

March 12, 2026

The Honorable Pete Hegseth
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Hegseth:

We write to express alarm regarding reports of civilian casualties arising from Operation Epic Fury in Iran and urgently request detailed information about the steps the U.S. is taking to prevent and respond to civilian harm. We are particularly disturbed by reports of what appears to be the deadliest attack on civilians thus far: a girls' elementary school, where at least 175 civilians, many of them children, were reported [killed](#) and 100 children and staff [wounded](#). The New York Times recently [reported](#) that the U.S. preliminary investigation found that the United States is responsible for this strike due to outdated targeting data. With reportedly over 1,000 total civilian [deaths](#) already and a lack of clarity about the anticipated scale and duration of operations, we demand clear answers on how the Department plans to investigate these reports and prevent the risk of further civilian harm.

Longstanding U.S. military policy and the law of armed conflict, also known as international humanitarian law, apply during wartime and protect civilians and military service members alike. Under the law of armed conflict, the U.S. must distinguish between civilians and combatants, ensure proportionality, and take all feasible precautions to protect civilians. The Department of Defense has in recent years improved the way it prevents, mitigates, and responds to civilian harm, including through its Department of Defense Instruction on Civilian Mitigation and Response (DOD-I 30001.7) and the Civilian Protection Center of Excellence that provides direct support to warfighters.

We are therefore deeply concerned by reports of U.S. and Israeli strikes in Iran that have resulted in significant and growing civilian harm. The U.S. and Israel have reportedly struck or impacted numerous civilian sites—including [schools](#), [hospitals](#), [gymnasiums](#), [public gathering spaces](#), and a [UNESCO heritage site](#). In addition to civilian casualties, these strikes have disrupted civilian life and damaged infrastructure. The U.S. military must refrain from using explosive weapons in densely populated, civilian areas in line with its commitments under the [Political Declaration on the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas](#). Civilians and civilian infrastructure may under no circumstances be the object of attack and must at all times be respected and protected by all parties.

Reported civilian harm by the U.S. and Israel during Operation Epic Fury is particularly alarming yet unsurprising given the recent strain on our civilian protection institutions. For example, we understand that budget reductions at the Department have deprived military commands—including at U.S. Central Command—of essential resources needed to meaningfully address civilian casualties. In February 2025, you fired [top military lawyers](#) responsible for ensuring compliance with the laws of war, including those designed to protect civilians in conflict. And on March 2, 2026, you [asserted](#) that there would be “No stupid rules of

engagement.” President Trump has likewise [declared](#) that “I don’t need international law.” This attitude is not only lawless but counterproductive. General Joseph Votel, former Commander of U.S. Central Command, recently stated “If you cause so many civilian casualties and you cause so much civilian harm here, it can actually undermine the mission that the military has been sent in to do [...] the benefit to be gained by supporting these [Civilian Harm Mitigation and Response (CHMR)] positions, I think it outweighs the movement of resources to other places.” Now is not the time to admonish the principles of civilian protection and undermine the important work the Department has undertaken in recent years to advance CHMR policy and practice.

To that end, we seek detailed information regarding civilian protection during Operation Epic Fury and steps the military is taking to mitigate and respond to civilian harm. We also urge your Department to make public the findings of the ongoing investigation with respect to the strikes on the Shajareh Tayyebbeh school.

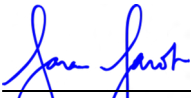
Specifically, we request written responses to the following questions:

