

up front

private armies

Iraq has now spent five years under military occupation, and the suffering of the Iraqi people continues.

With growing pressure to withdraw US and UK troops from Iraq, mercenary forces have been given an ever greater role in the conflict, making hundreds of millions of pounds for the corporations that supply them. The companies grow richer while whole communities are condemned to the long-term poverty which comes with war.

Despite hundreds of cases of human rights abuse by mercenary forces over the past five years, private armies have been immune from prosecution. War on Want is leading the campaign for UK legislation to ban the use of mercenaries in war and to regulate their activities closely in all other arenas. February 2008



Stills from two 'trophy videos' shot by PMSCs in Iraq. The videos can be found at www.waronwant.org/pmsc

With your help, we have a real chance of winning the campaign against corporate mercenaries.

War is one of the chief causes of poverty, destroying schools, hospitals, industry and any hopes for development. We did not need the twin catastrophes of the Afghanistan and Iraq invasions to teach us this. But not everyone is made poorer by war. Many companies thrive off conflict, and indeed have a vested interest in seeing it continue.

War on Want brought the problem of private armies to the public's attention with our acclaimed report *Corporate Mercenaries*. The concerns we raised in that report have now turned into public outrage, with new examples of human rights violations by mercenaries in Iraq coming to light every week. We are stepping up the pressure on the UK government to introduce legislation regulating private military and security companies (PMSCs) and banning them from conflict situations such as Iraq, and we need your help to make this happen.

Human rights abuses

There are currently tens of thousands of mercenaries working for PMSCs in Iraq – the second largest occupation force behind the US military. As the atrocities committed by these corporate mercenaries mount up, the demand for action against them grows. When Blackwater mercenaries opened fire in Nisour Square in Baghdad in September 2007, killing 17 Iraqi civilians, it made international

headlines and brought scrutiny on the entire industry. But this is far from the only example of human rights abuse perpetrated by mercenary forces in Iraq:

- In November 2007 an Iraqi taxi driver was shot and killed by mercenaries working for DynCorp International, a private military company hired to protect American diplomats.
- In October 2007 mercenaries from Australian firm Unity Resources Group killed two Iraqi women in an attack that saw 40 shots fired at their car.
- In the same month mercenaries working for UK company Erinys International opened fire on a taxi near Kirkuk, wounding three civilians.
- In February 2007 a Blackwater sniper shot and killed three Iraqi guards working for the Iraqi Media Network from the roof of the Ministry of Justice.
- Employees of two PMSCs were implicated in the abuse-of-prisoners scandal at Abu Ghraib prison, including allegedly raping a male juvenile detainee and directing the use of torture.

The scale of the problem

Mercenaries are as old as warfare. Yet the corporations profiting from conflict in war zones such as Iraq and Afghanistan have taken



War on Want protestors outside the British Association of Private Security Companies' annual conference.

the tradition of private armies to a completely new level. Companies such as Blackwater, ArmorGroup and Aegis are integral to the war in Iraq, and many regularly engage in firefights with the Iraqi militia forces. Without them, the UK and USA would be unable to sustain the occupation.

The total income for the private military and security sector worldwide has reached a staggering £40 billion a year. Over the past five years the UK government has spent £225 million on PMSCs in Iraq and Afghanistan alone. British mercenary company Aegis has won a second major contract from the US military, for a massive £235 million over the next two years. PMSCs are now recruiting low-paid mercenaries from countries in Latin America and Asia so as to cut costs and boost profits even further.

Time for action

For the government, using private military and security forces has clear advantages. As one mercenary told the BBC, "If a private security contractor is killed on active duty, you don't get any body bag pictures on the front pages. That means no bad publicity for the government." Yet the recent series of human rights abuses committed by mercenaries in Iraq has underlined how unacceptable it is for PMSCs to continue operating outside the law. In 2002 the British government published a Green Paper in which it acknowledged the problems caused by the

absence of UK legislation on PMSCs and suggested a range of options to regulate the sector. Six years later, the government has failed to take forward any of these options. Both the Iraqi and Afghan governments are introducing regulations to control mercenary troops operating in their countries, and Washington has taken steps to hold American PMSCs accountable to US law. Yet still the UK sits on its hands and does nothing.

The British government must take action immediately to prevent private companies engaging in combat overseas. The UN working group on mercenaries has called on countries such as the UK to introduce legislation on PMSCs as a matter of urgency, and even the industry itself recognises it can no longer operate outside the law. Please send the card attached to your MP to demand government action. Together we can rein in the mercenary armies and protect future generations from the privatisation of war.

To download our report *Corporate Mercenaries*, and for more information on our campaign, go to www.waronwant.org/pmsc

We are stepping up pressure on the UK government to act, and we need your help to make this happen.



Guns for hire in Brazil

Armed security contractors forcefully evict farmers from their land.

