

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

May 6, 2020

Dear General Townsend,

We write regarding AFRICOM's recent publication of the first quarterly report on allegations and assessments of civilian casualties resulting from U.S. military operations. We welcome this step to provide increased transparency and public accounting of U.S. military operations and as part of our national commitment to minimizing civilian casualties. This action is consistent with the demonstrated interest of Congress for greater transparency in our Nation's use of targeted force and our efforts to prevent civilian casualties.

It is our understanding and hope that these reports will continue to be available to the public on a regular basis. We urge you to, wherever possible and consistent with the need to protect classified information, provide detail on how assessments are made and acknowledge where they may differ from the assessments of credible, independent non-governmental organizations and others.

As you are well aware, there have long been significant discrepancies between the civilian casualty assessments of NGOs and those of the Department. These differences may be explained by differing methodologies and access to classified intelligence; however, when reporting comes from credible and sophisticated NGOs with cultural and linguistic capacity, civilian casualty reports are not easily dismissed. We recognize that in some cases our adversaries may seek to provide misinformation about civilian casualties as well.

Regardless of the source of such allegations or reports, left unaddressed the perception that the United States is unconcerned about civilian casualties is damaging to our credibility and counterproductive to U.S. counterterrorism strategy and objectives. For example, in Somalia the terrorist group al-Shabaab seeks to leverage inconsistencies in civilian casualty reporting in its propaganda efforts. Left unaddressed, these discrepancies reduce our trustworthiness and can negatively impact the confidence of local partners that the U.S. government is committed to protecting civilian lives and in holding itself accountable.

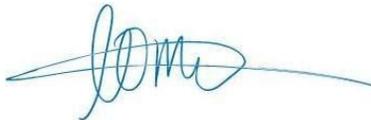
Accordingly, we recommend that in preparing these reports you provide as much information as possible to the public about your assessments and why they differ from those of NGOs. This

should include a public accounting of basic questions of methodology and the Command's definitions of combatants and non-combatants.

Providing additional public transparency around the use of force and civilian casualties is also in keeping with recent legislation passed by Congress. Section 1703 of the Fiscal Year 2020 National Defense Authorization Act (Public Law 116–333) requires Department-wide reporting on efforts to mitigate civilian casualties, descriptions of the general reasons for discrepancies between U.S. Government assessments and those of non-governmental organizations, and the definitions of “combatant” and “non-combatant” used in the preparation of the report. We urge you to include all such information in your reporting, as well as descriptions of ongoing investigations within the AO regarding possible civilian casualties.

Once again, thank you for moving forward to provide these public reports. We look forward to working with you to ensure that American interests, values, and national security are reflected in AFRICOM's quarterly civilian casualty reports, and once again applaud your commitment to transparency and accountability.

Sincerely,



Ilhan Omar  
Member of Congress

Additional Signatories

Adam Smith, Chair, House Committee on Armed Services

Adam B. Schiff, Chair, House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence

Eliot L. Engel, Chair, House Committee on Foreign Affairs

André Carson, Chair, Subcommittee on Counterterrorism, Counterintelligence, and Counterproliferation

James R. Langevin, Chair, Subcommittee on Intelligence and Emerging Threat and Capabilities

Terri A. Sewell, Chair, Subcommittee on Defense Intelligence and Warfighter Support

Karen Bass, Chair, Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations