Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

November 19, 2025

The Honorable Marco Rubio
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Kristi Noem
Secretary of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretaries Rubio and Noem,

We write to you expressing profound concern over the findings of the recently published report titled "You Have Arrived in Hell: Torture and Other Abuses Against Venezuelans in El Salvador's Mega Prison." This meticulously researched report, published on November 12 by Human Rights Watch and the El Salvador-based Cristosal, exposes the systematic pattern of abuse and torture experienced by the 252 Venezuelan nationals the Trump Administration sent to El Salvador's notorious Centro de Confinamiento del Terrorismo (CECOT) between March and April of 2025. It also finds that the Administration failed to respect the principle of non-refoulement and questions the Administration's reliance on El Salvador's assurances that it would abide by the UN Convention Against Torture. We urge you to investigate these findings and provide an immediate explanation to Congress and to the American people for the Trump Administration's complicity in subjecting these individuals to such horrific and cruel treatment.

After being held at CECOT for approximately four months, the 252 detainees were released to Venezuelan custody on July 18, 2025. Following their release, Human Rights Watch and Cristosal were able to locate and interview 40 of these individuals, as well as interview another 150 people with credible knowledge of their experiences to corroborate their stories.

What they shared was horrifying and reflects treatment consistent with torture under international human rights law. Verbal abuse, denial of basic hygiene and sanitation, and inadequate food or access to healthcare were the norm. Every single one of the interviewees reported near daily physical and psychological abuse for the entire duration of their detention, including suffering from severe beatings for "infractions" as simple as speaking too loudly or bathing at a time that displeased prison guards. Several detainees reported incidents of sexual violence, including rape. Many of the detainees continue to suffer from physical injuries sustained during their time in CECOT, as well as from psychological trauma.

The detainees also described the grotesque treatment they suffered in connection with high-profile visits to CECOT by U.S. government officials – including Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem. According to the detainees, prior to Noem's March 26 visit, guards provided them with hygiene items and sheets, and mattresses. Thirty minutes after Noem's departure, detainees who had protested during her arrival were beaten severely and deprived of access to water and food for the rest of the day. Detainees were also beaten after visits by the International Committee of the Red Cross, and after detainees mounted protests against their treatment.

Longstanding domestic and international law prohibit the United States from transferring any person from our jurisdiction or effective control to any place where the person would face such serious human rights violations.[1] Yet, the Department of Homeland Security sent these individuals to El Salvador to be detained at CECOT, and the Department of State provided $4.76 million dollars to cover the costs "associated with" their detention.[2] Given what appears to be the U.S. government's complicity in abuses against these individuals, we ask for responses to the following questions no later than December 10:

1. What were the full terms of the agreement between the U.S. and El Salvador regarding the detention of these individuals?
2. Which U.S. government official(s) authorized the transfer of $4.76 million in State Department funding to Salvadoran security agencies in compensation for detaining these individuals, and under what authority were these funds transferred? Are there any restrictions on how El Salvador can use those funds, and how is the U.S. verifying compliance?
3. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, among other organizations, has long raised concerns regarding torture in Salvadoran prisons. What assessment was conducted regarding the treatment of detainees and detention standards in CECOT prior to the arrival of these individuals? What due diligence did you conduct to ensure that detainees sent to CECOT from the United States would not be subject to torture?
4. Will the Administration incorporate the findings of the report into the 2026 Human Rights Report for El Salvador?

These violations are a stain on the moral conscience of our country. We urge you to take all necessary steps to ensure that the United States is never again complicit in such horrific and unlawful behavior.

Sincerely,

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[1] Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act of 1998, Pub. L. 105–277, Division G, Subdiv. B, Title XXII, Ch. 3, Subch. B, § 2242 (*codified as* Note to U.S.C. § 1231); Article 3 of the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, June 26, 1987, 1465 U.N.T.S. 85; 8 U.S.C. 1231(b)(3); Article 33 of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, April 22, 1954, 189 U.N.T.S. 137; Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, October 4, 1967, 606 U.N.T.S. 267.

