

A Common Purpose: Raising Standards in the Private Security Industry Conference, 15 June 2010

Baroness Ruth Henig

SIA Chair

Please note that the text below is not a transcript of the speech given but the draft text that Ruth Henig read from. There may therefore be some variation in the final wording and phrasing that Ruth used.

Thank you, Hazel, for welcoming everyone here today. I am delighted to see so many of our partners, security providers and buyers of security here in London for our annual conference, the first time we have held our conference in the capital. Today's conference focuses on how all of us who work in the private security industry can work together more closely, sharing best practice and building on productive relationships.

Now that regulation has been around for six years, we are beginning to see the longer term effects, and the areas which we still need to look at more closely. We, and others, regularly measure the impact and effects of regulation on the private security industry, and on those working closely with it. We can confidently say that working as a security guard for instance, or a door supervisor nowadays is seen as a career in which someone can progress. Licensing has improved the basic skills operatives have, their future career options, the way they are treated by police and the public, and it has reduced criminality in the industry. So, regulation has demonstrably been beneficial and it has worked, but thus far only up to a point.

There will always be areas for improvement. In particular for example we all need to be aware of the very high and very unacceptable levels of violence towards people who work in private security, particularly door supervisors. In March, an SIA study found that two thirds of door supervisors had been assaulted at work, with 60% reporting being abused verbally and 54% reporting a physical assault. For those who had worked in the sector for more than five years, this rose to 94% who reported being attacked. The study also found that nearly half of security guards had been subjected to some form of violence. In no other sector would this be regarded as acceptable working conditions. We, the regulator, and our partners responsible for setting standards in the industry, along with private security companies and individuals themselves need to bring this statistic down by equipping operatives with skills to handle violent situations.

Another area for improvement is that some licence holders have low levels of spoken English which employers, clients and private security operatives have voiced as a concern and a potential threat to public safety. In response to the recognised increase in the number of people with English as a foreign language working in the private security industry, this year we will consult with industry experts, partners and others responsible for setting industry

standards as well as the end users to agree recommendations for a way forward on this issue, and to encourage shared responsibility.

To move forward in tackling these areas of improvement, and others, we will need to work closely with our partners, and with private security industry businesses, to discuss how we can share regulatory responsibilities effectively and to mutual benefit. This is the time to start planning for, and working towards, greater empowerment and lighter touch regulation for those working in the private security industry. We would like to see key industry figures and organisations, such as the Security Institute, BSIA and Skills for Security, to name but a few, as well as individual companies, joining in the discussions, leading the drive for higher standards and for innovation. This means working with the SIA to explain to Parliamentarians, civil servants and to those who work in the industry how regulation in the industry will evolve, and helping to achieve the goals we will all hopefully be united in pursuing. You can all help the SIA to move forward, building on the benefits of regulation which have been achieved so far, and working together to drive forward a joint agenda of 'professionalisation' of the industry and of higher skill levels and continuous training for those who work within it.

An early challenge and opportunity will of course be the Olympics, where we are already working together to ensure their success and to enable the industry to gain a permanent benefit from the new recruits who will be needed to ensure that the games run smoothly. This will be a step along the way to a more confident and professional industry, overseeing skills and training development, vetting and checking employees and setting professional standards, whilst the SIA focuses on criminality, enforcement and high risk areas and provides the inspection and assurance function to ensure that the system is operating effectively.

At a strategic level, in the next few years we need to take the opportunity to change the regulatory landscape quite significantly. After six years of regulation, the basic licensing framework is firmly in place and working effectively. Criminality has been reduced, standards of competence and professionalism have risen and public confidence in the industry is increasing. One of the last measures to pass through Parliament before the election was an act which will give the SIA the opportunity to move from the licensing of individuals to compulsory business licensing, starting with vehicle immobilising companies. This will enable the SIA in the future to set minimum standards for all businesses and to focus our attention on where the major risks to public safety still lie. We can then tackle this through the intelligence we gather, using more effective enforcement to tackle the remaining pockets of criminality in the industry.

At the same time, as I have already said, I would like to see the SIA working with partner bodies and private security companies on the most effective

way to plan for the transfer of the SIA's responsibilities for developing and maintaining competency standards and qualifications to the industry, while maintaining a role in approving these standards, and facilitating the establishment of an industry-led hallmark scheme to drive higher standards above the minimum requirements for compulsory business licensing. Further down the road I foresee the empowerment of compliant businesses to take on additional responsibilities for staff licensing and compliance management.

That is where I would like us all to be in six or more years time, and I hope that is your vision too. It means of course that currently we are halfway along our journey from the inception of licensing – which is why this is such a pivotal moment for us. I know we will all have to work hard to turn this vision into reality, but I look forward to working with the industry, and of course many of you here, to agree a common strategy and purpose and to plan how we can move steadfastly to the realisation of our goals.