



Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office

2023 UK Annual Report on the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights for Businesses Operating in Complex or Fragile Environments

This report details the work the United Kingdom undertook in 2023 to implement the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights (VPs). As a member of the Voluntary Principles Initiative (VPI), the UK is required to produce a report each year on its work to implement the Voluntary Principles.

Commitment to the Voluntary Principles and Human Rights

The UK Government is committed to supporting the implementation of the VP's and the growth of VPI membership. The VPI enables the UK to work with partners to achieve durable and positive change, promoting human rights and open societies. It provides a valuable open and frank forum where companies, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and governments can share best practice, exchange ideas, and discuss challenging issues. Through this collaboration, the VPs help companies drive up standards in managing their security operations as well as enabling both public and private security providers to act responsibly wherever they operate.

The UK considers the VPs a key framework in helping implement the UN Guiding

Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGP) alongside the UK National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights. The UK National Action Plan, updated in 2020, sets out the UK's commitment to:

“Raise awareness and increase the impact of the Voluntary Principles Initiative.”¹

Domestic Policies, Laws, and Regulations

The UK has specific laws protecting human rights and policies governing business activities. These are set out in legislation or sometimes protected by common law rules.

The UK is subject to international human rights obligations under customary international law and the international legal instruments we have signed and ratified. Human rights obligations generally apply only within a state's territory and/or jurisdiction. There is no general requirement for States to regulate the extraterritorial activities of business enterprises domiciled in their jurisdiction, although there are limited exceptions to this, for instance under specific treaty regimes.

The UK may also choose, as a matter of policy, in certain instances to regulate the overseas conduct of British businesses.

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<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/implementing-the-un-guiding-principles-on-business-and-human-rights-may-2020-update/uk-national-action-plan-on-implementing-the-un-guiding-principles-on-business-and-human-rights-progress-update-may-2020>

The UK has ratified a series of international treaties and agreements—such as the International Labour Organisation’s eight core conventions, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights, which enshrine human rights and fundamental freedoms, and have been given effect, through law. The Human Rights Act 1998 incorporated the rights protected by the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) into UK law.

The UK is committed to promoting responsible corporate behaviour by UK companies overseas, supported through the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises². The Guidelines address concerns on the social, economic, and environmental impacts of business activities worldwide and provide recommendations for responsible business conduct. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) works closely with the Department of Business and Trade who act as the UK National Contact Point, responsible for promoting the Guidelines and for operating the complaints mechanism relating to breaches of the Guidelines³.

Promotion of the Voluntary Principles

We have publicly expressed our support for the VPs and reported on our commitment in the UK Government’s 2022 Annual Human Rights and Democracy Report published in July 2023⁴. The UK’s VPI Annual Reports are published on GOV.UK and the VPI’s website. Throughout 2023, the UK continued to be an active participant in the VPI and in the VPI Steering Committee. The UK participated in the Annual Plenary held in London in May, Government Pillar meetings and the Steering

Committee Strategic Retreat held in November to support the ongoing development and delivery of the VPs. The informal UK VPI Working Group, chaired by the FCDO, also met in November to discuss challenges to the VPI and its members.

The UK’s engagement focused on the development of the Three-Year Strategic Plan (2024-2026) to grow the VPI and strengthen its global leadership role in security and human rights. This included the creation of the Partnership Framework to allow for mutual support and sharing lessons learned with In Country Working Groups (ICWGs) in DRC, Peru and Mozambique⁵, and advancing discussions to open the membership of the VPI to non-oil, gas, mining and harvesting sectors.



London: Corin Robinson, Director General Africa met with H.E Albert Fabrice Puela, Minister of Human Rights, The Democratic Republic of Congo to discuss issues concerning security and human rights.

We are pleased with the progress made towards expanding the government pillar. In May, the Government of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) was voted in as an Engaged Government Member. The FCDO’s Director General for Africa met the DRC Minister of Human Rights, welcomed them into the VPI and discussed the challenges within

² <http://mneguidelines.oecd.org/guidelines/>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/uk-national-contact-point>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2022>

⁵ [Why implement the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights : Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights](#)

the security and human rights sphere⁶. We are hopeful that the DRC's membership will reinforce the momentum for more African governments to join the VPI.

In Country Implementation

The UK's diplomatic missions overseas have supported implementation of the VPs:

In **Chile**, the VPI Steering Committee commissioned a stakeholder mapping study of the country's extractive industries and relevant security and human rights actors undertaken by Universidad Católica in Santiago. The British Embassy engaged with a range of corporate, governmental, and civil society stakeholders on human rights and the extractive industries, including through the visit of the then Foreign Secretary, Rt Hon James Cleverly MP, in May 2023, and the visit of the UK Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee in March 2023 for their 2023/24 report on critical minerals. The Embassy will advocate for the creation of an in-country working group to help tackle the challenges in security and human rights.

