



Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office

2024 UK Annual Report on the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights for Businesses Operating in Complex or Fragile Environments

The Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights were unveiled 24 years ago by the then Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Robin Cook, and US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. The United Kingdom, as chair of the Voluntary Principles Initiative in 2025, will continue to work with other governments, businesses, civil society, worker representatives and communities to protect human rights and prevent conflict. We welcome the opportunity to continue reporting on our work to promote and implement the Voluntary Principles.

Commitment to the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights

The UK Government remains committed to supporting the growth and impact of the Voluntary Principles Initiative (VPI). The VPI facilitates mutual learning and joint problem-solving with other governments, companies and non-governmental organisations to address complex security and human rights issues in business operations; building good relations with the communities in which they operate.

The Voluntary Principle (VPs) are a key framework in helping implement the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) that encourage businesses to voluntarily adopt due diligence approaches to respecting human rights.

Commitment to this agenda is consistent with the UK Government's international approach to Human Rights and Governance, as set out by the FCDO Minister for Human Rights, Lord Collins in December 2024¹. A key pillar of this approach is responding to global challenges such as business-related human rights abuses, by prioritising the principles of human rights and governance.

The VPI supports the UK Government's Growth, Security and Development priorities by working to create a more stable environment for companies to operate in conflict-affected and high-risk areas in a responsible way that respects human rights. Respect for human rights and the rule of law creates the certainty which the private sector needs to invest and innovate, delivering inclusive growth in countries, from which UK businesses can profit. A world where rights are respected and states are well-governed, is a world which will be more peaceful, and where Britain will be more prosperous and secure.

The UK was the first State to produce a National Action Plan (NAP) on Business and Human Rights to give effect to the UNGPs. The NAP set out our commitment to:

"Strengthen the implementation, effectiveness and membership of the VPI".²

UK commitment is further underlined by our decision to take on the role of the government

¹ Human Rights Day 2024: Lord Collins' speech - GOV.UK

² Good Business: Implementing the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights - GOV.UK

chair of the VPI in 2024-25. A key focus of our chairing will be delivery on the ground and on the growth and development of In-Country Working Groups (ICWGs) that operate in many high risk and conflict areas. The ICWGs bring together stakeholders to address local implementation challenges to provide a more stable environment for key business sectors and communities.

Domestic Policies, Laws, and Regulations

The UK Government expects all UK businesses to respect human rights and the environment throughout their operations; and supports a mix of existing legal and regulatory measures alongside voluntary initiatives that help promote private sector compliance with human rights and business best practice frameworks. 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, which, together, ensure certain rights and liberties.

The UK is subject to international human rights obligations under customary international law, and as a result of the international legal instruments we have signed and ratified. Human rights obligations generally apply only within a State's territory and/or jurisdiction. Accordingly, 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 treaty regimes. The UK may also choose, as a matter of policy in certain instances, to regulate the conduct of British businesses operating internationally.

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 enshrined human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Human Rights Act 1998 ensures that individuals in the UK have a remedy for breach of rights protected by the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).

The UK supports voluntary due diligence approaches taken by UK businesses to respect human rights and the environment across their operations and supply relationships, in line with the UNGPs and the Organisation for Economic Development (OECD) Guidelines on Multinational Enterprises³. As a signatory to the Guidelines, the Government operates an independent UK National Contact Point (NCP)⁴, which engages UK businesses to increase awareness and understanding of these principles and to operate the complaints mechanism relating to breaches of the Guidelines.

Promotion and Implementation of the Voluntary Principles

We have publicly expressed our support for the VPs and reported on our efforts in the UK's VPI Annual Reports, published on GOV.UK.

During 2024, the UK continued to raise awareness of the VPs with our diplomatic missions to encourage participation in new and existing In Country Working Groups (ICWGs) and by delivering projects in partnership with civil society at grass roots level.

Throughout the year, the UK continued to be active in the Steering Committee; the government pillar; in the UK's Informal VPs Working Group; and as a member of the Initiative to support the ongoing delivery of the VPs. UK actions focused-on expansion of the VPI beyond extractives and agriculture to large land acquisitions at risk of affecting local communities; updating the framework on the

³ <http://mneguidelines.oecd.org/guidelines/>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/uk-national-contact-point-for-the-organisation-for-economic-co-operation-and-development-guidelines#oecd-guidelines-for-multinational-enterprises>

establishment of new ICWGs to help tackle human rights and security related issues; and developing internal membership and governance frameworks to strengthen the Initiative's global leadership role in security and human rights.

