

2019 Annual Report of the Government of the United States of America for the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights Initiative

A. Commitment to the Voluntary Principles

The U.S. government is a founding member of the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights (VPs) Initiative. We aspire to set the standard for excellence for government participation in the VPs Initiative, and remain committed to its mission – to guide companies in the industries of extracting, harvesting, or developing natural resources or energy on providing security for their operations in a manner that respects human rights; to strengthen implementation, accountability, and transparency within the Initiative; and to strengthen participation of VPs Initiative participants in all three pillars. In 2019, we made progress on all of these fronts – strengthening implementation through cooperation with partners on the ground, seeking opportunities to expand dialogue and shared learning among participants, and by developing and supporting measures to further increase effectiveness of the reporting tools and governance mechanisms of the VPs Initiative. In 2019, participants also worked together to advance the strategy outlined in the [“Voluntary Principles Strategy 2016-2019.”](#) Throughout the year, U.S. government participants increased coordination with participants in all three pillars as well as with their own embassies to engage governments and help implement the VPs on the ground. Further, the VPs Initiative continued to support the In-Country Implementation Groups (in Burma, Nigeria, and Ghana) to facilitate effective implementation of the VPs at the local level. To strengthen accountability and transparency, participants continued to work together to implement the verification frameworks.

Engagement in the VPs Initiative

The State Department’s Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL) leads U.S. government engagement in the VPs Initiative – in cooperation with the State Department’s Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs and Bureau of Energy Resources. Work on the VPs Initiative and related efforts within DRL are led by the Internet Freedom and Business and Human Rights Section within the Multilateral and Global Affairs office and includes representatives from the State Department’s Office of the Legal Adviser. The VPs team also engages with regional bureau colleagues, officers at U.S. embassies around the world, and officers at other U.S. agencies such as the Department of Commerce, Department of Labor, Department of Defense, and the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation .

As stated at the outset, the U.S. government has been a longstanding and active participant in the VPs Initiative, as evidenced by the time and resources we devote to it. We served as government chair from March 2015 through March 2016; served on the Steering Committee in the years leading up to and the year after our chairmanship concluded; and rejoined the Steering Committee in March 2019.

B. Domestic Policies, Laws, and Regulations

The U.S. government is party to relevant human rights conventions, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human

Rights (UNGPs) provide global guidance regarding business and human rights, providing that States have a duty to protect human rights; corporations have a responsibility to respect human rights; and that those affected by business-related human rights abuse should have access to remedy. The VPs Initiative is the preeminent mechanism implementing aspects of the GPs in the area of human rights-respecting security practice in the extractives industries. The VPs Initiative produced a document that demonstrates the linkage between the VPs Initiative and the UNGPs. With regard to the UNGPs' implementation, the U.S. government released [a U.S. National Action Plan \(NAP\) on Responsible Business Conduct](#) to promote responsible and transparent business conduct overseas. The NAP addresses ways in which the U.S. government can promote and encourage responsible business conduct with respect to human rights, labor rights, anti-corruption, transparency, and more.

The United States strongly supports accountability for human rights abuses, as evidenced by its domestic legal and regulatory regime, as well as its deep and ongoing engagement with governments, businesses, and NGOs. Civil liability is one important element of legal accountability, and domestic tort law provides a powerful tool for accountability. U.S. law provides clear remedies for torts committed domestically and mechanisms such as legal aid and class certification enhance accessibility of such remedies. As an additional example in the area of private security contractors (PSCs), contract law provides a useful vehicle for the enforcement of contractual terms against PSCs. Contracts between the USG and PSCs are enforceable in U.S. courts.

Certain relevant federal laws may reach non-government activity. As one example, protections against discrimination in federal laws reach significant areas of non-government activity, including civil rights laws that prohibit racial or ethnic (national origin) discrimination in the sale or rental of private property, employment at private businesses with 15 or more employees, admission to private schools that receive federal funding, and access to public facilities like hotels and restaurants. In addition, many state and local anti-discrimination laws cover discriminatory practices by private employers, landlords, creditors, and educational institutions.

The U.S. government views multi-stakeholder initiatives, like the VPs Initiative, as an important tool for engaging with business home and abroad. The United States supports a number of initiatives that complement the VPs Initiative. The United States is an active board member on the International Code of Conduct for Private Security Providers' Association (ICOCA) (see also "Private Security" section). We also support and actively participate in the Kimberley Process (KP). The KP is a multi-stakeholder initiative launched in 2003 by governments, the diamond industry, and NGOs to prevent the flow of "conflict diamonds" from entering the global diamond supply chain. Determined to break the link between armed groups and mineral mining in Africa's Great Lakes Region, the U.S. Congress enacted Section 1502 of the Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act of 2010 (known as "Dodd-Frank"). The law requires companies listed on U.S. exchanges to report annually to the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) whether any "conflict minerals" (tin, tantalum, tungsten, and gold) necessary to the functionality or production of a product are from the DRC or the nine adjacent countries. Key to the U.S. government's efforts to foster a responsible minerals supply chain is its Public-Private Alliance for Responsible Minerals Trade (PPA), a formal partnership with industry, civil society, and the U.S. government. The PPA was established in 2011 and now includes over 40 members.

