each individual crew member across the three vessels? Specifically: For the eight crew members of the Fiorella — Gabriel Aladino Mero Delgado, Jefferson Ariel Mero Cueva, Bryan Alfredo Arcentales Mero, Juan Alfredo Arcentales Anchundia, Joel Steven Valencia Mero, José Norberto Mero Quijije, Juan Carlos Valencia Mero, and Carlos Adrián Mendoza Macías — are any of these individuals currently in U.S. custody or the custody of any government acting at the direction of or in coordination with the United States? If not, what does the U.S. government know about their whereabouts?
6. Has the Department of State received any diplomatic communications from the Government of Ecuador regarding these incidents, including in connection with the U.S.-Ecuador bilateral security and defense cooperation agreements cited by Ecuador in its response to the United Nations Committee on Enforced Disappearances? If so, please provide these communications.

7. Has the United States provided any response to the United Nations Committee on Enforced Disappearance Urgent Actions Nos. 2293–2300/2026? If so, please provide the content of that response. If not, does the United States intend to provide a response? If not, please provide information on why the United States will not provide such a response.
8. Is the U.S. government cooperating with Ecuador in response to the Urgent Actions Nos. 2293–2300/2026? If not, why not?
9. What are the specific steps the U.S. government is taking to determine the location of the eight missing or unaccounted-for crew members of the *Fiorella*? Please indicate whether any U.S. government entities participated in or were notified of the search activated by Ecuador on January 22, 2026, and whether any vessels or aircraft were deployed to the *Fiorella*'s last known coordinates.
10. For any crew members who were repatriated to Ecuador:
 - (a) were they provided any documentation of the basis for their detention and release;
 - (b) were they screened for injuries and provided medical care prior to transfer; and
 - (c) has the U.S. government made any contact with those individuals or their families since their repatriation?
11. Please provide all videos, photographs, and audio recordings taken by U.S. personnel or U.S. aircraft, UAVs, or other modes of surveillance during the three incidents described incidents.

If the United States was not involved in these incidents, we ask that you provide any information you have on the individuals or entities that have been behind these incidents, and answer the following questions:

12. Were any American nationals or American entities including private security or private military contractors involved in the incidents described in this letter? If so, please provide information on these individuals or entities.
13. Was the United States government aware of the actions of these entities before, during, or after these incidents?
14. Has the United States government provided any support, including defense equipment or services, or intelligence, for these operations?
15. Is the United States working, coordinating, liaising, or otherwise interacting with any private security or private military organizations operating in the eastern Pacific or off the

coast of Venezuela that may have been involved in any of the incidents? If so, please provide details on these interactions.

16. What is your understanding of the involvement of the government of El Salvador or Salvadoran entities in these incidents?


Additionally, with respect to U.S. actions in Ecuador, please provide answers to the following questions:

17. What is the current United States military and security presence in Ecuador, including military, law enforcement, intelligence, and contractor personnel, on a fixed or rotational basis at Ecuadorean installations, including in Manta and near the Ecuador-Colombia border? Please provide information on the military or security forces present in Ecuador, their mission, relevant agency or military branch, capabilities, and actions taken to date.
18. Were United States military forces involved in the March 6, 2026, strike in Ecuador, after which Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth stated via a post on X that the United States is now “bombing Narco Terrorists on land”? Please provide information on the nature of U.S. military action or support for this operation, including the weapons and munitions used as well as the legal justification for the strike.
19. How much and for what purposes has the United States provided foreign assistance to Ecuador’s security forces since January 2025? Please include full details on arms sales, foreign military financing, International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement funding, and other support to Ecuadoran military and security forces.


We appreciate your attention to this urgent matter and ask that you provide a written response by July 10, 2026.

Sincerely,

Sincerely,



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



William R. Keating
Member of Congress