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United Nations, December 30 (RHC)-- UN human rights officials have condemned U.S. President Donald Trump's pardoning of four American mercenaries convicted of killing Iraqi civilians in 2007. "These pardons violate U.S. obligations under international law and more broadly undermine humanitarian law and human rights at a global level," the members of Working Group on the use of mercenaries said in a statement on Wednesday.

The Working Group, comprised of Lilian Bobeia, Chris Kwaja, Ravindran Daniel and Sorcha MacLeod, also expressed concern such pardons, called them as "open doors to future abuses." They called on members of the Geneva Conventions to condemn the pardons, reiterating that the Geneva Conventions "oblige States to hold war criminals accountable" even when acting "as private security contractors."

In 2015, a U.S. court found Nicholas Slatten guilty of first-degree murder, while Paul Slough, Evan Liberty and Dustin Heard were convicted of voluntary and attempted manslaughter. These four contractors (mercenaries), who worked for the private security firm Blackwater guards, opened fire in a busy square in Baghdad in 2007 and killed 14 unarmed Iraqi civilians. The incident prompted outcry from human rights organizations and sparked a public debate about the military's use of private contractors in conflict zones.

Last week, Trump issued a flurry of pardons and commutations to a slew of controversial figures with ties to his administration, including the four Blackwater contractors.

The pardons triggered a wave criticism inside the United States with General David Petraeus and Ryan Crocker, respectively commander of U.S. forces and U.S. ambassador in Iraq at the time of the incident, calling the pardons "hugely damaging, an action that tells the world that Americans abroad can commit the most heinous crimes with impunity."

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