

Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights

The Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights (abbreviated as VPs) are a set of principles aimed at guiding companies in maintaining the safety and security of their operations within an operating framework that ensures respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Since the VPs' launch in 2000, a set of governance arrangements has evolved, with the purpose of promoting the use of the principles, facilitating their implementation and protecting their brand image. These arrangements are established in the following documents:

- this governance umbrella document
- participation criteria
- framework for admission and participation of new governments ("government framework")
- reporting guidelines (work still in progress)

Definitions

Participants(*) may be described in various ways in VPs governance documents, for example:

Participants of the Voluntary Principles are those governments, companies and NGOs that either were founding participants at the launch of the initiative or those that have been admitted to the Plenary by consensus of active participants at the time.

An **Active Participant** is a participant that has not been declared inactive.

An **Inactive Participant** is one that has been declared as such by the Plenary as a result of failing to submit an annual report that meets agreed criteria (Participation Criteria number 5) and/or that categorically refuses to engage with another Participant.

A government may, depending on the circumstances of its involvement in the VPs, be described as an **applicant government**, a **participant government** or an **engaged government**. The significance of these terms is set out in the government framework.

A **Pillar** is a term used to describe the three stakeholder groups of participants: **governments, companies and non-governmental organizations**.

An **Observer** refers to an organization that has received approval to participate in Annual Plenary meetings but cannot become a participant because its functions do not qualify it to be part of one of the three pillars, e.g. an international organization or an industry representative body. Observers cannot vote at Plenary meetings but may otherwise participate fully, except in any meetings that are specifically restricted to certain categories of participant.

Note (*): "participants" excludes "Inactive Participants" unless the contrary is specifically stated.

VPs Governance Bodies

The process of governance is undertaken by various bodies established for this purpose. These include:

Plenary: the main decision-making body, consisting of all active participants. It usually meets once a year at an Annual Plenary Meeting, hosted by one of the participant governments, at which participants address current implementation and governance issues, set priorities and approve the annual work plan and budget. The meeting also serves as a forum for the exchange of good practice and other experience. The meeting is held under the Chatham House rule. Engaged governments and observers are also invited to attend and participate in debate, but do not have a vote.

Steering Committee: consists of two governments, two companies, two NGOs and the Secretariat (as facilitator). Each "pillar" selects its own representatives at the Annual Plenary meeting under arrangements determined by them. The Steering Committee meets as necessary to conduct business between Annual Plenary meetings and to undertake any work mandated to it by the Plenary. It has certain defined decision-making powers as set out in the government framework. Its members are expected to consult regularly with "pillar" colleagues and to reflect their views in Steering Committee meetings and decisions.

In-country implementation processes (ICIPs): country-based multi-stakeholder processes aimed at strengthening implementation of the VPs in the country concerned and involving the participation of the host government.

Working Groups: established by the Plenary to focus on specific issues: e.g. governance, reporting, communications. Participation is usually open to all interested VPs participants. Working groups may be chaired by the Secretariat or one of the participants.

Task Forces: established by the Plenary to support the development of ICIPs when this is considered useful. Participation is usually open to all interested VPs participants. Taskforces may be chaired by the Secretariat or one of the other participants

Secretariat: responsible for the day-to-day work of the VPs, including promotion, outreach, organization, co-ordination, advice to participants, and financial and other administration. Provides the institutional memory and manages the website (www.voluntaryprinciples.org). The Secretariat function is funded by contributions from existing VPs members and is provided jointly by the International Business Leaders' Forum (IBLF) and Business for Social Responsibility (BSR). A memorandum of understanding between the two organizations provides detailed terms of reference of the Secretariat.

Other Governance Documents

The following documents set out criteria for specific aspects of VPs governance.

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The **Participation Criteria** articulate the responsibilities of participants of the initiative and outline minimum requirements for participation, a dispute resolution process and more transparent procedures for accepting new participants. Additionally, the criteria enshrine a commitment by participants, once formal reporting criteria are finalized, to report publicly on their implementation of the VPs or their support for implementation.

The **Framework for Admission and Participation of New Governments** (abbreviated as “government framework”) sets out the process for admitting new governments. It establishes two categories of governments: participating governments and engaged governments.

The **Reporting Guidelines**, once agreed, will provide guidance for participants in which format and how to report annually on the progress they have made on VPs implementation.

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