In March, the UK participated in a visit led by the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF) to Mozambique to reinforce high-level national political support, commitment to membership of the VPI, and promote sustainable, nationally owned, in-country implementation process of the VPs on the ground ⁵.



Washington: FCDO officials met with H.E Angelo Manuel Paunde, Director of Human Rights, and delegation from the Government of Mozambique

In May, Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) officials attended the VPI Annual Plenary in Washington, D.C. They moderated a panel session on 'Emerging Lessons and Learnings on Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining' to address the problem of illegal mining and the requirement for governments to do more to engage with the sector and participated in panel discussions on 'Effectuating Change on the Ground' in order to share insights on application of the VPs from policy to action in Colombia and Nigeria.

We are pleased that the Government of Mozambique was voted in to the VPI as an Engaged Government member at the Annual

Plenary in Washington⁶. This followed close collaboration between the UK and partners and the Government of Mozambique to prepare and submit their application to join the Initiative. The UK will continue to support Mozambique to implement the VPs in country.

A Country Focus - Chile

The most prominent human rights risks in Chile relate to increased criminal activity in the north of the country where mining activities are concentrated, as well as challenges regarding the use of force in handling social protest. A new regulation which established a duty for the police to collaborate with public and private actors remains difficult to implement because of public distrust and corruption. A multistakeholder ICWG can provide a platform that helps bring together stakeholders to collaborate on security issues, business community relations policies, and private security companies' training standards.

In September, the British Embassy hosted the launch of a new ICWG⁷. The ICWG attracted significant participation from Chile's globally extractives sector, government ministries, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' human rights team and the Ministry of Mining, as well as international partners, academia, civil society and the National Copper Corporation of Chile. The launch provided a platform for participants to discuss the most pressing issues of policing of public protest in and around mining sites, the behaviours of Private Security Companies (PSCs) and state police forces, and mining-related land use compensation for indigenous communities.

⁵ [A reinforced commitment to business, security, and human rights in Mozambique - News](#)

⁶ [Mozambique Accepted as an Engaged Member of the Voluntary Principles Initiative - News](#)

⁷ [VPI Launches Working Group in Chile to Strengthen Local Security and Human Rights Practices - Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights : Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights](#)



Santiago: The launch of the VPs In Country Working Group at the British Ambassador's Residence

The participants saw the value of creating a shared space for extractive companies, PSCs, the Carabineros and other state actors to come together to discuss shared security challenges. They agreed there was space to explore options for joint working. Following the event, the Director of Human Rights in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs accepted Baroness Chapman's invitation to participate in the VPI's Annual Plenary in London 2025, made during her visit to Chile earlier in the year. The interest of the government of Chile in the VPs supports its existing commitments to maintaining and improving Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) standards. In turn, this helps address sustainability challenges as set out in Chile's 2024 Universal Periodic Review (UPR), the country's national Lithium Strategy, and the Escazú Treaty, to which Chile is party.

VPs Implementation

Globally the UK remains engaged through UK Embassies and High Commissions to widen awareness and increase the implementation of the VPs:

- a) In **Colombia**, the British Embassy continues to play an active role in the Mining and Energy Committee for Security and Human Rights (CME) through its seat on its board as an observer and attendance at accountability meetings. In August, the British Embassy attended the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights' presentation on the outcome of their mission visit to Colombia. The Group urged the international community to support implementation of the VPs, including beyond Bogota. The British Embassy will continue to support spaces where communities, NGOs and businesses can

have constructive discussions on security and human rights issues, as well as encouraging active participation in the VPs.

- c) In **Mozambique**, the British High Commission in Maputo participated in a high-level visit to Mozambique led by DCAF to further support implementation and reinforce the Government's commitment to the VPs. The visit promoted an exchange with stakeholders on how Mozambique's membership of the VPI could advance security and human rights in country and to highlight synergies with related initiatives, the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the International Code of Conduct Association (ICoCA).

The delegation met with the Minister of Justice, Constitutional and Religious Affairs and the Minister of Defence to discuss expectations around implementation of the VPs. The delegation participated in meetings with the National Working Group in Maputo and the regional working group in Cabo Delgado, met with Cabo Delgado's Governor and Secretary of State and reinforced their commitment to the VPs process and secured their agreement to support the consultations on the development of a National Action Plan (NAP).