In addition, the U.S. government supports efforts to address child labor, forced labor, labor trafficking, and other labor rights violations in mining in numerous countries. In 2019, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) continued to fund projects to address child labor and unacceptable working conditions in artisanal and small-scale mining in Colombia, Ghana, and the DRC. In Colombia and Ghana, DOL's [Somos Tesoro](#), [Pilares](#), and [Caring Gold Mining](#) projects focus on artisanal and small-scale gold mining. In the DRC, DOL's [COTECCO](#) project focuses on reducing child labor in the cobalt supply chain. In addition, DOL funds the [FLIP project](#) in Ghana to reduce forced labor and labor trafficking in multiple supply chains, including gold mining.

DOL updated its [Comply Chain: Business Tools for Labor Compliance in Global Supply Chains](#) mobile app in September 2019 with new features, including improved user friendliness to reduce loading times and storage size, bookmarking, and PDF conversions, among others. The app helps companies and industry groups, including in the extractive sector, develop robust social compliance systems to root out child labor and forced labor from global supply chains. The app is available in English, French, and Spanish.

Another related issue is violence against environmental defenders. The U.S. Department of State formed an informal interagency working group (IAWG) in March 2017 to monitor violence against environmental defenders around the world. The IAWG seeks to evaluate and identify practices to better provide, with partners, strengthened and relevant stakeholder access to environmental information, robust environmental impact review of extractive sector, energy, and infrastructure tenders and projects, transparency, and access to justice in cases of violence. The Voluntary Principles Secretariat briefed the IAWG on December 5, 2019 on how companies can use the VPs to help maintain operational safety and security while respecting human rights. The VPs Initiative was slated to provide an additional briefing in early 2020.

Separately, the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises (Guidelines) are an important government-backed tool that provides recommendations to companies on a range of responsible business conduct practices, including issues related to human rights, labor rights, transparency, the environment, and more. The [U.S. National Contact Point](#) (U.S. NCP) for Responsible Business Conduct is charged with promoting the best practices found in the Guidelines, as well as facilitating the resolution of disputes when issues arise related to corporate implementation of the Guidelines.

C. Promotion and Implementation

During 2019, the U.S. government pursued opportunities to promote the VPs publicly in a variety of international fora, meetings, and public and written statements. Further, we promote awareness of the VPs within the U.S. government. Acting Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Scott Busby met with government officials from relevant U.S. Department of State regional and functional bureaus and ambassadors to brief them on, and encourage their engagement with, the VPs Initiative. We featured the VPs in the Department of State's Human Rights and Labor Officers Training, as well as the training course for Economic Officers posted at U.S. embassies around the world. DRL officers also led numerous conversations with desk officers, as well as economic, political, and human rights officers in Washington and at embassies, to educate them about the VPs and the VPs Initiative and respond to questions. This

has helped increase the flow of information between Washington and embassies as well as with the VPs Initiative at both the international-level and the country-level regarding human rights and security challenges in the extractives industry. It has also created outreach and implementation opportunities and helped raise the profile of the VPs on the ground.

The U.S. government also worked with stakeholders to facilitate effective implementation of the VPs, both at the Initiative and local levels. Through 2019, U.S. embassies facilitated VPs outreach and implementation through various mechanisms, including, but not limited to: assessing which VPs participants were operating in country; identifying and building relationships with host government officials and local partners; convening multi-stakeholder meetings with VPs participants, local communities, and host government officials; and facilitating communication between DRL and embassy officers to report developments and identify opportunities.

Verification and Accountability

Upon joining the VPs Initiative, corporate pillar participants pledge to uphold a set of commitments in their business practices and in 2015, VPs Initiative participants approved verification frameworks for companies, NGOs, and governments. One component of the verification framework is presentations to a VPs Initiative working group and/or the Plenary on VPs implementation every three years. The U.S. government acted as a peer reviewer for another participant's presentation in March 2018, and looks forward to serving as a peer reviewer in 2020. Separately, the United States produces both an internal and a public annual report each year, consistent with the Government Pillar Verification Framework.

