

2024 Annual Report

Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights

A. Commitment

PAX joined the Voluntary Principles in January 2003 and continues to be fully committed to its purpose. We regard the VPs as a useful tool for companies to promote and protect human rights when securing their staff and their assets, as part of a wider goal to contribute to fundamental global public goods, justice, peace and democratic values.

We participated in NGO-pillar meetings, verification presentations, and the Plenary meeting, and held numerous engagements with members of the government and corporate pillars about a variety of specific issues. In addition, we participated in membership application procedures, most actively the one of OMV.

We are glad that we have been able to assist in the working of the VPI as member of the Board of the Voluntary Principles Association and authorized co-signer.

B. Procedures

Nothing to report.

C. Promotion

We have since 2010 repeatedly invited the prospective corporate member OMV AG to engage in a dialogue about human rights due diligence. This has been flatly rejected. During the application process for the VPI, we have explained that international crimes are the most salient human rights issues imaginable and have attempted to convince OMV of the importance of meaningful dialogues with victims of such violations. Unfortunately, this most salient issue has fallen on deaf ears.

Attached is the statement by PAX about the decision to vote OMV in as an engaged member.

D. Country Implementation

PAX is active in conflict-affected areas in Europe, Latin-America, Africa and the Middle-East, working to protect civilians against acts of war, ending armed conflict and contributing to peaceful and inclusive societies. Several of our programs include advocacy aimed at strengthening the rule of law and engagement with the public security sector to promote the protection of civilians and of human rights. We also work on corporate accountability and support victims of corporate human rights abuses in their struggle for justice and remedy. For example, we work with victims of human rights abuses in the Colombian mining region César, to hold to account the international mining companies that contributed to and profited from these abuses during the civil war. Amongst these companies is a VPI member.

In general, there is little connection between our in-country work and the VPSHR, as PAX focusses on underlying conflict drivers and protecting and strengthening international human

rights norms. Unfortunately, VPI implementation often does not look beyond project-level security issues and therefore misses opportunities to promote respect for human rights.

D. Lessons and issues

1. **The members of the VPI are dedicated to promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms. However, there is a significant international political shift that threatens to undermine the rules-based order, moving away from respect for human rights and the rule of law, and purposefully damaging democratic values and institutions. Notably, several permanent members of the UN Security Council are at the forefront of this trend. Attacks on the international rule of law directly challenge the principles that the VPI upholds and jeopardize the ability of its members to achieve their objectives.**

Apathy is no option. The VPI and its members must vigorously defend the international rule of law and actively oppose the prevailing trend to undermine it, or we will lose the very foundation upon which we stand.

2. An essential part of accountability is transparency about how the best practices and guidelines that have adopted by the VPI are used by its members. Some members do, others do it partly, and yet others do not at all report meaningfully whether or how they apply the adopted guidance and best practices. Consequently, the VPI is not half as credible as it would otherwise be. The outside world cannot assess the meaning and the impact of VPI membership as the VPI provides no assurance that members “ensure respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms”, “create an enabling environment for the realisation of human rights”, and have “a positive impact on local governance, peace and stability and play a proactive role in preventing conflict”.
3. It is a stated ambition of the VPI to promote its principles and best practices. This requires advocacy for and engagement with e.g. decision makers working on mandatory due diligence legislation with a purpose that the principles and best practices regarding human rights due diligence on security and conflict that have been adopted by the VPs are reflected in implementation guidance documents for emerging laws and regulations. The activities of the VPI is not commensurate to the importance of its ambition in this respect. We expect that the issue will be taken up with vigour in 2026 and that the staffing of the VPI will be adjusted accordingly.

E. Future

PAX is faced with brutal budget cuts. Important donors are drastically scaling down. E.g., the Dutch and US Government’s support for peace and human rights activities by civil society organisations will be reduced to almost zero by January 1st 2026. In addition, major cuts to humanitarian and development budgets cause acute hardships around the globe with private donors unable to fill the gaps. Consequently, PAX will reduce its workforce with 2/3 by the end of this year, and will then no longer be able to make a substantial time commitment to the VPI.

London, 21 March 2025

Statement by PAX regarding the engaged membership of OMV to the VPI

We would like to formally state that PAX voted against the application for membership of the company OMV to the VPI. Although the vote is finalized, PAX' vote of objection stands registered and we would like to shortly explain this vote of objection.

OMV was active in a consortium that operated in Sudan in the period 1997-2003. During this period, severe war crimes were committed by government forces and allied militias in their quest to secure the consortium's oil operations. Former executives of OMV's consortium partner Lundin are currently tried in a Swedish court for knowingly supporting the government's actions and thereby aiding and abetting these war crimes. However, we believe the full consortium bears responsibility and last year, a criminal complaint was filed in Austria against OMV senior executives.

12.000 people were killed, 160.000 people were forcibly displaced, the area was left utterly destroyed and has not recovered until today. None of the survivors and affected communities have seen any form of remedy. None of the involved companies has ever agreed to the affected communities' request to enter into dialogue.

We expect that OMV's newly gained status of engaged member of the VPI will have them take up their basic responsibility to conduct human rights due diligence. On all impacts, not only those in the future, but also those in the past. Not only to learn from what went wrong, but to actually address these wrongs. Because for the victims, these impacts are not 'in the past': they are felt every day. Talk to the victims, listen to their story and take responsibility for your part in that story. There is no moving forward without dealing with the past.

We also expect and look forward to working with the VPI members of all three pillars to be strongly engaged and committed to this matter.