



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

2014 UK Annual Report on the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights

Commitment

Statement of commitment or endorsement of the Voluntary Principles

The UK Government is firmly committed to the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights and is chairing the initiative from March 2014 to March 2015. The Voluntary Principles play an important role in helping to implement the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs), and they make a valuable contribution to upholding human rights and preventing conflict in difficult operating environments where extractive companies carry out their operations. The Voluntary Principles provide an open and frank forum where a range of stakeholders, including companies, NGOs and governments, can share best practice and discuss sometimes difficult and challenging issues. The Voluntary Principles help to drive up standards and contribute to the UK Government's efforts to build stability overseas.

The Voluntary Principles are the only tool for implementing the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the UK's Action Plan on Business and Human Rights in the extractive sector. The UK Action Plan sets out our commitment to *"work together with partners in the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights to strengthen the implementation, effectiveness and membership of the Voluntary Principles, including through the UK Chairmanship of the Initiative beginning March 2014"*.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/236901/BHR_Action_Plan_-_final_online_version_1_.pdf

We published a public version of the UK's 2013 Voluntary Principles annual report on the Foreign Office website in March, and we will do the same in 2015, in line with the new government pillar verification framework. We will also publish a public version on the Voluntary Principles website.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/298785/Public_UK_VPs_annual_report_2013_-_for_the_FCO_website.pdf

We have publicly expressed our support for the Voluntary Principles, and reported on our efforts within the initiative, in the UK Government's 2013 Annual Human Rights Report.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2013/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2013#section-vii-human-rights-in-promoting-britains-prosperity>

We have also used social media (including Twitter, Facebook and You Tube) to promote our commitment to the Voluntary Principles across several FCO channels.

Policies, Procedures and Related Activities

Relevant policies, procedures, and/or guidelines (or any changes thereof from the previous reporting year) to implement the Voluntary Principles

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) is responsible for UK policy on the Voluntary Principles. The Voluntary Principles are an important tool for delivering the upstream conflict prevention objectives of the UK Government's Building Stability Overseas Strategy and fall within the UK's Business and Human Rights Action Plan. Other government departments including UK Trade and Investment and the Department for International Development, have a role in implementing the Voluntary Principles in pursuit of the benefits they bring to businesses and local communities.

The UK assumed the Chairmanship of the Voluntary Principles on 28 March. We had three priorities for our chairmanship:

- To encourage more governments and UK companies to join the initiative, particularly governments of fragile and conflict affected countries, where it can be difficult for extractive companies to do business. We did this through lobbying at Ministerial and official level, and supporting roundtables, workshops and other events to promote the Voluntary Principles and raise awareness of the initiative.
- To help companies to use the Voluntary Principles to manage risks more effectively and strengthen implementation. We did this through encouraging greater collaboration by all relevant stakeholders on the ground. We also supported project work to strengthen implementation of the Voluntary Principles.
- To make progress towards bringing the initiative more in line with the UN Guiding Principles, through increased accountability and transparency. This included efforts to encourage greater reporting, including through the newly developed verification frameworks, and use of our Plenary in March 2015 to share best practice, learn lessons and improve processes.

To mark the launch of our chairmanship, we issued a statement on the FCO website, and former Foreign Office Minister for Conflict Issues Mark Simmonds MP published a video message, which set out our priorities for the year. This was shared through the FCO website, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-chairs-the-voluntary-principles-on-security-human-rights>

We also made a statement to Parliament to announce our chairmanship.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/uk-chairmanship-of-the-voluntary-principles>

We chaired the monthly conference calls of the Steering Committee and Board of Directors, and monthly government pillar calls.

The UK continued to play an active role in the Outreach and Implementation Working Group, the Implementation Sub Group, and the Roles and Responsibilities Working Group (subsequently known as the Verification Working Group).

The UK contributed to the funding of the scoping study for the proposed Benefits and Outcomes Assessment, and has continued to work with other participants of the Implementation Sub Group to identify a way to develop case studies and measure the benefits and outcomes of corporate implementation of the Voluntary Principles.

We also participated in efforts to develop roles and responsibilities documents (agreed in August) and verification frameworks for each pillar, as well as drafting the revised terms of reference for the Verification Working Group, to ensure a continuing process for verifying implementation by all pillars. The UK is committed to greater accountability and transparency within the Voluntary Principles, and to that end, we will volunteer to be reviewed in the implementation discussion session at our Plenary in March 2015, and will publish a public version of our annual report on the FCO website and Voluntary Principles website.

