

Providing Global Leadership in Security and Human Rights: Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights Initiative Strategy 2019-2022

The Voluntary Principles Initiative (VPI) is a platform in which governments, companies and NGOs work together to help companies maintain the safety and security of their operations within an operating framework that ensures respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Since the Initiative was established, members of the VPI have deepened their understanding of security-related human rights risks in various operating environments and significantly improved their policies and practices. At the same time, the VPI membership recognizes that complex environments, ongoing serious risks and growing stakeholder expectations require continuous knowledge-building and application of best practices.

I. VISION

Members of the Voluntary Principles Initiative will continuously improve their promotion of and respect for human rights in the context of their security practices and will make every effort to prevent conflict.

The focus in 2019-2022 will be on creating value for members, increasing membership, maximising impact through joint and cross-pillar action, building on-the-ground capacity, increasing accountability amongst the membership, and continuing to support the effective implementation of the Voluntary Principles so that members may operate within a framework that promotes respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms, and the principle of non-discrimination. The membership underlines its support for equal rights for all, including women and men, as well as the importance of taking into account the vulnerabilities of other groups.

A Defining Moment

In 2020, the VPI will celebrate its 20th anniversary, an important milestone for the Initiative on which to reflect on achievements and lessons learned, and to set the direction for the coming years. The Secretariat and Steering Committee will ensure that the communications opportunities presented by the 20th anniversary are fully deployed in support of this strategy.

Building on Solid Foundations

Over the past 20 years, the Voluntary Principles has become an influential global framework, referenced as a global best practice in the performance standards of many international organizations, international financial institutions, and industry associations. Tools and templates have been developed to help implement the VPs and improve operational practices. Within the VPI membership, increased cross-pillar collaboration and frank dialogue have contributed to deeper understanding of complex issues and improved implementation. A number of multi-stakeholder In-country Implementation Groups have been established and meet regularly, some in high-risk environments, to improve collaboration and dialogue aimed at reducing human rights risks.

Strengthening Our Effort

Numerous challenges remain in addressing continuing human rights vulnerabilities in the natural resource industries. VPI members are increasingly aware of the repression of human rights defenders, gender-based violence such as sexual abuse and exploitation; entrenched gender biases which can undermine women and girls' enjoyment of their rights; and other threats to the human security and human rights of those belonging to particularly vulnerable groups, including women, children and young people.¹ In some cases, operating environments are becoming more conflict-ridden and the broader respect for human rights is deteriorating. Violent conflict is a major driver of security-related human rights violations. Members are aware that underlying conflict drivers such as political, social and economic exclusion and lack of opportunity, the absence of the rule of law, insufficient civic space and ability to dialogue, repression, persecution of human right defenders, and poor human security, all create conditions where the risk of violent conflict increases. By helping to address such underlying issues, members are creating an enabling environment for the realisation of human rights. Members are committed to having a positive impact on local governance, peace and stability and playing a proactive role in preventing conflict, rather than reacting to it is essential for effective implementation.

Cooperation of host governments remains another key factor for effective implementation, often requiring a joint effort by all pillars.

The number of companies, governments, and civil society organizations which are members of the VPI remains small relative to the number that would benefit from more universal implementation. The Initiative must adapt and expand to ensure its continued relevance in a changing world.

In light of the above contextual challenges, this Strategy seeks to advance the Initiative's work in four strategic directions:

1. Solidifying the Voluntary Principles Initiative as the premier global guidance and multi-stakeholder forum in the area of security and human rights, allowing members to convene, share best practices, and promote respect for human rights;
2. Advancing country-level implementation of the Voluntary Principles, including by reinforcing mechanisms for in-country stakeholder coordination and joint engagement with host governments by VPI members;
3. Further enhancing the Initiative's relevance and influence by expanding its membership; and
4. Continuing to strengthen the Initiative's governance and accountability systems.

II. KEY RESULT AREAS 2019 – 2022:

In order to advance this work, activities will be implemented under the following key result areas:

1. The Voluntary Principles Initiative is recognized as a leading security and human rights initiative providing global leadership

- a) The internal sharing of best practices and lessons learned through the convening power of the VPI is leveraged to develop and provide new or updated tools and guidance around specific

¹ Vulnerable groups include but are not limited to women and girls, children, indigenous peoples, ethnic and religious minorities, the poor and marginalized, and LGBT persons. The vulnerabilities of particular groups need to be understood in the specific context of each project or community.

