

Extraordinary Session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention

Roundtable on Environmental Defenders, June 24, 2022

ICoCA Statement

Overview of the growth in private security industry.

The private security sector has experienced sustained growth over the last decade and is forecast to maintain that growth over the coming decade.¹ While estimates vary, there is consensus that growth will be constant with one estimate projecting a market valuation of \$263 billion by 2024². There are tens of thousands of private security companies operating around the globe at any one time. These include some of the largest companies in the world. Allied Universal, for example, employs 800,000 people in 90 countries, making it the seventh largest employer in the world. Much of the industry growth, however, comes from the establishment of small and medium sized enterprises in the global South.

This growth of the industry, including both large and small players, has been fuelled by growing insecurity and a rise in conflict at a time when state security is being scaled back. Conflict is often driven by the ever-growing demand for resources, with companies displacing communities whose livelihoods rely on the land, resulting in tensions over access to land and resources compounded by the backdrop of an increasingly stressed natural environment.

The intersection of private security, human rights and environmental defenders

The intersection of private security and human rights abuses against environmental defenders takes place when private security providers are contracted by governments, corporations and non-governmental organisations to secure access to land and resources.

In 2020, Global Witness recorded 227 murdered land and environmental defenders.³ Latin America is particularly problematic for environmental defenders with private security providers contracted by all sectors and industries across the continent. With over 16,000 private security companies employing over two million people in Latin America, these security companies hire more citizens than the police, reflecting a worldwide phenomenon. One study of private security and military companies (PMSCs) in Latin America estimates the ratio to be four members of PMSCs to one police officer in Brazil, five to one in Guatemala, and seven to one in Honduras.⁴ This particular study starts by recounting the story of Berta Cáceres, an indigenous leader in Honduras who campaigned peacefully against the Agua Zarca dam and was murdered in her home. The report highlights how her assassination is emblematic of many problems associated with the private sector security industry in Latin America, with strong ties to the state.⁵ According to Global Witness the most lethal

¹ According to the latest research by Future Market Insights, the private security is set to witness steady growth at a CAGR of 3.0% growth during 2021-2031. <https://www.futuremarketinsights.com/reports/private-security-market>

² Freedonia global Security Services Report 2020

³ Last Line of Defence : The Industries Causing the Climate Crisis and Attacks Against Land and Environmental Defenders, Global Witness, September 2021.

⁴ <https://www.occrp.org/en/daily/7837-private-security-companies-go-unchecked-in-latin-america>

⁵ <https://www.thedialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Security-for-Sale-FINAL-ENGLISH.pdf>

sectors for environmental defenders are those involved in resource extraction, dams, agribusiness and more.

Unfortunately, the renewables sector is not immune. Since 2010, Business & Human Rights Resource Centre has identified 197 allegations of human rights abuses related to renewable energy projects, including killings, threats, and intimidation; land grabs; dangerous working conditions and poverty wages; and harm to indigenous peoples' lives and livelihoods.⁶ With rapidly increasing demand for minerals such as Cobalt, used in batteries for electric cars, and for land for renewable energy projects including solar, wind and biofuels, and potentially even reforestation and 'conservation' schemes, we will see heightened conflict, with private security companies at the interface between the sponsors of these projects, whether companies, governments or non-profit organisations.

While there are many cases of abuses involving corporate clients around the world, the non-profit sector garnered little attention until BuzzFeed broke a story in 2019 alleging that WWF was providing support to park rangers in Central Africa and South Asia who were committing severe human rights abuses against people living near protected areas. An independent report set up to verify these allegations found that WWF "was aware of the potential for human rights abuses by ecoguards, but it did not carefully assess the human rights risks or develop an effective plan to prevent and respond to abuses."⁷ Questions need asking about the role private security actors may have played in this. Access to information here is key. Which private security companies are clients contracting, what is the ownership structure of these private security providers, what services are they contracted to provide, how do contracts embed human rights due diligence and how do the clients of these private security providers ensure human rights are being respected.

How Regulation and Oversight of the Private Security Sector Can Help

While there have been developments to strengthen national regulatory frameworks of private security companies, implementation levels have been uneven and in numerous regions there remain many unregulated private security companies. Moreover, in many contexts, there is a lack of transparency in and oversight of the activities, responsibilities and corporate structures of private security companies and their subcontractors.

The International Code of Conduct for Private Security Service Providers Association, ICoCA, is a multi-stakeholder initiative formed in 2013 to ensure that providers of private security services respect human rights and humanitarian law. It serves as the governance and oversight mechanism of the International Code of Conduct for Private Security Service Providers. The Code sets out principles for private security companies based on international human rights and humanitarian law, including the prohibition of torture, human trafficking, and rules on use of force.

ICoCA is the only international multi-stakeholder organisation working towards raising standards within the private security industry globally, with a particular focus on complex environments. ICoCA conducts human rights due diligence on its Member and Affiliate companies, it has a certification

⁶ https://media.business-humanrights.org/media/documents/files/Renewable_Energy_Benchmark_Key_Findings_Report.pdf

⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/nov/25/report-clears-wwf-of-complicity-in-violent-abuses-by-conservation-rangers>



scheme linked to a number of international standards, it monitors their operations, it takes complaints against them and provides guidance.

ICoCA has been shown to be an important platform to enable the practical implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, on improving access to remedy and ensuring accountability. The multi-stakeholder nature of ICoCA represents one of its greatest strengths in that it coalesces the perspectives and interests of civil society organisations, governments, private security companies and other stakeholders, that together help drive the purpose of the Association.

That being said, more support is needed for civil society organisations, especially those based in the global south, including organisations representing indigenous people's and other environmental defenders who come into conflict with private security providers and their clients. Governments should be stepping up to support these organisations. We encourage civil society organisations, including those representing environmental defenders, to engage with ICoCA, and help act as eyes and ears on the ground, monitoring the activities of private security companies and their clients, requesting and accessing information about their operations, and advocating to home governments for better oversight and regulation of the sector.