

Press Release

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For Immediate Release

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**Families of American Contractors Slain in Iraq Seek Help
from American Public as They Are Attacked by Blackwater**

Raleigh, NC – The families of four American security contractors who were burned, beaten, dragged through the streets of Fallujah and their decapitated bodies hung from a bridge over the Euphrates River on March 31, 2004, are reaching out to the American public to help protect themselves against the very company their loved ones were serving when killed, Blackwater Security Consulting. After Blackwater lost a series of appeals all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, Blackwater has now changed its tactics and is suing the dead men's estates for \$10 million to silence the families and keep them out of court.

Following these gruesome deaths which were broadcast on worldwide television, the surviving family members looked to Blackwater for answers as to how and why their loved ones died. Blackwater not only refused to give the grieving families any information, but also callously stated that they would need to sue Blackwater to get it. Left with no alternative, in January 2005, the families filed suit against Blackwater, which is owned by the wealthy and politically-connected Erik Prince.

Blackwater quickly adapted its battlefield tactics to the courtroom. It initially hired Fred F. Fielding, who is currently counsel to the President of the United States. It then hired Joseph E. Schmitz as its in-house counsel, who was formerly the Inspector General at the Pentagon. More recently, Blackwater employed Kenneth Starr, famed prosecutor in the Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky scandal, to oppose the families. To add additional muscle, Blackwater hired Cofer Black, who was the Director of the CIA Counter-Terrorist Center.

After filing its suit against the dead men's estates, Blackwater demanded that its claim and the families' existing lawsuit be handled in a private arbitration. By suing the families in arbitration, Blackwater has attempted to move the examination of their wrongful conduct outside of the eye of the public and away from a jury. This comes at the same time when Congress is investigating Blackwater.

Over 300 contractors have been killed in Iraq with very little inquiry into their deaths. The families claim that Blackwater is attempting to cover up its incompetence, its cutting

of corners in favor of higher profits, and its over billing to the government. Due to lack of accountability and oversight, Blackwater's private army has been able to obtain huge profits from the government, utilizing contacts established through Erik Prince's relationships with high-ranking government officials such as Cofer Black and Joseph Schmitz.

In addition to assembling its litigation troops, Blackwater also stonewalled the families concerning any information about how the men were killed. Over the past two and a half years, Blackwater has not responded to a single question or produced a single document. When the families' attorneys, Callahan & Blaine, obtained a Court Order to take the deposition of a former Blackwater employee with critical information about the incident, Blackwater quickly re-hired him and sent him out of the country. When the witness returned to the United States more than a year later, the families obtained another Court Order for his deposition. Blackwater again prevented them from taking his deposition by seeking the assistance of the U.S. Attorney's Office to block the deposition under the guise that he possibly possessed national secrets. Following an investigation, the U.S. Army reported that the witness had no secret information and that it had no objection to the deposition.

Blackwater has now lifted this atrocity to a whole new level by going on the offensive and suing the families for \$10 million. The families now find themselves looking down the barrel of a gun as Blackwater, armed with a war chest and politically-connected attorneys, is aggressively litigating against them. Blackwater has also threatened to hold the administrator of the estates personally liable to scare him into abandoning his position, and has threatened the families' attorneys as well.

The families are simply without the financial wherewithal to defend against Blackwater. By filing suit, Blackwater is trying to wipe out the families' ability to discover the truth about Blackwater's involvement in the deaths of these four Americans and to silence them from any public comment. In February, the families testified before Congress. However, Blackwater's lawsuit now seeks to gag the family members from even speaking about the incident or about Blackwater's involvement in the deaths. This is a direct attack to their free speech rights under the First Amendment.

"I initially took this case because it was the right thing to do in helping the families find closure by discovering the events surrounding their loved ones deaths," said Daniel J. Callahan, attorney for the families. "I have found the evidence concerning Blackwater's involvement in the deaths to be overwhelming and appalling. Even more disturbing though is the callous nature in which Blackwater has not only concealed the truth, but also outright sued to force the families to stop pursuing the case and to silence them."

Blackwater has spent millions of dollars and hired at least five different law firms to fight the families, rather than meeting and addressing what should be Blackwater's top priority—the safety and well being of the mothers, wives, and children left behind. Blackwater has said that it will not pay one red cent to assist or console the surviving families, but instead has counter sued for \$10 million.

Without help, Blackwater will succeed in avoiding scrutiny for its conduct, escaping accountability for its actions, and silencing the families of the four Americans killed in Fallujah. A defense fund has been established by which the public is able to donate money to assist the families with litigation costs and expenses.

Donations can be sent to the estates' trust account, payable to "C&B ITF Blackwater Victims Defense Fund," c/o Callahan & Blaine, 3 Hutton Centre Drive, Ninth Floor, Santa Ana, California 92707. Donations may also be made securely online through PayPal by going to www.blackwatervictims.com. All donations will be kept confidential and anonymous.

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