

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 17, 2019

The Honorable António Guterres
Secretary-General of the United Nations
United Nations Headquarters
New York, NY 10017

Dear Secretary-General Guterres,

We are writing to follow up on our correspondence from August 15, 2018 regarding the murder of three Russian journalists – Orkhan Dzhemal, Alexander Rastorguyev, and Kirill Radchenko – who were killed in the Central African Republic (CAR) on July 31, 2018 while working on a documentary about the Wagner Group, a private Russian mercenary organization overseen by Kremlin-connected businessman Yevgeny Prigozhin. We believe that increased engagement from the relevant United Nations mechanisms, including the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), will help to ensure a transparent and credible investigation into the murder.

In your response to us on September 7, 2018, you wrote that “MINUSCA efforts are currently focused on supporting the investigative efforts of the competent authorities of the Central African Republic, [...] to ensure that the national investigations are undertaken in accordance with international standards. Should any information otherwise come to the attention of MINUSCA which might assist these national investigations, such information will be provided to the competent authorities.”¹

One year on, neither the CAR nor the Russian Federation are conducting credible and thorough investigations. Based on a detailed inquiry carried out by the London-based Dossier Center, media organizations including *CNN* and *Novaya Gazeta* have reported that, from the moment of their arrival in the CAR, the journalists were under surveillance by local officers who were in frequent communication with Russian citizens tied to the Wagner Group, including Alexander Sotov and Valery Zakharov.² The latter has served as a security advisor to CAR President Faustin-Archange Touadéra.³ The Dossier Center’s investigation showed that companies overseen by Mr. Prigozhin have made regular payments to senior CAR officials, including the Police Chief and the Minister of National Security.⁴

Despite many indications linking the murder to Mr. Prigozhin’s operatives, the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation has refused to consider this possibility, to examine key

¹ Letter from UN Secretary-General António Guterres to U.S. Senator Marco Rubio, September 7, 2018, https://www.rubio.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/d3f46c92-5da1-4daa-ae18-e6e94e82e4f8/3375C34C7737C9CE3898A9A77AD8CD60.20180907--letter-from-sg-guterres-re-death-of-journalists-in-car.pdf.

² Tim Lister and Sebastian Shukla, *CNN*, January 10, 2019, <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/01/10/africa/russian-journalists-car-ambush-intl/index.html>;

Irina Gordienko, *Novaya Gazeta*, July 30, 2019, <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2019/07/30/81434-oni-podavali-ubiystvo>; *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, January 10, 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/khodorkovsky-investigators-say-evidence-links-vagner-group-to-russian-journalists-killings/29701936.html>.

³ *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, January 10, 2019.

⁴ Final Report on the Murder of Orkhan Dzhemal, Aleksandr Rastorguev and Kirill Radchenko in the Central African Republic, Dossier Center, <https://dossier.center/car-en/>.

evidence – including the journalists’ personal belongings that are still kept at the Russian Embassy in Bangui, or to question key persons of interest, including Mr. Sotov and Mr. Zakharov. Instead, the Russian government continues to insist that the journalists were killed in a robbery.⁵ According to Mr. Dzhemal’s widow, Irina Gordienko, the Russian authorities are “sabotaging” the investigation.⁶ Furthermore, the Dossier Center has found that “Yevgeny Prigozhin’s employees are exerting virtually unlimited influence over the preliminary investigation in [the] CAR and are also directly suborning officials.”⁷

On January 23, 2019, UN Special Procedures mandate-holders – the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; the Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order; and the Working Group on the use of mercenaries as a means of violating human rights and impeding the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination – sent written communications with detailed questions pertaining to the investigation to the governments of the Russian Federation and the CAR. Specifically, they requested “information and/or comment(s) [...] on the Wagner Group, including the legal and administrative framework governing its operations in the Central African Republic as well as on the company’s activities in the country.”⁸ The Russian Government sent a pro forma response on April 12, 2019, leaving this and other key questions unanswered.⁹ The CAR Government has not responded.

Given the inability or unwillingness of the authorities in the CAR and the Russian Federation to conduct a meaningful, transparent, and good-faith investigation into the murder of Orkhan Dzhemal, Alexander Rastorguyev, and Kirill Radchenko, we respectfully request that you consider authorizing MINUSCA, under the “Protection of Civilians” clause in its Mandate, to conduct its own investigation into their deaths.

Thank you for your continued attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator



Marco Rubio
United States Senator

⁵ Irina Gordienko, *Novaya Gazeta*, July 17, 2019,

<https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2019/07/17/81271-ni-styda-ni-sledstviya>; Irina Gordienko, *TIME*, July 30, 2019, <https://time.com/5637539/russia-central-african-republic-militia-anniversary/>.

⁶ Ekho Moskvyy, *Echo*, July 30, 2019, <https://echo.msk.ru/news/2473471-echo.html>.

⁷ Final Report on the Murder of Orkhan Dzhemal, Aleksandr Rastorguev and Kirill Radchenko in the Central African Republic.

⁸ UN Special Procedures Communication to the Government of the Russian Federation, January 23, 2019,

<https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=24243>;

UN Special Procedures Communication to the Government of the Central African Republic, January 23, 2019,

<https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=24244>.

⁹ Response from the Government of the Russian Federation to UN Special Procedures, April 12, 2019,

<https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadFile?gId=34622>.