Risk Assessment

The U.S. government generates and vets relevant information that can be used to conduct appropriate due diligence and risk assessment. The U.S. government deploys significant resources to produce and disseminate a variety of reports that help describe the state of human rights, labor rights, and commercial and investment conditions across the world, and produces international company profiles to provide U.S. companies with information to help them vet potential business partners. In certain instances, the government also funds third-party reports that contain information useful to those seeking to promote and implement responsible business conduct, such as adhering to the VPs. As part of the ongoing effort to facilitate responsible business conduct, the U.S. government will continue to enhance these resources, making them increasingly user-friendly and easier to find for the purposes of corporate human rights due diligence and social impact assessment.

The U.S. government also supports and advocates for implementation of the OECD Due Diligence Guidelines five-step process in which companies review their supply chains and manage and mitigate risks they find. The SEC references these guidelines as a framework that satisfies due diligence requirements for the 3 Ts (tungsten, tantalum, and tin) and gold sourced from the Great Lakes region in Central Africa under the rule implementing Section 1502 of the Dodd Frank Act.

Public Security

With regard to training, both the U.S. Department of State and the Department of Defense require security service providers contracting with the U.S. government to provide training addressing both U.S. and international law, including human rights and international humanitarian law, prior to deployment. In addition, consistent with U.S. law, the Departments of State and Defense vet foreign security force units who may receive assistance, to include training and equipment, , and when the vetting process identifies credible information that a unit has committed a gross violation of human rights, U.S. assistance, including training, is withheld.

Private Security

We support and participate in the Montreux Document Forum on pertinent legal obligations and good practices for states related to operations of private military and security companies during armed conflict and the International Code of Conduct for Private Security Service Providers (“ICoC” or “Code of Conduct”). Whereas the Montreux Document is specific to the conduct of States and relates to both private security companies operating in areas of armed conflict and other military support contractors, the Code of Conduct represents the commitment of private security companies to live up to international human rights standards and best practices and abide by international humanitarian law when operating in complex environments. The U.S. government was deeply involved in developing the Code of Conduct and its governance and oversight body—the ICoC Association (ICoCA). The U.S. government joined ICoCA as a founding member in September 2013. ICoCA is a multi-stakeholder initiative that promotes, governs and oversees implementation of the International Code of Conduct and promotes the responsible provision of security services and respect for human rights and national and international law in accordance with the Code.

The U.S. government has always had a representative serving on ICoCA’s Board of Directors. U.S. government representatives also serve on the “group of friends of the Chair” of the Montreux Document Forum to help bolster the activities of the Forum.

In addition, the U.S. government sponsored the establishment of a set of management standards for private security companies based on the Montreux Document and the Code of Conduct through the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) and the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). The U.S. government believes that such standards will yield benefits for the government in terms of consistency, clarity in requirements, and affordability. The Department of Defense requires demonstrated compliance with the ANSI PSC.1 or ISO 18788 for its private security contractors; the Department of State’s Bureau of Diplomatic Security incorporates membership in good standing in the ICoCA as a requirement for the Worldwide Protective Services (WPS) contract, and its successor contracts, WPS II and WPS III. Diplomatic Security also requires WPS contractors to confirm conformance with ANSI PSC.1 throughout the duration of their contract.

D. Lessons and Issues

The VPs Initiative has been considerably strengthened over the last several years. In order to build accountability, credibility, and effectiveness of the VPs Initiative, we will continue to focus

on support for in-country implementation and verification of implementation. Verification is important to help ensure to the satisfaction of both VPs Initiative participants and the public that governments, NGOs, and companies are meeting their commitments under the VPs. We were pleased to see several corporate pillar participants present on verification under the corporate pillar verification framework, and encourage all corporate pillar participants to publicly demonstrate commitment to verification and participate in it moving forward. We will also continue to participate in the In-Country Implementation Groups, which seek to facilitate activities that promote in-country implementation of the VPs as well as address local security and human rights challenges.

The U.S. government continues to be encouraged by the advancement of dialogue and trust-building across pillars. Despite some challenges, participants have made enormous strides in communicating candidly with one another. Through our outreach, on phone calls, and in our meetings in Washington and abroad, the U.S. government continues to emphasize that the VPs Initiative's greatest strength lies in its ability to serve as a platform for candid discussion and collaboration around shared objectives, including successes and challenges experienced during implementation. We will keep supporting this platform and reiterating this message.

We will continue to strengthen the VPs Initiative by helping to advance implementation of the principles on the ground, strengthen participation, and improve accountability and transparency. Given the importance of multi-stakeholder initiatives to the U.S. government's engagement with companies abroad, we have the opportunity to shine a light on the good work being undertaken by VPs companies, and to continue to strengthen the VPs Initiative in line with U.S. objectives for responsible business conduct. The U.S. government remains deeply committed to the VPs Initiative and we will continue to enhance the stability of the VPs and look forward to continued success and collaboration with all participants.