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135th IPU ASSEMBLY AND RELATED MEETINGS

Geneva, 23 – 27.10.2016

Panel discussion: *Promoting democratic accountability of the private security sector*

26 October 2016 (9.00 – 10.30 a.m.)
Room 1, level 1, CICG

Concept note

Background

In recent decades, the evolution of the security landscape has posed new security governance challenges. Since the early 1990s, there has been a worldwide shift in the way that the State provides security. Traditional public security functions are increasingly being contracted out to private military and security companies (PMSCs). These companies do not operate exclusively within countries, and their increased presence in international armed conflicts has brought them closer to military operations. The scope of services that PMSCs provide is increasingly diverse. It includes guarding people and facilities, counter-piracy, and training and advising members of public security forces.

The industry is currently estimated to be worth USD 244 billion per year. Despite their growth, PMSCs often operate under the radar of State democratic institutions. Regulations and oversight have not always kept up with changes in PMSC activities. The nature and exact role of the private military and security industry often remains unclear. In many cases, relevant legislation and oversight mechanisms are outdated.

Panel description

As law-making institutions representing the will of the people, Parliaments are key actors in bringing democratic accountability to the private military and security sector. They therefore have an important role to play in establishing legal frameworks and promoting accountability within the sector. It is crucial to be able to share knowledge, build capacity among parliamentarians, and establish tools and guidelines for more effective legislation and oversight over PMSCs. One example of a resource aiming to meet this need is the legislative guidance tool created by the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces.¹ The tool provides guidance to parliamentarians, lawmakers, members of oversight committees and other stakeholders in national legislative processes, who may be updating or developing national regulations related to PMSCs.

¹ Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, *Legislative guidance tool for states to regulate private military and security companies*, 2016, <http://www.ppps.dcaf.ch/en/legislative-guidance-tool-0>

Questions to stimulate discussion

- What are the characteristics of the PMSC industry in your country? What is the level of awareness of PMSCs?
- What are some of the laws and mechanisms currently in place to promote accountability of PMSCs in your country? What are some of the challenges in implementing such measures?
- What tools would be useful for parliamentarians to better promote democratic accountability of the private security sector? How can available tools be adapted to better meet parliamentarians' needs?
- What are the immediate steps that parliamentarians can take to start or advance a process that would increase accountability of the private security sector?

Format

The session will be an interactive discussion between parliamentarians and experts. After introductory remarks by the panellists, the floor will be open for an exchange of views, and for questions and answers.