themes, including in collaboration with other organisations. As a result, the capacity of Voluntary Principles Initiative members to address emerging implementation challenges and create a secure environment where human rights are respected is increased. Priority themes include risk mitigation, conflict prevention and the creation of an enabling environment for the realization of human rights, the prevention of gender-based violence, and policy development that is sensitive to the needs all vulnerable groups, risk assessments and training;

- b) The Voluntary Principles Initiative addresses conflict prevention through the compilation and sharing of best practices, the development of guidance on identifying and addressing conflict drivers in Risk Assessments, and on identifying and using opportunities to promote the creation of an enabling environment for human rights;
- c) The Voluntary Principles Initiative collaborates with other organizations and initiatives (including the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights, DCAF, ICOCA, EITI, OECD, Business and Human Rights Resource Centre, IHRB) on specific implementation issues where expertise and resources can be leveraged by working together, for example, in the development of best practice guidance; and
- d) The international visibility of the Voluntary Principles is supported and enhanced through the development and implementation of a communications plan, which is updated annually.

2. Country-level implementation of the Voluntary Principles is deepened, including through supporting the In-country Implementation Groups

- a) Meaningful policy and programming support are provided to the In-country Implementation Groups within a context of strong encouragement for local ownership. Support will include the development of a framework for their budgets and plans to support their activities with an emphasis on clear deliverables and planned outcomes;
- b) Support to In-country Implementation Groups, which may include operational funding and activities (such as workshops, training, outreach, etc);
- c) Support for the attendance of one In-country Implementation Group member to each Annual Plenary, if required and appropriate, to enhance peer learning towards improvement of VPs implementation;
- d) Support by the Secretariat and full members to building the capacity of engaged members within their operating environment;
- e) The feasibility of creating new In-country Implementation Groups is explored, ensuring on-the-ground multi-stakeholder demand and support prior to setting up any group;
- f) A VPs funding mechanism is considered for development to provide a framework for disbursing any appropriate Voluntary Principles Association funds to In-country Implementation Groups and potentially for other activities as determined by the Steering Committee to provide greater predictability and sustainability for 2020-2021;

- g) Guidance for In-country Implementation Groups is created and disseminated based on lessons learned and multi-stakeholder working group best practices, including around conflict prevention, creating an enabling environment for human rights, and the meaningful participation of women and women's organizations;
- h) Effective cross-pillar coordination is employed by all pillars to address specific challenges on the ground towards improvement of VPs implementation, including engaging with host governments, conflict prevention, the creation of an enabling environment for the realization of human rights, and implementation that is sensitive to vulnerable groups; and
- i) Support, tools, and mentorship is provided, including to new members of the Voluntary Principles Initiative.

3. The Voluntary Principles Initiative is expanded, further enhancing the Initiative's relevance and sustainability

- a) The Voluntary Principles Initiative will attract new members through an outreach plan that targets all pillars, including companies outside the extractive sector and non-OECD governments. Specific companies and governments will be targeted in the outreach plan.

4. Ensuring credible and meaningful accountability and stronger governance within the Initiative

- a) The Engaged Company category is adopted and implemented to admit new members pursuant to an agreed-upon process. More broadly, the applications process is efficient, accountable and transparent for the membership and the applicant;
- b) The VPI Grievance Mechanism is reviewed through relevant hypothetical scenarios. Any needed changes are made to improve the substance and/or procedures of the VPs Grievance Mechanism such that problems identified by Members are constructively addressed and resolved satisfactorily, including, if applicable, by addressing barriers that vulnerable groups may face in the grievance process;
- c) The Verification presentation roster and rotation of presenters is made more equitable, transparent and predictable, and circulated to all members;
- d) A peer review process and a timetable for reviewing Annual Reports is adopted;
- e) A common approach for assessing the impact of Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights implementation by VPI members is developed through the elaboration of relevant model indicators;
- f) Alternatives to the current Voluntary Principles Association establishment in the Netherlands is explored with the aim of lowering costs and increasing the efficiency of Voluntary Principles Association operations;

- g) The effective roles and responsibilities of the Government Chair, the Steering Committee and the Secretariat are reviewed and strengthened to ensure strong continuity from year to year;
- h) Current but inactive members are encouraged to actively re-engage in the VPI;
- i) A surplus/reserve policy is adopted that meets Voluntary Principles Association needs and concerns; and
- j) A gender analysis of the Voluntary Principles Initiative is conducted in order to inform gender-sensitive decision making and mainstreaming at the local and institutional levels.

III. PROGRESS REVIEW:

The Steering Committee will review this strategy on an annual basis and report back to the Annual Plenary Meeting.

October 15, 2019