

October 8, 2025

Dear Member of Congress:

We, the undersigned human rights, labor, faith-based, civilian protection, foreign policy, and other civil society organizations with distinct areas of focus and expertise, many with extensive experience in Latin America, write to express our alarm at the repeated extrajudicial killings of unidentified civilians in the Caribbean, and the escalating risk of war caused by the Trump administration's recent illegal actions involving U.S. military forces. We urge you to assert your congressional power to block further unauthorized U.S. military action in the Western Hemisphere.

Since the beginning of September, the U.S. military has carried out multiple aerial strikes against civilian boats in the Caribbean resulting in over 20 civilian deaths. The Trump administration has not provided any valid legal justification for these strikes or any evidence to substantiate its claims that the victims were an imminent threat to the security of the United States. We fear that, barring decisive action by members of Congress, there will be more strikes, more extrajudicial killings, and potentially a full-blown limitless war with one or more countries in the region, with likely devastating humanitarian and geopolitical consequences.

This unauthorized military campaign did not come without warning signs. Before his reelection, President Trump [threatened](#) to mobilize U.S. military assets to wage a “war” on drug-trafficking organizations. Soon after taking office, the Trump administration began the entirely novel practice of classifying various regional drug cartels and criminal organizations as “foreign terrorist organizations” (FTOs) and Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGTs). FTO and SDGT classifications do [not provide](#) the U.S. government with authorization to use lethal force against members of these organizations. Yet, on August 8, 2025, the *New York Times* reported that Trump had [signed](#) a secret directive that “provided an official basis for the possibility of direct military operations at sea and on foreign soil against cartels.” Soon afterwards, U.S. media outlets [reported](#) that the administration would be deploying significant air and naval forces to the southern Caribbean, including destroyers, a guided-missile cruiser, a nuclear-powered attack submarine and over 4,000 U.S. troops. Two weeks later, the first boat strike took place.

As Human Rights Watch [noted](#), the extrajudicial killing of civilians by the U.S. military is a violation of customary international law and international human rights law, specifically the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which protects the right to life and due process, and to which the United States is a party. Senator Rand Paul further stated, “It isn’t our policy just to blow people up [...] We arrest people. [...] even the worst people in our country, if we accuse somebody of a terrible crime, they still get a trial.” In addition, these killings [expose](#) U.S. servicemembers to potential criminal liability under the federal murder statute.

These strikes are also not authorized under U.S. domestic law. Under Section 2(c) of the War Powers Resolution of 1973, which notes that the constitutional powers of the President as Commander-in-Chief to introduce U.S. armed forces into “situations where imminent involvement in hostilities is clearly indicated by the circumstances” may only be exercised pursuant to “(1) a declaration of war, (2) specific statutory

authorization, or (3) a national emergency created by attack upon the United States, its territories or possessions, or its armed forces.” These conditions have clearly not been met. Congress must reassert its war powers and condemn these unlawful strikes.

In addition to the boat strikes, administration officials have engaged in bellicose rhetoric including implicit threats of military strikes on Venezuelan soil, and it [is now widely reported](#) that the Trump administration is preparing for a war or military action against Venezuela with the goal of overthrowing the current government. For instance, on September 15, Secretary Rubio [told Fox News](#) “we’re not going to have a cartel, operating or masquerading as a government, operating in our own hemisphere. [...] And [President Trump is] going to use the U.S. military and all the elements of American power to target cartels who are targeting America.” In the weeks preceding the strikes, the Trump administration doubled the reward offered for information leading to the arrest of Nicolás Maduro and accused the president of being the head of the “Cartel de los Soles” despite experts [disputing](#) the very existence of such a cartel, much less [Maduro’s leadership](#) thereof. Broad economic sanctions have also fueled a catastrophic humanitarian crisis and the [migration of millions of Venezuelans](#) to neighboring countries and the United States.

The United States has justified its dangerous military escalation against Venezuela through claims of its involvement in the regional drug trade, despite the fact that Venezuela is a [relatively minor player](#). Venezuela [does not produce](#) significant quantities of [cocaine](#) or [fentanyl](#). Recent U.S. government estimates suggest that [less than 10%](#) of cocaine shipments bound for the U.S. transit through Venezuela. Nevertheless, the first two boats that were attacked were reportedly from Venezuela; President Trump claimed that their occupants were members of the Tren de Aragua (TdA), a criminal gang from Venezuela that has played a [marginal role](#) in drug trafficking to the United States. Although the administration has alleged that TdA is controlled by Maduro, the U.S. government’s own intelligence agencies have [contradicted this claim](#).

