

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 22, 2025

The Honorable Marco Rubio
Secretary of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Kristi Noem
Secretary of Homeland Security
2707 Martin Luther King Jr. Ave SE
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Rubio and Secretary Noem:

We are writing to express grave concern about reports of prison conditions in El Salvador that appear to violate international human rights standards related to treatment of prisoners in detention. We ask that you promptly take action with the Government of El Salvador to remedy this violation of human rights and ensure that conditions for detainees, including those sent from the United States and placed in El Salvador's custody, comply with international standards.

In addition, given that the United States is obligated under the UN Convention Against Torture (CAT) not to send persons to a country where they may face torture, we urge you to immediately end the practice of removing individuals present in the U.S. to prisons in El Salvador.

Human rights monitoring groups and observers from the United Nations and Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) have described horrific conditions in prisons across El Salvador. These observers have presented physical evidence and testimonies from family members and survivors of severe overcrowding, deprivation of sleep, food, drinking water and medical care, unhygienic conditions, prolonged solitary confinement, and severe beatings that in some cases led to broken bones, ruptured pancreas and spleen, or unconsciousness.¹ One report found that for Salvadoran prisoners, "torture has included beatings and ill-treatment, threats, and even electric shocks."²

Likewise, the IACHR described evidence of "violence that include beatings, simulated drowning, electric shocks, abuse in the use of pepper spray, among others."³ The IACHR also noted with alarm hundreds of prisoners who have reportedly died in the custody of Salvadoran prisons since the state of exception began, often without sufficient notification of families, medical transparency about the reasons for death, or dignified treatment of the remains, which were sometimes disposed of in mass or clandestine graves.⁴

¹ Human Rights Watch "Human Rights Watch declaration on prison conditions in El Salvador for the J.G.G. v. Trump case" (March 20, 2025): <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/03/20/human-rights-watch-declaration-prison-conditions-el-salvador-jgg-v-trump-case>; UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "El Salvador Urged to Uphold Human Rights Amid State of Emergency:" <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/03/1135097>

² Cristosal, "Executive Summary. One Year Under State of Exception: A Permanent Measure of Repression and Human Rights Violations." (August 17, 2023): <https://cristosal.org/EN/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/English-Executive-Summary-One-Year.pdf>.

³ IACHR, "State of Emergency and Human Rights in El Salvador," Report. (September 2024): [https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/reports/pdfs/2024/Report_StateEmergencyHumanRights_ElSalvador%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/reports/pdfs/2024/Report_StateEmergencyHumanRights_ElSalvador%20(1).pdf)

⁴ Ibid.

First-hand accounts from persons deported from the United States who spent time at the Terrorism Confinement Center (CECOT) in El Salvador include alarming and disturbing information about psychological and physical abuse. Kilmar Ábrego García, a legal resident of the United States who was sent to CECOT on March 15 and remained there until June 6, filed a lawsuit on July 2, 2025, with the United States District Court for the District of Maryland.⁵ In it, he declared that while in detention inside of CECOT and other Salvadoran prisons, he was beaten, deprived of sleep, suffered malnutrition, denied the use of a bathroom leading to having to soil himself, and subjected to psychological torture, including threats that he would never leave CECOT, or that he would be placed in a cell with gang members in order to allow them to “tear” him apart.⁶

In interviews with several media outlets, 16 of the more than 250 Venezuelan men who were released from CECOT and deported to Venezuela as part of a prisoner exchange deal in June after spending 125 days in the prison following their rendition to El Salvador on March 15 also detailed appalling treatment. Upon their entrance to the prison, multiple detainees reported being told by the warden that they had no rights, and that the only way they would ever leave was “in a black bag.” In addition, they reported experiencing frequent and severe beatings, sleep deprivation, deprivation of medical treatment, isolation, and sexual assault, among other horrors.⁷

These prison conditions represent not only cruelty that threatens human dignity, but also serious violations by El Salvador of its obligations under international human rights law. As a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the Government of El Salvador is required to take effective action to prevent torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment in areas under its jurisdiction.⁸

