

Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights: Celebrating 20 years of partnership and collaboration to uphold human rights

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As the [Voluntary Principles Initiative \(VPI\)](#) celebrates its 20th anniversary, [the principles](#) that underpin the initiative are more relevant today than ever. Global events, such as COVID-19, have shone a spotlight on the many inequalities and vulnerabilities seen throughout society. This has exacerbated the risk of conflict owing to the increased political and economic uncertainty that countries are currently facing around the world. We also face longer-term challenges such as climate change, which also have the potential to increase the risk of conflict as more communities start to experience food insecurity, water scarcity and forced displacement. This will not only make the principles themselves more relevant but will also highlight the importance of partnership and collaboration - something that is embodied by both the International Council on Mining and Metals (ICMM) and the VPI.

This year we have already felt some of this turbulence with an increase in demonstrations condemning police brutality across the world. The VPs are a critical tool for security providers to ensure they are respecting human rights, as argued in a [recent statement](#) from the NGO and corporate members of the VPI. The authors of this statement underscore the commitment made under the VPs that security forces are required to protect human rights in accordance with the rule of law. This includes using force responsibly and not violating the rights of individuals who are exercising their right to freedom of association and peaceful assembly. Through application of the VPs, organisations can effectively manage the risk associated with security provision by:

- Conducting a comprehensive assessment of human rights risks associated with security
- Engaging appropriately with public and private security service providers and surrounding communities in complex environments
- Instituting human rights screenings of and training for public and private security forces
- Developing systems for reporting and investigating allegations of human rights abuses

At ICMM, we are proud of our role as a permanent observer to the initiative since 2001 and the part we have played in the amplification of the VPs across our own membership over the past two decades. At the heart of this partnership is the unwavering commitment to respect human rights. It is this shared value that led to ICMM incorporating the VPs across our own membership [commitments](#). Through [Mining Principle 3](#), members are required to uphold the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and to cooperate in processes that remedy adverse impacts on the rights, interests, cultures, customs or values of employees and local communities. Specifically, performance expectation 3.3 requires all ICMM members to *implement, based on risk, a human rights and security approach consistent with the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights*. Implementation of ICMM's Mining Principles is supported by robust site-level validation, credible assurance and transparent disclosure. This broadens the reach of the VPs to all 27 ICMM company members operating in over 50 countries and 650 sites.

Encouraging the adoption of the VPs as the key framework for responsible security provision will be increasingly important as the landscape becomes more complex. As well as being an active observer over the past 20 years and incorporating the VPs into our own Mining

Principles, ICMM has been a keen advocate of the principles and worked with partners to promote their widespread application. For example, ICMM, in partnership with International Finance Corporation (IFC) and the International Committee of the Red Cross, produced [Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights: Implementation Guidance Tools](#). This first-of-its-kind set of tools was designed to help companies implement the VPs in practice. This not only assisted ICMM members in implementation but supported performance improvement for the wider extractives sector.

The VPI offers a unique opportunity to foster collaboration and encourage shared learning between its corporate, NGO, and government members – that all have a role to play in the implementation of the principles. I believe that the principles themselves will only become more critical in ensuring that human rights are upheld as we are set to grapple with increasingly challenging societal issues in the coming years. ICMM will therefore continue to support the VPI, support implementation of the VPs by our members, and encourage the adoption of the VPs by the wider mining industry.