1. Did the United States Armed Forces carry out the strikes on the Shajareh Tayyebbeh school? If so, what was the target and why was the decision taken to execute the strikes? What was the assessed civilian harm risk of the strikes, and what steps were considered or taken to prevent civilian harm?
2. What is the U.S. military’s assessment of civilian casualties from the airstrikes on the Shajareh Tayyebbeh school? In light of the scale of reported deaths of children in Minab, will the Department investigate the airstrikes on the Shajareh Tayyebbeh school as a possible war crime?
3. What is the role of artificial intelligence, if any, in selecting targets, assessing intelligence, and making legal determinations during Operation Epic Fury? If artificial intelligence is used, is it subject to human review and at what point? Was artificial intelligence, including the use of Maven Smart System, used to identify the Shajareh Tayyebbeh school as a target? If so, did a human verify the accuracy of this target?
4. How are congressionally mandated civilian harm mitigation and response (CHMR) policies and institutions, including DoD-I 3000.17 and the Civilian Protection Center of Excellence, being resourced, implemented, and operationalized during Operation Epic Fury?
5. What steps is the Department taking to prevent and mitigate civilian harm in its planning and targeting during Operation Epic Fury? What precautions is the U.S. taking to avoid and minimize civilian harm?
6. Please describe the Department’s process for target selection and review in Operation Epic Fury. Has the Department employed red-teaming and used civilian environment teams to mitigate civilian harm in this operation? If so, how do you assess the success of these actions? How many personnel are responsible for civilian harm mitigation and response in Operation Epic Fury?
7. What steps does the U.S. plan to take to respond to civilian harm reports from Operation Epic Fury, including development of lessons learned and post-harm responses to civilians?


8. Will the Department commit to surging CHMR capabilities to protect civilians in the context of Operation Epic Fury? Please indicate your plan for doing so, and any resources required from Congress.
9. Has the Department established accessible channels for civilians to report alleged civilian harm in Operation Epic fury? Are those channels available in Persian, Kurdish, and other major Iranian languages?
10. How is the Department working with Israeli authorities to harmonize civilian harm practices and policies between U.S. and Israeli forces?

We request a response no later than March 20, 2026. Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.


Sincerely,




Sara Jacobs
Member of Congress




Yassamin Ansari
Member of Congress




Jason Crow
Member of Congress



Adam Smith
Member of Congress




Jim Himes
Member of Congress




Gregory W. Meeks
Ranking Member
House Committee on Foreign
Affairs



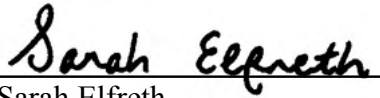
Greg Casar
Member of Congress



Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress



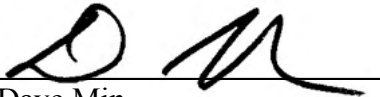
Ro Khanna
Member of Congress



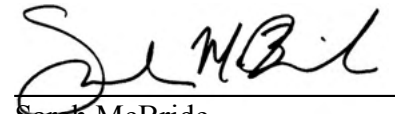
Sarah Elfreth
Member of Congress



Veronica Escobar
Member of Congress



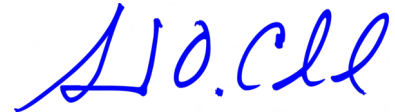
Dave Min
Member of Congress



Sarah McBride
Member of Congress



Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



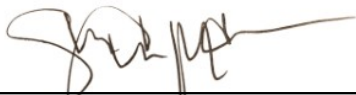
Salud Carbajal
Member of Congress



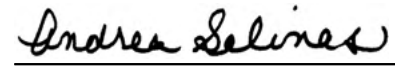
Jim Tokuda
Member of Congress



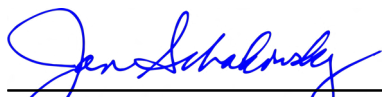
Ilhan Omar
Member of Congress



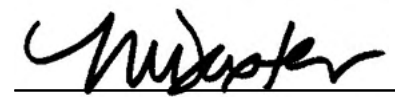
Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick
Member of Congress



Andrea Salinas
Member of Congress



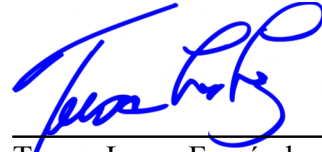
Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress



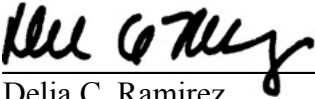
Maxine Dexter, M.D.
Member of Congress



Jasmine Crockett
Member of Congress



Teresa Leger Fernández
Member of Congress



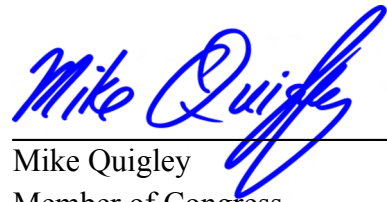
Delia C. Ramirez
Member of Congress



Chris Deluzio
Member of Congress



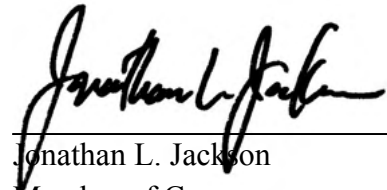
James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