In **Mozambique**, the British High Commission continued to provide technical assistance to the Government of Mozambique for their application to become an Engaged Government Member of the VPI. The British High Commission and Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF), in partnership with the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), delivered webinars and workshops on the VPs in Maputo and Cabo Delgado. The outcome of this engagement supported the Ministry of Justice, Constitutional and Religious Affairs to consolidate two working groups created at national and provincial level to deepen discussions on issues of high interest for Government, Private Sector and NGOs.

In May, British High Commission and FCDO officials met with the delegation of the

Ministry of Justice, Constitutional and Religious Affairs at the VPI Plenary in London, to encourage the Mozambique Government to join the VPI. Further meetings took place along with Gemfields and Total Energies to discuss alignment of their plans with the activities of national and provincial working groups to further strengthen implementation of the VPs.



Maputo: Workshop for stakeholders to deepen discussions on issues of high interest for Government, Industry and NGOs

A. In **Peru**, the British Embassy continued to be an active participant in the In Country Working Group (ICWG). The group met in July to discuss security standards in the face of rising organised crime, and of mining companies being targeted by criminal groups, including murders of mining field operatives. The ICWG also met with police to hear about their training needs. Further, the British Embassy raised the VPs in high-level engagement settings, including with the Director for Human Rights at Peru's Foreign Ministry during the visit of UK Global Ambassador for Human Rights, Rita French. The group agreed to meet again in early 2024.

Project Funding

In 2023, the UK contributed £253,000 in funding to the Security and Human Rights Implementation Mechanism (SHRIM), a multi-

⁶ <https://twitter.com/UKinDRC/status/1662148205184708608>

donor fund established in 2016 by the UK and DCAF to improve security and human rights good practice in fragile contexts. Through direct project interventions led by national partners and its seat on the Executive Committee, the UK ensured funding was used for projects that have a real impact in the implementation of the VPs and wider business and human rights. Funding in 2023 brings the total UK contribution to the SHRIM to £1.3m since its creation. UK funding supported delivery in a number of priority countries:

- a. In **Colombia**, through technical assistance to *Comite Minero y Energetico (CME)*, the ICWG piloted the Implementation toolkit for multi-stakeholder collaboration to prevent security and human rights risks at the operational site of Frontera Energy in southern Colombia. This brought together, for the first-time, representatives from the national petroleum company, an army division, civil authorities, and national human rights institution (*Defensoría del Pueblo*) to identify and define mitigation measures for business, security, and human rights risks around mining sites. This was achieved through a combination of workshops in Villavicencio, the capital of the Meta department, and a visit to the operational site in Puerto Gaitan. A diverse range of views on risks were collected and aggregated into a pilot risk analysis; the exercise also highlighted a number of elements in the initial toolkit content and process that required further strengthening.

The project successfully generated political buy-in for the roll out of this pilot, and willingness to change security and human rights practices, notably by reducing the use of force in socioeconomic conflicts. CME will continue to promote lessons learned from this exercise to encourage more companies to use the toolkit to undertake enhanced due diligence as a collaborative exercise.

- b. In **The Democratic Republic of Congo**, DCAF and local partner Observatory for the Study and Development of Social and Environmental Responsibility (OEARSE) held consultative meetings on a draft model private security law with government, civil society, private security companies and their clients in seven provinces to spur legal reform. The consultations secured endorsement of its content at both provincial and national levels. Changes within the Ministry of Interior meant that it could not formally endorse the draft. However, continued engagement generated interest from National Assembly Representatives to consider endorsing the text for submission to Parliament. Furthermore, the project reinvigorated the Ministry of Interior to continue developing its capacities to improve private security governance.

The project successfully rolled out community-level campaigns through workshops⁷, interviews, focus groups and radio shows on private security companies' impact on human rights to strengthen community awareness, reaching an estimated 12,000 individuals around mining sites in Haut-Katanga, South Kivu and Maniema provinces.

The campaign increased understanding of the roles and responsibilities of public and private security, and the protection of individuals' human rights when interacting with security providers.

⁷ [Quelle est la différence entre sécurité publique et privée - radio communautaire à Luwindja by Jimmy Shakyhand \(soundcloud.com\)](https://www.soundcloud.com/jimmy-shakyhand)



Community sensitisation in Lualaba



Community sensitisation in Maniema

Equipped with this knowledge, the audience reported that they felt they had not reacted strongly enough to human rights abuses by private security companies in the past and are now better informed to highlight potential abuses in the future.