Moreover, the United States, as party to the Convention Against Torture, is obligated to not send a person to a country where there are “substantial grounds for believing that he would be in danger of being subjected to torture,” taking into account whether there is “a consistent pattern of gross, flagrant or mass violations of human rights.”⁹

It is shocking that the U.S. government would send people from the United States to such prisons. It is also illegal under both international law and domestic U.S. law.¹⁰ The United States should not be complicit in the torture of incarcerated individuals. Nor should it remain silent

⁵<https://static01.nyt.com/newsgraphics/documenttools/e7334f2899b395b0/5811241f-full.pdf>

⁶ National Public Radio, “Abrego Garcia says he was severely beaten in Salvadoran prison.” (July 3, 2025): <https://www.npr.org/2025/07/03/g-s1-75775/abrego-garcia-el-salvador-prison-beaten-torture>

⁷ The Washington Post, “‘Welcome to hell’: Inside the megaprison where the U.S. deported migrants” (July 31, 2025): <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2025/07/31/venezuelans-deported-us-el-salvador-prison-cecot/>; National Public Radio, “‘Hell on Earth’: Venezuelans deported to El Salvador mega-prison tell of brutal abuse,” (July 27, 2025): <https://www.npr.org/2025/07/27/nx-s1-5479143/hell-on-earth-venezuelans-deported-to-el-salvador-mega-prison-tell-of-brutal-abuse>

⁸ ICCPR, Article 7: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>; CAT, Articles 1 and 3.1: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-against-torture-and-other-cruel-inhuman-or-degrading>

⁹ CAT Article 3, op cit.

when a government of a country, especially one that the United States is paying for the express purpose of housing such deportees, repeatedly fails to meet minimum standards for humane prison conditions.

Therefore, we urge you to:

- Undertake an immediate and transparent review of prison conditions in El Salvador, and promptly and publicly report your findings to Congress;
- Insist that the Salvadoran government give U.S. diplomatic personnel immediate access to the prisons and detainees in order to conduct such a review;
- Ask the Salvadoran government to invite relevant experts at the United Nations, including the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, at the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, including the Rapporteurship on the Rights of Persons Deprived of Liberty and to Prevent and Combat Torture, and from humanitarian organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and provide them unhindered access to prisons to assess conditions; and
- Cease any further rendition of persons from the United States to El Salvador for the purpose of detention in a prison there.

The moral authority of the United States is best respected when we insist that all countries, including our own, abide by international human rights standards, including those pertaining to imprisonment and detention.

Sincerely,



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



Norma J. Torres
Member of Congress

¹⁰ Article 3 of [CAT](#): “No State Party shall expel, return (“refouler”) or extradite a person to another State where there are substantial grounds for believing that he would be in danger of being subjected to torture.” [Section 1231 of Title 8 U.S.C.](#) makes it policy of the U.S. to not “expel, extradite, or otherwise effect the involuntary return of any person to a country in which there are substantial grounds for believing the person would be in danger of being subjected to torture, regardless of whether the person is physically present in the United States.”



Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress



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



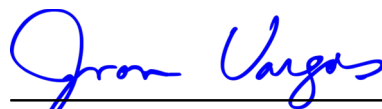
Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



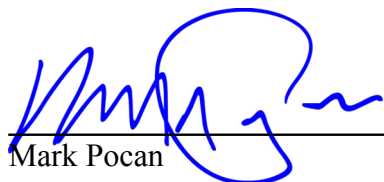
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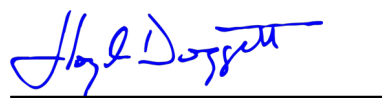
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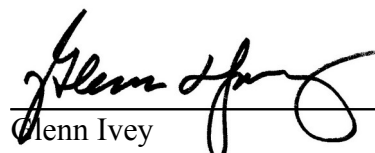
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