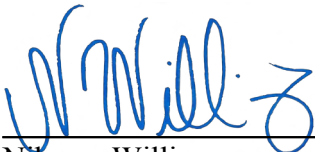
Mike Quigley
Member of Congress



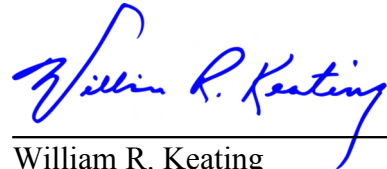
Yvette D. Clarke
Member of Congress



Jonathan L. Jackson
Member of Congress



Nikema Williams
Member of Congress



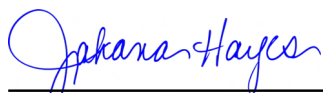
William R. Keating
Member of Congress



Melanie Stansbury
Member of Congress



Diana DeGette
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Jahana Hayes
Member of Congress



Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress



Jared Moskowitz
Member of Congress



Sean Casten
Member of Congress



Joe Courtney
Member of Congress



Deborah K. Ross
Member of Congress



Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress



Joaquin Castro
Member of Congress



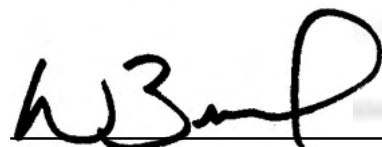
Jesús G. "Chuy" García
Member of Congress



Val Hoyle
Member of Congress



Derek T. Tran
Member of Congress



Wesley Bell
Member of Congress



Dan Goldman
Member of Congress



Kevin Mullin
Member of Congress



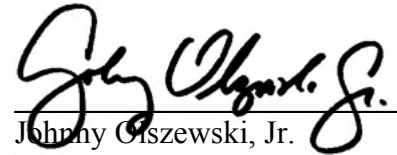
Maxine Waters
Member of Congress



Nanette Diaz Barragan
Member of Congress



Jim Costa
Member of Congress



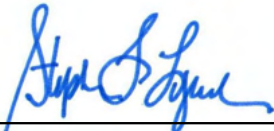
Johnny Oiszewski, Jr.
Member of Congress



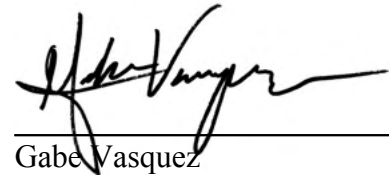
Dina Titus
Member of Congress



Lloyd Doggett
Member of Congress



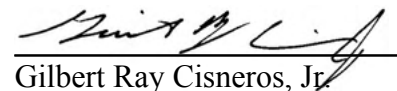
Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress



Gabe Vasquez
Member of Congress



Greg Stanton
Member of Congress



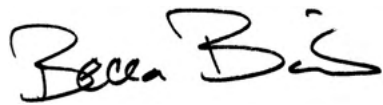
Gilbert Ray Cisneros, Jr.
Member of Congress



Lori Trahan
Member of Congress



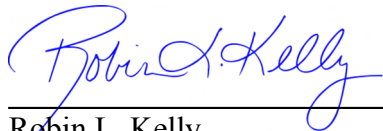
Gabe Amo
Member of Congress



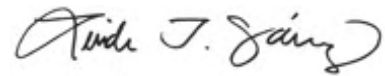
Becca Balint
Member of Congress



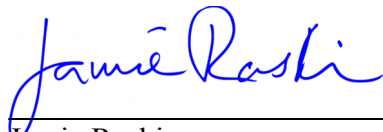
Doris Matsui
Member of Congress



Robin L. Kelly
Member of Congress



Linda T. Sánchez
Member of Congress



Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress



Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress



Ami Bera, M.D.
Member of Congress



Jared Huffman
Member of Congress



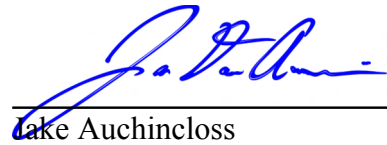
Chrissy Houlahan
Member of Congress



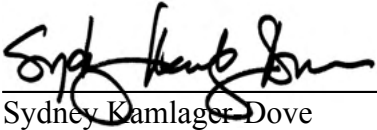
Bradley Scott Schneider
Member of Congress