A private security contractor hired by global agribusiness Syngenta shot and killed a farmer in October 2007 in Brazil. Valmir Motta, 32 years old and a father of three, was killed and six others were severely wounded in the Brazilian state of Paraná. Motta was a member of Via Campesina, an organisation which represents millions of small farmers and helps them to combat exploitation by multinational corporations and pro-corporate government policies. War on Want is a proud partner of Via Campesina's work around the world.

Valmir Motta had joined with 70 peasant families to protest Syngenta's illegal planting of genetically modified (GM) soya and maize seeds. In 2006 a £290,000 fine was levied against the multinational seed company for planting GM seeds in the protected zone around Iguaçu National Park, and Motta and others occupied Syngenta's test site. In July 2007, after 16 months of resistance, the families gave up their occupation and moved to a provisional settlement called Olga Benário.

But on the morning of 21 October 2007, about 150 peasants from Via Campesina reoccupied

Syngenta's test site. In the afternoon a bus stopped in front of the main entrance and 40 heavily armed gunmen got off and started shooting at the peasants. The gunmen killed Valmir Motta with two shots to the chest, shot five other peasants and assaulted Isabel do Nascimento de Souza, leaving her in a critical condition. Syngenta, one of the world's biggest agribusinesses, hired armed security contractors who forcefully evicted farmers from their land and attacked peasant camps in the region around their test site. The company's actions have been denounced repeatedly, including last October during a public hearing coordinated by Brazil's Human Rights and Minorities Commission.

Our partner's occupation of the test site has been recognised as crucial in publicising Syngenta's illegal activities. Via Campesina is demanding an investigation into the attacks on rural workers. They, and the residents of the Olga Benário settlement which borders the Syngenta test site, continue to oppose the company's GM experiments in the area as these contaminate their own seeds and damage the environment.

NEWS

Five residents of Phiri, Soweto who sued when the city drastically reduced their basic water provision won their day in court in December. The Johannesburg High Court heard the residents' challenge to the illegal limits placed on household water provision, and their request to double the meagre ration of 25 litres per day that some residents are receiving. The residents have been receiving support from War on Want partner organisation the Anti-Privatisation Forum since the water company installed prepaid water meters in their homes starting in 2003.

A law protecting babaçu trees from logging has been passed in Brazil. The trees produce the babaçu nuts which provide the sole source of income for nearly 400,000 women in four states. War on Want's partner MIQCB has been campaigning tirelessly for several years to see this law enacted, and its passage is a major victory for them. MIQCB, supported by War on Want, will now work to ensure that the law is effectively applied.

The Kenya National Alliance of Street Vendors and Informal Traders (KENASVIT) has submitted a draft bill to the Kenyan parliament which would offer important legal recognition and protections to informal workers. KENASVIT has been working on the Micro and Small Enterprises Bill for nearly two years with other stakeholders. Through the group's persistent and effective lobbying, the Kenyan government has recognised that street vendors and other informal economy workers play a key role in the country's national economy.

Nut breakers in Brazil will benefit from our partner's victory



War on Want is joining forces with some of Britain's biggest comedians for a night of hilarious stand-up and sketches. Top names Armstrong & Miller, Lee Mack, Shazia Mirza, and Jo Caulfield will be joined by rising stars Jack Whitehall and Josh Howie at London's Shepherd's Bush Empire on 21 February. All proceeds from this must-see gig will go towards War on Want's work fighting global poverty. Call 0844 477 2000 or visit ticketweb.co.uk to book tickets.

In Mozambique, 400 peasant farmers protested the government's giveaway of public land to private investors. The protestors represented regional farmers' associations from around the country. Addressing the crowd was Vice-President of the National Union of Peasant Farmers Joao Palate – a War on Want partner – who said that, while they supported private investment, it became “problematic when native land dwellers are removed from their own land, land which was their only means of subsistence and income, forcing them to become completely dependent upon external help”.

Berenice Celeyta from War on Want partner NOMADESC attended the 2007 Human Rights Defenders Forum in the USA. The meeting, chaired by former US president Jimmy Carter and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour, brought human rights defenders from 20 countries to discuss strategies for preventing and responding to mass atrocities. NOMADESC works to document human rights abuses in Colombia and empower communities to defend themselves against such violations.

Dear _____ MP

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There are currently tens of thousands of mercenaries working for private military and security companies (PMSCs) in Iraq outside legal or democratic control. Killings and human rights abuses by private contractors in Iraq have dominated the headlines, and both the US and Iraqi governments are taking action to control these mercenary armies. Yet the UK government has failed to act, despite UK companies being some of the biggest players in the industry.

The UK government demonstrated that it was aware of the problems posed by PMSCs when it published a Green Paper in 2002. However, six years on it has failed to take forward any of the options presented in the Green Paper. The UK government must introduce legislation to control the PMSC sector, which must include a ban on mercenary involvement in combat. Self-regulation by the industry is not an option. I urge you to call on the Foreign Secretary to introduce legislation to regulate private military and security companies as a matter of urgency.

Yours sincerely,

Name in full

Email

Address

_____ MP*
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

*If you don't know the name of your MP, visit www.theyworkforyou.com/mp

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