



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

2013 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 will take on the Chairmanship of the initiative in March 2014. 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 UK Government was the first country to publish a national plan to implement the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs). The UK Action Plan was launched by the Foreign Secretary and Business Secretary on 4 September 2013. This 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

Foreign Secretary William Hague made a written statement to Parliament on 4 September, announcing the launch of the Action Plan. This statement highlights our support for the Voluntary Principles.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/uk-action-plan-on-business-and-human-rights>

We have publicly expressed our support for the Voluntary Principles, and reported on our efforts within the initiative, in the UK Government's Annual Human Rights Report 2012.

<http://www.hrdreport.fco.gov.uk/human-rights-in-promoting-britains-prosperity/voluntary-principles-on-security-and-human-rights/>

We also reaffirmed our commitment to the Voluntary Principles in national statements at the UN Security Council Debate on Conflict Minerals in June, and at the meeting of the OSCE's 2013 Economic and Environmental Dimension implementation meeting in October. We have also used social media (including Twitter) to promote 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.

In March 2013, the UK joined the Voluntary Principles Steering Committee and Board of Directors, as a precursor to taking on the Chairmanship in 2014. We attended the two Steering Committee strategic retreats in Geneva in June and October, and took part in the development of the Voluntary Principles three year strategy. The UK also continued its participation in the Outreach and Implementation Working Group, the Sub Group on Implementation, and joined the newly formed Roles and Responsibilities Working Group.

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 in these countries, in order to raise awareness and encourage further outreach to governments and greater support for company implementation in country. In 2013 we added the Voluntary Principles to the curriculum of internal human rights training, to further embed the VPs into staff development on human rights issues.

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.

Country Implementation

Overview of country operations selected for reporting

We have undertaken outreach to governments of several countries where the Voluntary Principles are relevant, through various mechanisms, including bilateral lobbying at Ministerial and official level, stakeholder roundtables, workshops and other events, letters and public statements, and awareness raising at mining fairs. We have also made greater use of social media to promote the initiative.

Engagement with stakeholders on country implementation

We have participated in Voluntary Principles stakeholder working groups in a number of

countries, which bring together Voluntary Principles participants across all three pillars to discuss in country implementation, and our approach to government outreach. We have also met UK companies which participate in the initiative, to offer support for their Voluntary Principles implementation. In November, we established a UK cross-pillar group, which brings together UK Voluntary Principles participants from all three pillars, to discuss the strategy and efforts to strengthen the initiative.

Lessons and Issues

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

The UK believes the Voluntary Principles are a way of helping companies to abide by their responsibility to respect human rights in line with the UNGPs. However, we also believe participants need to continue to work to close the gaps which exist between the initiative and the UNGPs. Specifically, we believe that there needs to be greater accountability and transparency, improved quality of reporting, a more effective space for sharing best practice and discussing challenges, and more opportunities for involving affected communities. The three year strategy which was agreed in 2013 seeks to address some of these issues.

The UK looks forward to taking on the Chairmanship of the Voluntary Principles in March 2014, and we will use our year as Chair to maintain the momentum for delivering the strategy. Our priorities will be to expand government membership, strengthen implementation, and increase the accountability and transparency of the initiative, to make progress towards bringing the initiative in line with the UNGPs.