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DEPARTMENT OF SAFETY AND SECURITY

OFFICE OF THE UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL

16 July 2012

Dear Dr. Paul,

When your organization approached me last year to discuss a Global Policy Forum initiative to study Private Military and Security Companies and their use by the United Nations, I responded positively. I believe NGOs and the related communities of experts that work closely with the United Nations often produce studies and reports that can serve to illuminate important issues of concern to the United Nations and Humanitarian organizations. Serious discussion and representation of the various sides of difficult issues is useful in raising awareness and bringing important issues to light. Regrettably, having read “Dangerous Partnership – Private Military and Security Companies and the UN”, I do not believe the report meets the high standards we have come to expect from this type of work. Despite having met with the author and outlining our ongoing work into the use and oversight of PSCs, the report fails to reflect this discussion and sadly contains a number of inaccurate assumptions. The report generally relies on weak or dated individual incidents and draws very broad, often misleading, and inaccurate conclusions.

United Nations organizations do use international and national security companies. Our existing policy guidance on armed security contractors is dated, and there was a desire to address any concerns within the United Nations as to whether security companies used had requisite levels of oversight and management. The organization undertook discussions at the highest levels and ultimately my Department was tasked to lead an effort to develop stringent requirements for the United Nations system to regulate the use and management of armed security contractors, ensuring necessary due diligence. A draft policy which proposes a decision making framework and high standards for management accountability has been developed if these services are to be used. The policy emphasises the need for strict protocols concerning the use of force. It also describes the necessary management and oversight responsibilities of the United Nations.

Dr. James Paul
Executive Director
Global Policy Forum
New York

The draft policy provides the structure for the assessment process for the use of armed security contractors, and articulates that such companies may only be used in circumstances where the provision of armed security by the host country, another member state, or United Nations resources are not possible or appropriate.

Regarding other concerns about the report, the procurement data provided in Appendix I and II of the report on the acquisition of security goods and services is very incomplete and as such promotes misleading impressions. The United Nations contracts for various services with a wide variety of companies, many of which were conflated in descriptions in your report into Private Military and Security Companies, which again is inaccurate. The overwhelming majority of contracted services for guards by the United Nations are related to residential or facility protection. We use national companies like many diplomatic and private institutions, and UN personnel should not be disadvantaged from receiving reasonable levels of security for their homes and families more than anyone else.

Contrary to Ms. Pingeot's claims that UNDSS plays a key role in promoting PMSCs and specifically to me being a strong advocate for PMSCs throughout my tenure at the United Nations, I in fact was not satisfied with the current procedures and level of oversight regarding the use of PSCs and therefore decided to ensure that this was brought to both a higher and wider level of discussion within the United Nations system. Contrary to advocating for the promotion of the use of PSCs, I confronted the issue directly, advocating sound and sensible criteria and the need for due diligence. The resulting effort goes a very long way to ensuring that specific criteria was established so that the United Nations is neither tainted, impacted nor otherwise compromised by the use of these companies.

Regarding the larger issue on whether it is appropriate to use armed PSCs, the fact is that there are unfortunately places in the world today where relying on the principle of acceptance does not provide the security necessary to continue operations. "Hard" security measures, which the report goes to great lengths to prove counterproductive in all instances, are actually necessary and appropriate at times. "Hard" security is also not synonymous with use of PSCs, much as the use of PSCs is not synonymous with "beefy men with beards and flak jackets" which your report dredges up from older newspaper reporting. PSCs have saved the lives of United Nations staff members, and have allowed the United Nations to continue critical programmes assisting people in need. Within the United Nations we honor the memory of the PSC Gurkha guards who lost their lives in Afghanistan defending United Nations personnel, I also do not believe the reference in the report to United Nations staff who agreed to talk on and off the record correctly represents the views of the entire array of opinions of colleagues in the field, many of whom believe in the strong security provided by PSCs. Further, in telling only a partial story, the report recycled historical examples of where things have gone wrong, omitting the realities of where the use of PSCs have allowed the United Nations to deliver programmes where most needed.

We are tasked by the entire United Nations system to provide security in order to enable UN programmes and activities in an increasingly dangerous world. As such, the United Nations's presence is more important and more challenged than ever before. UNDSS is committed to providing the safe and efficient conduct of programmes and activities of the United Nations System, and will continue to strive to ensure due diligence and transparency in all that we do.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Gregory B. Starr', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Gregory B. Starr
Under-Secretary-General