Maputo: DCAF led mission delegate's meeting with H.E Helena Mateus Kida, Minister of Justice, Constitutional and Religious Affairs



Pemba City: The DCAF led mission delegation meeting with the regional VPs Working Group

DCAF and local partner, the Center for Democracy and Human Rights (CDD), discussed integration of the VPs into Mozambique's NAP on Business and Human Rights with the Mozambican Government and United Nations Human Rights Office (OHCHR). The NAP will set out expectations for business enterprises to promote the introduction of human rights due diligence in the context of their business activities.

In May, a British High Commission official supported the Government of Mozambique in their participation in the VPI's Annual Plenary in Washington D.C. Officials also exchanged experiences related to the development of a NAP with the Democratic Republic of Congo and Mozambican delegations.

- d) In **Peru**, the British Embassy, Lima, continued as an active member of the ICWG, including in the Steering Committee. In October, the Embassy hosted a session for 18 representatives of the Working Group's Steering Committee and members of a partner IVP working group in Cusco, in which they reflected on the challenges for responsible mining in Peru. The Cusco representatives shared insights from their work, including a proposed project to support women human rights defenders to have more productive relationships with key industry actors. Key outcomes from the meeting included defining priority topics for the upcoming year, especially focused around serious and organised crime; and addressing the politicisation of human rights

in the run-up to elections. In November, the working group met with the Presidency of the Council of Ministers and the Ministry for Energy and Mines to discuss steps for engagement on the registry of informal miners.

Finally, through central funding, the Embassy is supporting the implementation of a project with a local consortium to map existing efforts to implement the VPs in the country and provide capacity building to local businesses in a key mining region in Peru.

Funding to the Security and Human Rights Implementation Mechanism

In 2024, the UK funded the Security and Human Rights Implementation Mechanism (SHRIM), a multi donor trust fund established by the UK and the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF) in 2016, to improve security and human rights on the ground through multistakeholder engagement. The UK's funding supported:

- a) In **Colombia**, technical assistance to *Comite Minero y Energetico* (CME), part of the VPs In Country Working Group (ICWG) to pilot 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 petroleum companies, an Army Division, civil authorities, and the national human rights institution (*Defensoria 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.

The project successfully generated political support for the roll out of the 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 collaborative enhanced due diligence.

- b) In the **Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)**, 260 government stakeholders, civil society, and private security sector representatives in Kinshasa and from six provinces participated in preparatory briefings, meetings and workshops on the development of; a private security regulatory reform proposal; database for effective information sharing on private security; and a procurement tool. The debate centered on regulatory reform needs and action to draft private security law, a national database of private security companies and a model contract between private security companies and their clients.
- c) In **Mozambique**, 60 participants from embassies, government, civil society, academia, extractive companies and media attended a High-level Public Event on the VPs in Maputo⁸ to raise awareness about the VPs and promote exchanges on how Mozambique's membership of the VPI could advance security and human rights in the country. In addition, 98 officials from the Ministries of Justice, Defence, Interior, Mineral Resources and Energy, and Land and Environment in Maputo and provincial and district directors, CSOs and communities in Pemba, Montepuez and Palma attended the regional working group meetings. They shared information on the business, security, and human rights challenges in Cabo Delgado Province and the VPs NAP. An outcome of trust-building efforts included a visit of the Mozambican Ministry of Justice, DCAF and project partner Centre for Democracy and Human Rights (CDD) to TotalEnergies' operations and social projects in Cabo Delgado's Palma district to see how the VPs is implemented and its benefits to communities. Following Mozambique being accepted as an engaged member of the

VPI in May 2024, the Mozambican government has started the process to develop a VPs National Action Plan (NAP), which will build synergies with the Business and Human Rights NAP which was finalised in 2024.

- d) In **Nigeria**, the Nigerian Security & Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), in collaboration with DCAF and local partner the African Law Foundation (AFRILAW), co-facilitated multi-stakeholder consultations – including civil society and media, private security industry and its clients as well as key government ministries, departments, and agencies - to develop a draft National Action Plan (NAP) on Private Security Governance Reform. The draft NAP was presented to key policymakers and stakeholders for validation. The NSCDC has transmitted the finalised version to the Ministry of Interior who expressed support for its adoption.

