November 12, 2026

Dear Members of Congress,

We, the undersigned organizations, write to express our alarm at the extent of U.S.-caused civilian deaths and injuries in Yemen during Operation Rough Rider and urge rigorous congressional oversight over civilian harm, accountability, and lessons learned.

In late August, the Department of Defense (DoD) released its annual report on civilian harm from U.S. military operations in 2025, as required by Congress through Section 1057 of Fiscal Year 2018 National Defense Authorization Act, as amended. The report acknowledged nearly 400 civilian casualties – 153 deaths and 243 injuries – from just three incidents: a strike in Sanaa on April 6, a strike on the Ras Isa Port on April 17, and a strike on a migrant detention center in Saada, Yemen on April 28. These are extraordinarily high numbers of civilian casualties, and yet the report does not provide any further information about how or why this occurred and what the Department has learned.

What's more, civil society reporting suggests that the true human toll of Operation Rough Rider is higher. The DoD's report indicated that, more than a year after Operation Rough Rider ended, 15 additional incidents are still under assessment. The delay in assessments may be attributable, at least in part, to significant reductions in personnel and resourcing for the Department's civilian harm mitigation and response (CHMR) efforts, which include civilian harm assessment cells at U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) and other combatant commands. Amid a 90% cut in CHMR staff across the Department, CENTCOM's 10-person team has been cut to just one staffer.

This backlog doesn't just affect the civilians waiting for their life-altering harm to be acknowledged. It also inhibits the Department's ability to learn from its operations, a key purpose of civilian harm assessments according to DoD policy. The Department's failure to reckon with and learn from the harms of Operation Rough Rider may be seen in their actions in the opening days of the war between the US, Israel, and Iran, in which the United States and Israel reportedly killed and injured thousands of civilians – including over 100 children in a school in Minab.

The Department's 2025 report also stated that *ex gratia* or condolence payments to victims and survivors were "determined to not be appropriate" in the three Yemen incidents. This decision is premature and seemingly arbitrary. In the experiences of many of our organizations, the acknowledgement of civilian harm is typically the moment to initiate discussions with affected families about possible amends – including but not limited to formal apologies, condolence payments, or other forms of assistance. Rather than dismissing amends out of hand, the

Department should undertake a good-faith effort to understand families' needs and preferences for responses.

We urge members of Congress to:

- Conduct robust oversight into Operation Rough Rider and the resulting human toll, including by demanding more information about how and why civilian harm incidents occurred, what lessons the Department learned from these operations, and the status of ongoing civilian harm assessments and investigations. This includes asking for the release of the Civilian Protection Center of Excellence (CPCOE) qualitative lessons learned study on Operation Rough Rider, referenced in the CPCOE annual report to Congress;
- Ensure robust assessments, investigations, and transparency related to civilian harm in Yemen, including by ensuring the completion of outstanding civilian harm assessments and the publication of any formal civilian harm investigations (i.e., AR 15-6 investigations) ordered by the command;
- Encourage CENTCOM to reconsider its position on amends or responses to civilian harm caused in Operation Rough Rider, including through engagement with civil society organizations in direct touch with survivors; and
- Fully restore the DoD CHMR program, including by mandating minimum staffing levels and earmarking funding in annual appropriations and maintaining robust oversight over DoD implementation of congressionally-mandated policies.

Signed,

Airwars
Amnesty International USA
Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights
Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC)
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Human Rights Watch
Government Information Watch
MPower Change Action Fund
Mwatana for Human Rights
September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows
United for Peace and Justice
Win Without War