President Trump and Secretary Rubio should think twice about pursuing a policy of military escalation with Venezuela, a highly polarized and militarized country that has experienced destabilizing cycles of political violence and human rights violations. Recent [polling shows](#) that the American people overwhelmingly oppose involvement in a forced regime change effort against Venezuela, while other [polls show](#) that the vast majority of anti-Maduro Venezuelans oppose U.S. military action. Many in Venezuela fear that Maduro, who has announced that he will impose a [“state of external emergency”](#) in response to the threat of U.S. strikes, will use the threat as an excuse to clamp down further on internal dissent.

As has been widely reported, Venezuelan aircraft have come dangerously close to U.S. warships, and American vessels are operating in close proximity to Venezuelan military assets. While we are relieved that no direct exchange of fire has occurred, the Administration has knowingly put U.S. servicemembers into situations where armed confrontation is foreseeable. If U.S. forces are struck, the administration will bear the responsibility of unlawfully placing U.S. troops in harm’s way without congressional authorization.

We are highly concerned that these unwarranted and illegal military strikes and extrajudicial killings of civilians will pave the way for more extrajudicial killings of civilians, as well as direct military intervention targeting Venezuela and other countries throughout the hemisphere under the pretense of fighting “narcoterrorism.” Similarly, we are alarmed at [recent reports](#) that senior U.S. DEA officials pushed for military attacks against Mexico earlier this year. A conflict with or in Venezuela, Mexico, or any other country would have a tremendous destabilizing effect on the entire region, increasing the loss of human life, deepening poverty and internal displacement, and forcing out-migration.

We are also deeply concerned that this Administration could be attempting to provoke a military confrontation with the Venezuelan government in order to justify invoking the Alien Enemies Act to send Venezuelan nationals to inhumane, high-security prisons in other countries – similar to the fate of over 150 Venezuelans sent to the infamous CECOT in El Salvador in March. On the same day of the first attack on the civilians, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals rejected Trump’s use of the Alien Enemies Act of 1798 to expedite deportations without due process.

With the authority vested in you by the Constitution, we urge you to:

1. Support a War Powers Resolution ([S.J.Res.83](#), [H.Con.Res.51](#), [H.J.Res.126](#)) terminating unauthorized military action in the region, including any potential attacks against Venezuela, or against any organization designated on or after February 20, 2025 as a foreign terrorist organization or specially designated global terrorist, or against any states those entities operate in.
2. Reverse the U.S. military build-up in the Caribbean region, which experts agree risks dangerous escalation to conflict and is counterproductive in terms of counternarcotics objectives;
3. Require full accountability from the Trump administration for the actions that led to the deadly, illegal attacks perpetrated by the U.S. military against civilians in the Caribbean, including an investigation into who was killed;
4. Prioritize diplomatic engagement with governments in order to address drug trafficking in the region; and
5. Provide acknowledgement and compensation for the families of the victims of these extrajudicial killings.

Thank you for your consideration of this issue. In these unprecedented times, it is critical that the U.S. Congress reclaim its constitutional powers.

Sincerely,

Action Corps
Alianza Americas
Alliance of Baptists
American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)
Associação Brazil Office (ABO)
Benedictine Sisters of Erie
Benedictines for Peace
CASA, Inc. (formerly CASA de Maryland)
Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC)

Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR)
Center for Gender & Refugee Studies
Center for Victims of Torture
Central American Resource Center
Chicago Religious Leadership Network on Latin America (CRLN)
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces
Defending Rights & Dissent
Demand Progress
Dominican Sisters of Hope
Dominican Sisters of Sparkill
FOR Peace Presence
Franciscan Sisters of Dubuque Iowa, Leadership Team
Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL)
Global Exchange
Human Rights First
Immigrant Defenders Law Center (ImmDef)
Just Foreign Policy
Latin America Working Group Education Fund (LAWG)
Leadership Conference of Women Religious
Leadership Team of the Felician Sisters of North America
MADRE
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
Medical Mission Sisters, Justice Office
Military Families Speak Out
MPower Change Action Fund
Muslim Advocates
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Immigration Law Center
Oxfam America
Pax Christi Illinois
Pax Christi USA
Peace Action
Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft
Quixote Center
September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas – Justice Team
Sisters of Saint Francis, Rochester MN
Sisters of St. Dominic of Blauvelt, New York
Sisters of St. Francis
Sisters of the Holy Names U.S. Ontario Leadership Team
Society of the Sacred Heart – United States-Canada Province
The United Methodist Church – General Board of Church and Society
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC)
United Church of Christ

United for Peace and Justice

Veterans for Peace

Wind of the Spirit Immigrant Resource Center

Win Without War

Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual (WATER)