- c. In **Nigeria**, African Law Foundation in coordination with DCAF, the Association of Licensed Private Security Practitioners of Nigeria and International Code of Conduct Association for Private Security Providers (ICoCA) piloted a human rights training course to 240 private security personnel,

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and government officials in eight states. The training upskilled participants' capabilities on the provision of private security services. This led to five private security companies requesting support from African Law Foundation on conducting human rights risk assessments and of the regulator, the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps on tailored training.

The project also supported stakeholders to endorse resolutions on private security conduct during the Presidential elections to ensure the protection of human rights. The project raised the capabilities of 10 CSOs from 10 states on the monitoring of private security.



Kaduna: Training on private security and human rights for stakeholders

- d. In **Peru**, funding supported local partner Guaman Poma to revitalize the Cusco Regional ICWG to strengthen stakeholders' capacities to promote the VPs despite the emergence of a constitutional crisis in December 2022 that led to violent social protests. The project enabled Guaman Poma to undertake outreach to stakeholders and relaunch the ICWG with its first meeting in March 2023 and to successfully engage with civil society actors securing their support for the ICWG, expected to bring a new dynamic of engagement.

A Country Focus - Mozambique

In March, DCAF and local partner, the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), conducted a series of workshops for representatives of the Ministry of Justice, Constitutional and Religious Affairs, National Defence, Interior and Mineral Resources and Energy in Maputo to raise awareness about the VPs and build cross-ministerial support for Mozambique's application to join the VPI. The workshops increased participants' knowledge of the core standards of the VPs and engagement with the Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Interior that secured buy-in for the government to formally submit their application to become an Engaged Government Member of the VPI in September 2023.

Throughout 2023, CDD and DCAF delivered training on human rights and the VPs to senior officials from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Energy, National Mining Institute, National Petroleum Institute in Maputo, and at the provincial level in Cabo Delgado, representatives from CSOs and local authorities. The training raised awareness in areas of operation of multinational extractive companies.

In July in the city of Pemba, a conference on private security and human rights brought together representatives of civil society, the government, extractive companies, private security companies, DCAF and ICoCA. The event raised awareness about the challenges linked to private security, the role of other stakeholders in promoting respect for human rights by private security providers, as well as the need for improved regulation.

CDD hosted regular meetings for the ICWGs in Maputo and Pemba to consolidate and operationalize the groups to better address security and human rights concerns of communities and the private sector. This built trust between

CDD, the secretariat of the two ICWGs, and the private sector pillar. As a result, Gemfields' Group Director for Security extended an invitation to CDD and DCAF to visit their ruby mining site to learn more about the company's operations, understand the company's perspective on security and human rights, as well as the challenges it faces in Montepuez including with regards to artisanal and small-scale mining.



City of Palma: Local Government Representatives, Civil Society Organizations and Palma Working Group attending training on the VPs

The visit also provided an opportunity to discuss Gemfields' relationship with local communities as part of the broader question of communities' socio-economic development, which is not materialising in Cabo Delgado, despite the economic activity in the province.

Our partners also trained civil society representatives in Montepuez on Human Rights and the VPs to tackle practical challenges linked to the ruby mine's site. These trainings built the capacity of district-level stakeholders to identify and seek joint solutions. The project generated commitment to address artisanal and small-scale mining challenges in future Cabo Delgado ICWG discussions.



Montepuez, Cabo Delgado: CDD and DCAF's site visit to Gemfields' operated ruby mine

Public and Private Security

The UK is committed to promoting high standards in the security sector. December 2023 marked the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). In his speech at a stakeholder event at the Foreign, Development and Commonwealth Office, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, the UK Minister of State for the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, United Nations, and the Commonwealth, made five key human rights pledges including one on private security⁸. Lord Ahmad said:

“The UK government renews our commitment to protecting and promoting all these rights enshrined in the Declaration.... promoting responsible practice within private military and security companies particularly in the oil, gas, mineral and agricultural sectors”.

The UK Parliament has scrutinised issues of security and human rights. In October, the Foreign Affairs Committee published its report “Guns for gold: the Wagner Network exposed”⁹. The report focused on the network’s military activities, states’ use of commercial entities for military operations and the implications for UK interests. The UK Government’s response reported on its

measures to strengthen regulation in the global private security companies sector including the VPs and ICoCA as examples that show the positive impact of voluntary initiatives on Private Security Companies (PSCs).¹⁰

The Voluntary Principles provide a framework for businesses to co-operate with the implementation of security by public and private security providers. The UK encourages extractive companies working with public security to use the VPs as a method to reduce and ultimately eliminate human rights incidents.

The UK is a founding signatory to the Montreux Document, which reaffirms the existing obligations of states under international law relating to the activity of private military and security companies during armed conflict. The UK advocates its implementation through the International Code of Conduct for Private Security Services (ICoC) with compliance monitored through ICoCA.