As a result of the consultation process, The NSCDC requested DCAF and AFRILAW's expertise to support the law review committee in ensuring the inclusion of international norms and good practices in a new draft private security bill, and its subsequent submission to the National Assembly for approval. Over 240 participants from the southern Niger Delta and the northern mining region received training on the VPs.

- e) UK funding also supported DCAF in the development of a policy paper 'Understanding Private Surveillance Providers and Technologies'⁹ that seeks to ensure private surveillance services are appropriately and effectively covered under private security companies (PSCs) regulatory frameworks, and that providers act responsibly in challenging contexts. The policy paper received positive feedback during a dedicated panel at the 2024 UN Forum on Business and Human Rights and events in Nigeria and Guatemala. Its relevance in advancing good surveillance

⁸ [A reinforced commitment to business, security, and human rights in Mozambique - News](#)

⁹ [DCAF Understanding Private Surveillance WEB.pdf](#)

governance was acknowledged by private sector actors, government stakeholders from Nigeria, Peru, Guatemala and Switzerland including academics and civil society representatives.

Public and Private Security

The UK is committed to promoting high standards in the private security sector. The UK played a leading role in drafting the International Code of Conduct (ICoC) in 2010, which sets out principles for security providers and related standards, governance and the launch of the oversight mechanism, ICoCA. The ICoCA and the VPs are interrelated in providing effective human rights due diligence mechanisms to ensure that the private security providers contracted by mining companies act responsibly and are encouraged to build good relations with the communities in which they operate.

In January, the FCDO hosted a meeting for 35 PSCs, law firms and representatives of the Security in Complex Environments Group (SCEG) and the International Code of Conduct Association for Private Security Providers (ICoCA) to inform them of the Common Approach to Protecting Against Sexual Exploitation (CAPSEAH) in the humanitarian, development, and peacekeeping sectors on how it could benefit PSCs. The response from the global consultation process, including valuable input from SCEG and ICoCA members, was instrumental in getting the CAPSEAH agreed by the global cross-sector CAPSEAH steering committee¹⁰ to help organisations take action and align efforts to protect people from Sexual Exploitation, Sexual Abuse and Harassment.

The UK continued to take a leading role in ICoCA through the UK's role as a member and Board Director. The UK supported the development of a new five-year strategic plan to position ICoCA as the leading platform for setting international standards and ensuring

compliance with human rights and international humanitarian law in the private security sector. The UK also moderated the Webinar 'Transforming Security from the Community Up: Lessons Learned from the Geita Gold Mine'¹¹ that transformed community relations and improved the overall security situation at AngloGold Ashanti's mine.

The UK continued to engage with the Security in Complex Environments Group (SCEG), a special interest group for security, maritime and risk companies. This includes participation in the members' meeting, SCEG's Panel 'The Security and Resilience Architecture to Enable Ukraine Reconstruction' at the International Security Expo, Olympia, London; and at a special event 'Doing Business in Ukraine' on how SCEG companies can support businesses to travel to and operate in Ukraine safely.

A Country Focus – Strengthening Uganda's Private Security Ecosystem to Better Respect Human Rights

The private security sector in Uganda is experiencing significant growth and is the only country in East Africa where guards can be licensed to carry firearms. A surge in criminal activity involving private security guards and gun violence, along with the inadequate handling of firearms, has led to a call from the Ugandan Police Force to suspend some security companies and cancellation of their operating licences by The Private Security Organisation. In many of these incidents poor vetting and training have been identified as key drivers of the behaviour of guards. UK funding to ICoCA supported two visits to Uganda to explore this issue with a view to improving standards in the private security sector:

In July, ICoCA met with private security companies to assess compliance with the International Code of Conduct for Private

¹⁰ [A Common Approach to Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment | CAPSEAH](#)

¹¹ [GEITA GOLD MINE - ICoCA - International Code of Conduct Association](#)

Security Services (the Code) and to raise awareness of best practice. As a result, TUPSA joined as an Observer to ICoCA - an important step in raising and maintaining standards in the Ugandan security architecture.

