



August 13, 2012

Gregory Starr
Department of Safety and Security
FF – 1708
304 E 45th Street
New York, NY 10017

Dear Mr. Starr:

Thank you for your letter in response to our report on the use of Private Military and Security Companies by the United Nations.

We were pleased to note that while you disagreed with our assumptions and conclusions, you did not mention any inaccuracies of fact in our long and detailed report. That gives us confidence that our careful research and rigorous fact-checking produced an accurate account. We differ with you in how we assess the facts and what values we attach to them.

In your letter, you did not respond to our concern that the United Nations does not mention PMSCs in its official documents. Year after year, the Secretary General has issued reports on the Safety and Security of UN Personnel and not once referred to PMSCs. Other relevant UN reports also avoid reference to PMSCs, strongly suggesting an official taboo on the topic. In your letter, you insist that PMSCs play an important role in protecting staff and advancing the work of the organization. But if this is the case, why do the official reports – that DSS doubtless drafts – never mention PMSCs?

In our view, the Department of Safety and Security is failing in its responsibility to inform member states and the public about the UN's security policy. We would urge DSS to adopt a more forthcoming approach, incorporating reference to PMSCs in all reports where appropriate. Indeed, we believe that the United Nations should ask a blue ribbon panel of experts to prepare a broad-ranging inquiry into the costs, governance implications, policy impact and reputational issues posed by PMSCs. This would offer member states and the public a much-needed appraisal of these topics and lay the basis for a thorough-going review by the General Assembly.

We also note in our report that the UN has had abysmally low standards over the past twenty years for the vetting and oversight of these companies. You say in your letter that "existing policy guidance" is "dated." We are unaware of any serious policy guidance, dated or of more recent origin, that has shaped UN practice in this area. The UN has continued to hire disreputable companies and to stumble into one scandal after another,

while spending increasingly large sums on these discredited services. If there has been policy guidance, why has it been so invisible?

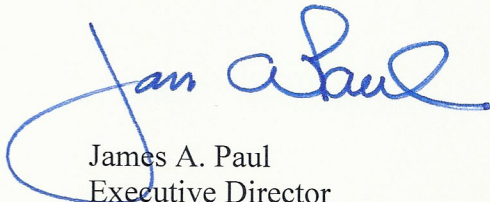
You speak dismissively of “historical” cases of PMSC malfeasance mentioned in our report. We believe all these cases must be taken seriously and we ask why the UN has never produced a thorough report or review, seeking “lessons learned” from these past mistakes – as well as those of recent origin.

We noted in our report that the proposed new guidelines are still not approved and put into practice after two years of discussion. We also pointed out that they cover only a small sub-set of the necessary field of PMSC contracts and that they ignore very serious problems of implementation in a highly decentralized contracting system. The UN’s approach to guidelines remains seriously flawed and far short of what we would expect of the organization.


You complain that the data in our report on UN contracts with PMSCs is “incomplete.” We are sure you realize ours was the most extensive data ever published on the subject, though extracted from notably incomplete UN contracting records. When we asked you to help us by providing complete and comprehensive data, you replied that it is impossible to know how much the UN system spends on these contracts and that you would “not hazard an estimate on an overall number.” How, we wonder, can DSS oversee system-wide security issues when it does not even have at hand the basic statistical information? We urge DSS to gather and to publish annually a statistical survey on PMSC contracts. This step – along with other elements of transparency we have suggested – would finally make available to member states the information they need to responsibly oversee the organization’s security policy and its related budgetary implications.

Our report raises serious questions about the impact of PMSCs on the UN’s programs and posture. The great attention the report has attracted in the press and in the UN community should alert you and the Secretary General to the need for a major change of course. Many observers – including experienced staff throughout the UN system – have questioned the policies of outsourcing and “hard security.” They have asked whether PMSCs really contribute to safety and security or whether in fact they add to insecurity, diminish program effectiveness, and bring a negative reputation to the organization. It seems to us that your Department has an urgent responsibility to explain why the UN increasingly uses these companies and whether other, more effective alternatives, better aligned with UN values, could be adopted instead.

Yours sincerely,



James A. Paul
Executive Director



Lou Pinget
Program Coordinator and author of the report