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Sent via email to: mercenaries@ohchr.org

Dear UN Working Group on Mercenaries,

Submission on the role of private military and security companies in immigration and border management and the impact on the protection of the rights of all migrants

I wish to make a short submission to your working group on the above issue. I am a journalist and author of a book about mercenaries. I have spent several years researching the private security companies involved in the UK's immigration detention and deportation network.

Much of this work was conducted between 2013 and 2015 when I was a researcher for Corporate Watch, a small NGO. Whilst there have been some developments since 2015, they have largely confirmed my earlier findings.

I urge you to read an article I wrote for New Humanist magazine in 2016, where I charted the growth of the UK private detention industry from the early 1990s.¹ I surveyed the LinkedIn profiles of around 100 people who had worked in the industry, and observed several patterns.

Over a third of detention centre staff used to work in prisons, and a smaller proportion were ex-armed forces. In one case, a senior custody officer at a major detention centre was a British army reservist – fighting in the same conflicts that the detainees had fled from. Night club bouncers were another key source of recruits.

There were also at least ten UK detention centre managers were transferred to Australia between 2009 and 2011, when the country escalated its use of detention, partly in response to Tamil refugees fleeing Sri Lanka en masse by boat. Jane Healy, a refugee advocate in Sydney, told me that she has noticed “a high proportion of British ex-military in positions of authority” in Australia's detention system.

Whilst the private security industry claims to offer governments the benefit of competition, in reality there are very few companies globally that have the capacity to do this type of work, and many of their staff move between the same companies.

In 2016, there were ten immigration detention centres in the UK. Two were run by the prison service, whereas private companies ran eight: G4S and Mitie had three each and both Serco and Geo Group had one.

By April 2020, the market will have become even more concentrated, with the departure of G4S from the UK immigration detention sector altogether, and its contracts being taken by Serco. This will leave just Mitie, Serco and Geo Group (a major Trump donor) as the only private providers across the UK. In England, it will be just Mitie and Serco – effectively a duopoly.

¹ New Humanist, *Inside the detention industry*, 25 July 2015, <https://newhumanist.org.uk/articles/5065/inside-the-detention-industry>

Many of these companies' senior staff have worked for their competitors in the past. In the case of Mitie, most of its top team came from Geo Group.² In 2014, Mitie took over Harmondsworth, the UK's largest detention centre, from its rival Geo Group. However, a secret filming investigation conducted by Corporate Watch found worsening conditions at the Harmondsworth following the takeover, with detainees being locked in their cells for longer each day in what appeared to be a cost cutting technique.³

In summary, although the private security industry claims to offer governments the benefits of competition by running immigration detention centres, the industry itself is so concentrated that there is very little difference between the firms' approaches, often sharing the same group of personnel. In the UK, the market is moving towards a duopoly.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Phil Miller.

² Corporate Watch, 'Care and Custody': Mitie's detention centre contracts, 1 September 2014, <https://corporatewatch.org/care-custody-mities-detention-centre-contracts/>

³ Corporate Watch, 'It's gonna break': Life in the UK's biggest detention centre, 4 March 2015, <https://corporatewatch.org/its-gonna-break-life-in-uks-biggest-detention-centre/>