



US pardons for Blackwater guards an “affront to justice” – UN experts

GENEVA (30 December 2020) - A group of UN experts* said the pardons granted to four convicted private security contractors for war crimes in Iraq violated US obligations under international law, and called on all States parties to the Geneva Conventions to condemn the pardons.

The Blackwater Worldwide contractors were prosecuted and convicted of multiple criminal acts committed during a massacre at Nisour Square in Baghdad in 2007 which left 14 unarmed civilians dead and at least 17 wounded. In 2015 the US courts convicted Nicholas Slatten of first-degree murder, while Paul Slough, Evan Liberty and Dustin Heard were convicted of voluntary and attempted manslaughter.

US President Donald Trump pardoned the four contractors on 22 December.

“Pardoning the Blackwater contractors is an affront to justice and to the victims of the Nisour Square massacre and their families,” said Jelena Aparac, Chair-Rapporteur of the Working Group on the use of mercenaries.

“The Geneva Conventions oblige States to hold war criminals accountable for their crimes, even when they act as private security contractors. These pardons violate US obligations under international law and more broadly undermine humanitarian law and human rights at a global level.

“Ensuring accountability for such crimes is fundamental to humanity and to the community of nations,” she said. “Pardons, amnesties, or any other forms of exculpation for war crimes open doors to future abuses when States contract private military and security companies for inherent state functions.”

The Working Group is extremely concerned that by permitting private security contractors to operate with impunity in armed conflicts, States will be encouraged to circumvent their obligations under humanitarian law by increasingly outsourcing core military operations to the private sector.

ENDS

(*) *The [Working Group on the use of mercenaries](#) is comprised of five independent experts: **Jelena Aparac** (Chair-Rapporteur), **Lilian Bobea**, **Chris Kwaja**, **Ravindran Daniel**, and **Sorcha MacLeod***

*The **Working Groups** and **Special Rapporteurs** are part of what is known as the [Special Procedures](#) of the Human Rights Council. Special Procedures, the largest body of independent experts in the UN Human Rights system, is the general name of the Council's independent fact-finding and monitoring mechanisms*