Examples of promoting awareness of the Voluntary Principles throughout the organisation or government

All UK diplomatic Posts have been provided with briefing on the Voluntary Principles. Officials responsible for or working in countries where the Voluntary Principles are particularly relevant have received more detailed information and instructions relating to inter-governmental outreach and support for in-country implementation, including engagement with business and civil society. Within the FCO we have continued to engage on the Voluntary Principles with officers working on and in Voluntary Principles priority countries, as well as in other fragile and conflict affected areas where the Voluntary Principles have relevance, in order to raise awareness and encourage further outreach to governments and greater support for company implementation in country. We continued to further embed the VPs into Foreign Office staff development on human rights issues, through a curriculum of internal human rights training, and in 2014, we added the Voluntary Principles to the business and human rights training we provide for UK Trade and Investment staff, who manage our relationships with UK businesses overseas.

Examples of promoting and advancing implementation of the Voluntary Principles internationally

Over the last year, we have worked to raise awareness of the Voluntary Principles in a number of countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America, through FCO Ministers, senior officials, geographical desks and our network of overseas missions. We have also funded project work to strengthen implementation of the VPs.

On 17 June the Foreign Office hosted an event with the ICRC, to launch their report on Business, Violence and Conflict, at which we promoted the Voluntary Principles.

On 25 June then Department for International Development Minister Lynne Featherstone used her speech at the Mining on Top: Africa-London Summit in London, to encourage African governments to join the Voluntary Principles initiative.

On 23 October Foreign Office Minister Baroness Anelay gave a speech at the launch of the International Energy Agency (IEA)'s first report on energy in sub-Saharan Africa, which included a reference to the UK chairmanship and the benefits of membership.

Country Implementation

Overview of country operations selected for reporting

We have undertaken outreach to governments of priority countries and other fragile and conflict affected countries where the Voluntary Principles have relevance, in order to promote the benefits of membership and encourage more governments to join the initiative. Our outreach has included bilateral lobbying at Ministerial and official level, stakeholder roundtables, workshops, mining conferences and other events, letters, articles, blogs and public statements. We have also made greater use of social media to promote the initiative.

Engagement with stakeholders on country implementation

Our overseas missions participated in Voluntary Principles stakeholder working groups in a number of countries. These groups bring together participants across all three pillars to discuss country implementation and our approach to government outreach. During our chairmanship, we encouraged our missions to organise, participate in, or establish these groups, and to ensure that all stakeholders were equally heard.

We organised one meeting of the UK cross-pillar VPs group on 25 September, to discuss progress on our chairmanship priorities, and next steps to strengthen the initiative.

We have also met UK Voluntary Principles companies in priority countries, to offer support for their Voluntary Principles implementation.

Examples of supporting outreach, education and/or training of relevant personnel, private security, public security, and/or civil society

In 2014, we promoted the Voluntary Principles in Angola, Argentina, the EU, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Mozambique, Peru, the Philippines, South Africa, Tanzania, and Thailand. We participated in workshops in Mozambique, Kenya and Angola, which brought together all the relevant stakeholders from governments, extractive companies and civil society for the first time, to discuss the benefits of the Voluntary Principles and implementation of the Principles on the ground. These workshops have provided the foundations for further dialogue on the Voluntary Principles in these countries.

Lessons and Issues

Lessons or issues from this reporting year, as well as plans or opportunities to advance the Voluntary Principles for the organisation.

We are pleased with the progress made this year towards expanding government membership, strengthening implementation and encouraging greater accountability and transparency. The development of the verification frameworks is a real step forward, and we will encourage all participants to adopt and implement them.

Ghana becoming the first African government to join the Voluntary Principles last year was also encouraging, and we hope that this will provide the momentum for more African governments to join the initiative.

Sharing experiences and case studies is the most effective type of outreach to encourage more governments to join the initiative. The Ghanaian and Colombian experience will be persuasive, and will help priority governments understand the benefits of membership. In

2015, it will be important to continue the work started to identify several case studies to share with priority governments, in order to demonstrate the positive impact that the Principles already have in their countries.

In March we will host the annual plenary meeting of the Voluntary Principles in London. We will use our plenary to promote the benefits of membership to invited governments, and provide a space to discuss and review participants' implementation of the Voluntary Principles for the first time. We will also work with the Steering Committee to review our progress against the first year of the Voluntary Principles strategy.

Following our Plenary, we will hand over the chairmanship to the US. We will continue to work with the US and other participants, during the second year of the Voluntary Principles three year strategy, to make further progress towards expanding government membership, supporting more effective use of the Principles, encouraging implementation of the new verification frameworks and the development of a more robust reporting process.