In November, ICoCA held meetings with 10 PSCs, regulators, industry bodies and clients of private security services to promote human rights protections; and for the Ugandan National Bureau of Standards (UNBS) to consider offering ISO 18788 certification to PSCs as one tool to improve private security standards in Uganda. Also in November, ICoCA partnered with TUPSA, to train 70 PSC directors and senior managers in conducting human rights impact assessments and on forced labour awareness, equipping them with knowledge and skills needed to align with global standards, enhanced workplace safety and advanced human rights protections¹². The training will support TUPSA's broader initiative to address public concerns over the quality of security personnel training; and to increase professionalism, regulatory compliance and a shared commitment to improving employee welfare and maintaining the highest standards of conduct. The two visits in 2024 laid the foundation for strengthening human rights throughout the Ugandan private security ecosystem, making progress towards a high-standards industry that respects human rights. ICoCA membership and certification to ISO 18788 have been incorporated in tenders for private security services for the East African Crude Oil Pipeline.

Project Funding to the International Code of Conduct Association for Private Security Providers

UK funding in 2024 enabled the International Code of Conduct Association for Private Security Providers (ICoCA) to strengthen

accountability, understanding and knowledge in private security through:

- a. In **Iraq**, a field visit to Basra raised awareness on best practices to 11 PSCs on how ICoCA can support PSCs, and their clients, to meet their human rights responsibilities. The visit highlighted the need to invest in responsible security providers; and the risks that come from driving costs down by lowering standards. ICoCA also need to establish a presence in country to advocate for responsive private security and help CSOs build their confidence and capacity to work on issues that remain sensitive in Iraq.
- b. During the year, 2,972 security officers and guards in 19 cities and towns across Kenya¹³ Tanzania ¹⁴ and Uganda¹⁵ participated in survey interviews on working conditions in the private security sector ¹⁶. The results provided robust data on the challenges faced by security personnel, the likely effect on security guard's performance, mental health, and that they are more likely to engage in corruption, misconduct and other offenses. The research presented at events including the OECD Forum on Responsible Mineral Supply Chains, UN OCHA Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Weeks (HNPW), Securex South Africa, UNI Property Services Global Conference, Food Network for Ethical Trade (FNET) and the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) raised awareness of the link between poor working conditions and increased risk of human rights abuses being carried out by private security personnel. The report also changed the negative narrative around

¹²[Push for international accreditation: Security firms seek improved standards, salaries - The Observer](#)

¹³ [ICoCA-WC-Country-Report-Kenya.pdf](#)

¹⁴ [ICoCA-WC-Country-Report-Tanzania.pdf](#)

¹⁵ [ICoCA-WC-Country-Report-Uganda-1.pdf](#)

¹⁶ [Working Conditions - ICoCA - International Code of Conduct Association](#)

private security, presenting guards not as perpetrators but as exploited workers¹⁷.

- c. Launch of a social media campaign to promote the Environmental, Social and Governance Guide on Private Security and Human Rights on LinkedIn¹⁸ and Google.¹⁹ The guide provides information to portfolio investors about human rights risks associated with private security and provides tangible actions to support them in addressing these risks throughout the investment lifecycle. An online campaign completed in March, targeting the asset management community in North America and Europe resulted in over 5,500 downloads of the guide.

Lessons Learned

Addressing security and human rights challenges in fragile and conflict-affected situations requires meaningful participation by different stakeholders to share common interests or concerns surrounding specific policy questions that enable stakeholders to work cooperatively, generate viable solutions and take collective action. To achieve this a dedicated space for stakeholder groups is required, including organising targeted training for specific audiences, leaving space for open discussions before, during and/or after training and working group meetings, and/or organising separate meetings for coordination. This enables stakeholder groups to participate more equitably in discussions regionally and nationally.

Strengthening existing ICWGs creates a platform for dialogue, and can provide a useful starting point for transparency, trust building among stakeholders, and to identify the need for reforms and interventions that protect communities and improve the business environment.

Forward Looking

In 2025, the UK will take on the role of Government Chair of the VPI from 21 March 2025 for one year.

The Voluntary Principles (VPs) is a ready-made vehicle to deepen links between government and businesses to deliver growth across the UK. During our tenure as chair, we will focus on delivery and making a difference on the ground. To do this, we are keen to continue developing existing and establish new ICWGs in fragile environments and look to work more closely with other Multi-stakeholder Initiatives to maximise impact.

¹⁷ NTV UGANDA on X: "#NTVOnTheSpot <https://t.co/k0RZfM7J5t>" / X

¹⁸ [International Code of Conduct Association \(ICoCA\) | LinkedIn](#)

¹⁹ [ESG Guide - ICoCA - International Code of Conduct Association](#)