The VPI and ICoCA provide effective human rights due diligence mechanisms that enable private security providers contracted by extractive and harvesting companies to act responsibly. Contracting with private security providers that meet international standards, respect human rights and international humanitarian law is essential for any responsible company.

Throughout 2023, the UK continued to take a leading role in ICoCA though its role as a Board Director including by participating in discussions on changes to the government membership criteria to help grow the pillar and enable governments from non-armed conflict areas to join the association and the development of a five-year strategic plan to set the future direction of the association. We also contributed to the ICoCA membership directory setting out the importance of the

⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i85fcLXowmg>

⁹ <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/41904/documents/207852/default/>

¹⁰ [Guns for gold: the Wagner Network exposed – Government Response to the Committee’s Seventh Report \(parliament.uk\)](https://www.parliament.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/100000/Guns_for_gold_the_Wagner_Network_exposed_-_Government_Response_to_the_Committee's_Seventh_Report.pdf)

UK's relationship with ICoCA and the drive to improve standards in the private security industry¹¹.



Geneva: Panelists discuss the Wagner effect and impact of malign private military contractors and non-responsible security contractors in fragile or unstable environments.

The UK also participated in a panel discussion on “the Wagner Effect: What Next For Responsible Security” at the inaugural Responsible Security Forum on 6 December, that examined the actions the international community should take to rein in malign actors, strengthening oversight and enhance accountability of PSCs¹².

The UK continued to engage with industry partner, the Security in Complex Environments Group (SCEG), a special interest group for private and maritime security companies. This has included participation in members meetings, a workshop on managing the risk of bribery in high risk and high reward environments and at SCEG's pavilion in the International Security Expo, which brought global security leaders together to showcase the latest innovations in private security.

Projects to strengthen accountability, engagement and understanding of private security

UK funding in 2023 enabled ICoCA to build knowledge, capacity, and awareness of responsible provision of private security amongst key stakeholders through:

- a. The translation of the Code of Conduct for private security services modules into French, Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, Somali and Swahili. Several PSCs have previously made the English version of the code of conduct course mandatory training. It is expected that the translation of this course to multiple languages will increase the number of companies doing the same.
- b. Developed online training on the use of force that seeks to reduce the risk of human rights abuses. Two PSCs involved in the development of the training course have stated that it will become a mandatory requirement within their operations. The course has been completed by 500 security personnel across 26 security companies over 25 countries.
- c. Country surveys in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda on working conditions of private security personnel. The surveys provided robust data on the challenges faced by security personnel. Survey results were shared at events in Dodoma, Tanzania and in Nairobi, Kenya during a mission in March 2023, where government, industry, clients, and civil society were all represented.

The research has been presented at a range of events, including the OECD Forum on Responsible Mineral Supply Chains, a Swiss Business and Human

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https://issuu.com/klarentsmedia/docs/icoca_member_directory_2023-2024?fr=xKAE9_zU1NQ

12 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NOM-Bj40CJs>

Rights Forum and at the ICoCA Annual General Assembly resulting in raised awareness of the link between poor working conditions and increased risk of human rights abuses being carried out by private security personnel.

- d. In November, 230 investors registered at an online seminar launch of the Investor Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Guide on Private Security and Human Rights. The guide provides information to portfolio investors about human rights risks associated with private security and aims to empower them to leverage influence over companies to ensure more rigorous human rights due diligence is conducted on private security service providers. An outcome of the launch was two leading ESG data providers of analytics and providers of critical decision support tools for the global investment community seeking engagement with ICoCA to support their work.
- e. In Nigeria, ICoCA delivered training to raise awareness amongst key government bodies and journalists on the role, impact, and good practices of PSCs during the 2023 elections. Training upskilled 10 CSOs on monitoring PSC activities in 10 states across the country. A further 250 individuals, from the Independent National Electoral Commission, Office of the National Security Adviser to the President, the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps as well as over 100 PSC representatives were trained and sensitised on the need for good private security governance during the election period. This led to stakeholders agreeing the Resolutions for Good Private Security Governance.

In December, five representatives from civil society participated in training workshops on research, gender, monitoring, and documenting human rights violation, to strengthen civil societies capabilities to advocate for

effective industry regulation and to support ICoCA field missions in country and project development. This brought together, for the first time, a diversity of CSOs from Nigeria, Mozambique, Colombia, and Peru. The training helped create a community of practice – including through the creation of a WhatsApp group to communicate experience in their respective countries.

Lessons Learned

The changing landscape in which contracting companies and private security companies operate highlights the need to further strengthen links across multi-stakeholder initiatives and organisations operating in this space. This report has highlighted the importance and value in working collaboratively with international and local partners. We encourage further collaboration between governments, companies and civil society as many of the challenges the sector faces can only be met by collective action to ensure activity translates into positive change.