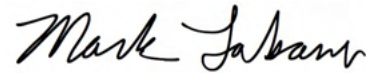
Eric Sorensen
Member of Congress



Jake Auchincloss
Member of Congress



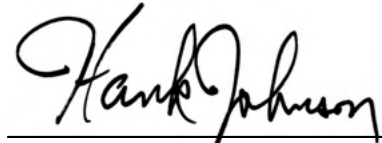
Sydney Kamlager Dove
Member of Congress



MARK TAKANO
Member of Congress



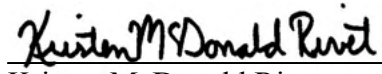
Paul D. Tonko
Member of Congress



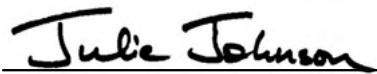
Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress



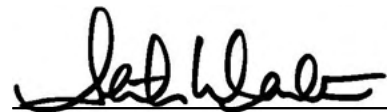
Adelita S. Grijalva
Member of Congress



Kristen McDonald Rivet
Member of Congress



Julie Johnson
Member of Congress



Seth Moulton
Member of Congress



Mike Levin
Member of Congress



Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress

Mark DeSaulnier
Member of Congress

Emilia Strong Sykes
Member of Congress

Brittany Pettersen
Member of Congress

John Garamendi
Member of Congress

Dwight Evans
Member of Congress

James R. Walkinshaw
Member of Congress

Joe Neguse
Member of Congress

Kweisi Mfume
Member of Congress

Judy Chu
Member of Congress

Maggie Goodlander
Member of Congress

Mark Pocan
Member of Congress

Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress

Bill Foster

Bill Foster
Member of Congress

Eugene Simon Vindman

Eugene Simon Vindman
Member of Congress

Luz L. Rivas

Luz M. Rivas
Member of Congress

Valerie P. Foushee

Valerie P. Foushee
Member of Congress

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Member of Congress

Jerrold Nadler

Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress

Sam T. Liccardo

Sam T. Liccardo
Member of Congress

Ted W. Lieu

Ted W. Lieu
Member of Congress

Betty McCollum

Betty McCollum
Member of Congress

Madeleine Dean

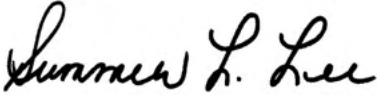
Madeleine Dean
Member of Congress

Sahas Subramanyam

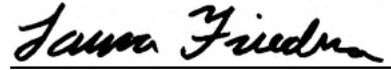
Sahas Subramanyam
Member of Congress

Donald S. Beyer Jr.

Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress



Summer L. Lee
Member of Congress



Laura Friedman
Member of Congress




Ayanna Pressley
Member of Congress



Andre Carson
Member of Congress



Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress



Shontel M. Brown
Member of Congress



Grace Meng
Member of Congress



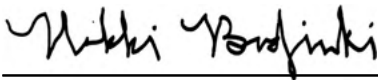
Mary Gay Scanlon
Member of Congress



Marilyn Strickland
Member of Congress



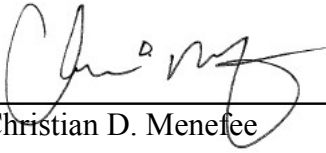
John W. Mannion
Member of Congress



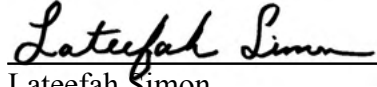
Nikki Budzinski
Member of Congress



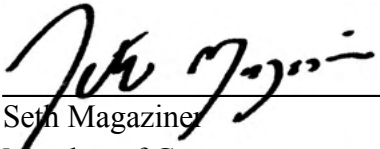
Al Green
Member of Congress



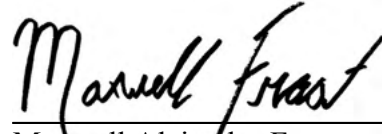
Christian D. Menefee
Member of Congress



Lateefah Simon
Member of Congress



Seth Magaziner
Member of Congress



Maxwell Alejandro Frost
Member of Congress

CC: Admiral Brad Cooper, Commander
U.S. Central Command