[2] Newsweek, "Trump Admin's $4.7 Million Deal With El Salvador Revealed in Court Filing," Dan Gooding, September 9, 2025, https://www.newsweek.com/trump-administration-el-salvador-deal-cecot-alien-enemies-act-lawsuit-2127087

Tim Kaine
United States Senator

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Member of Congress

Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

Joaquin Castro
Member of Congres

Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator

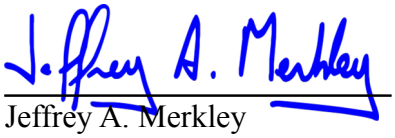
Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

Sarah McBride
Member of Congress

Brian Schatz
United States Senator

William R. Keating
Member of Congress



Jeffrey A. Merkley
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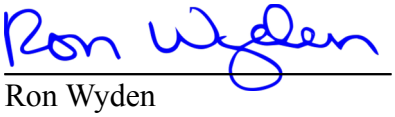
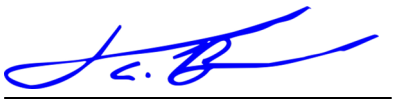
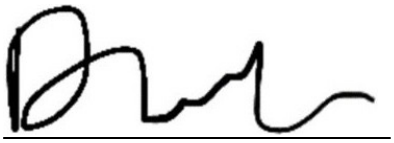


Ron Wyden
United States Senator

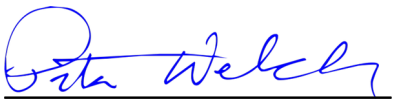
Dina Titus
Member of Congress



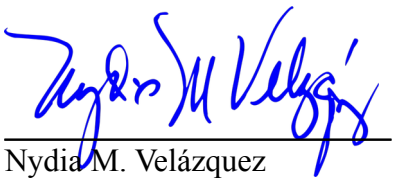
Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Dan Goldman
Member of Congress



Peter Welch
United States Senator



Nydia M. Velázquez
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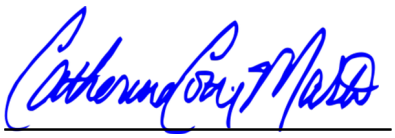
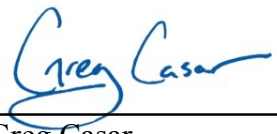
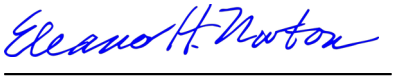


Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator

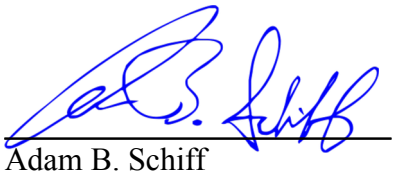


Greg Casar
Member of Congress

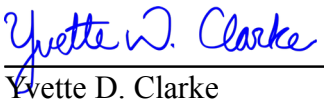
Jacky Rosen
United States Senator



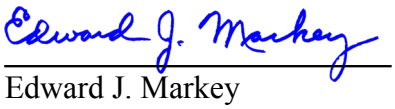
Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



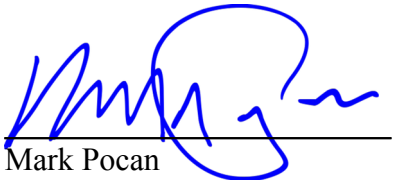
Adam B. Schiff
United States Senator



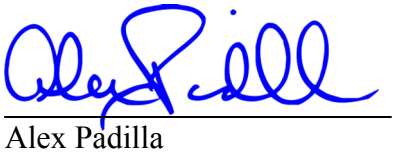
Yvette D. Clarke
Member of Congress



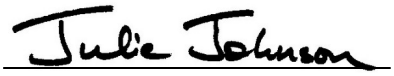
Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



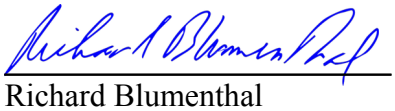
Mark Pocan
Member of Congress



Alex Padilla
United States Senator



Julie Johnson
Member of Congress



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

Madeleine Dean
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Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator

Steve Cohen
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Bernard Sanders
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Yassamin Ansari
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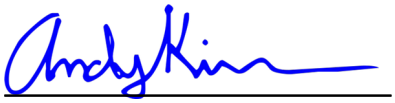

Andy Kim
United States Senator

Maxine Dexter
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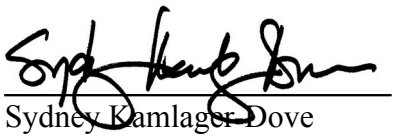
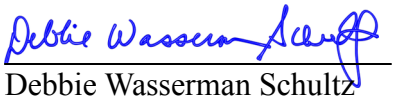


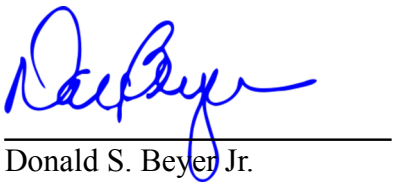
Sydney Kamlager-Dove
Member of Congress

Gabe Amo
Member of Congress

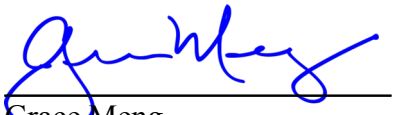


Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Member of Congress

Greg Stanton
Member of Congress



Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress



Grace Meng
Member of Congress

James P. McGovern
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