

# Green Advocates 2024 Annual Report

## Commitment to the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights

### 1. Describe how you have engaged in the Voluntary Principles Initiative over the past year.

Green Advocates, a board member of the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights have continued to advocate for promoting, protecting, and respecting human rights across the three pillars of the VPs and actively participate in call meetings of the NGO Pillar and also the regular meetings for members of the Steering Committee for the NGO Pillar that includes Pact and New Nigeria Foundation. Green Advocates participate in call meetings of the VPI Board of Directors

Green Advocates participated in the VPI plenary in Washington, D.C., U.S.A., in May 2024. Alfred L. Brownell, founder of Green Advocates was present and was a panelist in the discussion along with Bennett Freeman (Freeman & Associates); Danya Greenfield (Freedom House); Alyson Finley (US Government); Diego Perez-Claramunt (Gran Tierra);

Green Advocates participated in the Annual Strategy Retreat of the VPI Steering Committee held in Manhattan, New York at the Human Rights Watch headquarters, Empire State Building and discussed the following activities:

- Reforms to Verification Presentations and Annual Reporting;
- Reforms to Applications and Engaged Member Process;
- Report from the Governance and Jurisdiction Working Group;
- Steering Committee Meeting (Steering Committee members only);
- Reforms to the VPI Grievance Mechanism.

### 2. Describe efforts to increase transparency, both internally and externally, regarding your efforts to implement or support implementation of the Voluntary Principles.

Green Advocates features the VPSHR by making its Annual Report to the VPI publicly available. regularly publicized the VPSHR in lectures and panel discussions related to issues such as corporate accountability and environmental impact assessments, multi-stakeholders' platform and at the community level partnerships. Green Advocates reports publicly on security and human rights issues across Liberia and the West African sub-region

Green Advocates believes the transparency and has foster collaboration across the NGO Pillar, local communities, security sector and relevant national government bodies.

List of provided meeting reports within this reporting period:

- Report of the Advocacy Engagements with Security Expert Guard Agency of Liberia (SEGAL) held on 15th September 2024.
- The Report of the meeting with the Liberia National Police held in Monrovia on November 27, 2024.

### 3. Describe any efforts to engage in dialogue with other participants of the Voluntary Principles Initiative.

Green Advocates and LITE-Africa of the NGO Pillar hold regular bilateral dialogue to discuss issues affecting the VPI and also promotion of the VPI. Green Advocates introduced the VPI Jamaa Resources of

Kenya and regularly discuss the implementation of the VPI. Green Advocates has held meetings with Saviour Akpan of Comppart Foundation and Okereke Chinwike of African Law Foundation both engaged member of the NGO Pillar on the VPI implementation and collaboration.

Green Advocates engaged directly with Dr. Adriano Nuvonga of Centro para Democracia e Direitos Humanos (CDD) of Mozambique virtually and Caleb Wanga of Usalama of Kenya during the vetting process to understand their implementation plans of the VPSHR before recommending the two organizations to become full member of the VPI.

Green Advocates is a member of the African Coalition for Corporate Accountability, International Advocates Working Group AND THE Coalition of Human Rights in Development working alongside other participants of NGO Pillar the Voluntary Principles Initiative and use the annual gathering of members meetings to promote the VPI.

## Procedures

### **4. Provide a summary of the findings of the verification process as outlined in the NGO Pillar Verification Framework.**

Verification processes at the NGO Pillar level were conducted on Centro para Democracia e Direitos Humanos (CDD) of Mozambique virtually and Usalama of Kenya. After the voting by the NGO Pillar members, Usalama and CDD were recommended for consideration for full membership pending further presentation of documentation and review by Green Advocates.

Green Advocates participated in the Vale S.A. verification presentation in September 2024 fostering continuous peer learning and accountability.

## Promotion of the Voluntary Principles

### **5. Describe your efforts to raise awareness of and promote understanding of the Voluntary Principles with both internal and external stakeholders.**

Green Advocates continues to promote the VPSHR directly with communities who are not currently aware VPSHR at the project and raising VPSHR issues at the corporate level with ArcelorMittal Liberia. Green Advocates established structures in three counties (Nimba County, Bong County and Grand Bassa County) of Liberia to lead advocacy against Human rights violations by multinational corporations. Nimba has the Nimba County Natural Resources Rights Alliance (NCNRRA) and the Nimba Women's Resources Rights Platform (NWRRP); Bong has the Bong County Railroad and Resources Affected Communities (BCRRAC) and Bong County Women Railroad and Resources Platform (BCWRRP) and Bassa has the Grand Bassa Coastal Resources and Communities Alliance (GBCRCA) and Grand Bassa Women Resources Rights Platform (GBWRRP).

Green Advocate provided awareness on the VPSHR at the Independent Accountability Mechanism (IAMnet) and CSO Annual Meeting in October 2024 in Manila, Philippines. IAMnet and global civil society organizations under the banner of International Advocates Working Group (IAWG) convene Annual Meetings to reaffirm commitment to address the concerns of communities that may be harmed by projects funded by international financial institutions. IAMnet is a partnership of dedicated practitioners from development Finance Institutions who build capacity on accountability and compliance for improved corporate governance and development impact.

### **6. Describe efforts to engage and facilitate participation of non-member CSOs, affected communities, and other relevant stakeholders in the Annual Plenary Meeting or workshops.**

Green Advocates and partner organizations, the Alliance for Rural Democracy, Natural Resource Women Platform and the Mano River Union Civil Society Natural Resources Rights and Governance Platform have engaged directly with local communities and civil society organizations throughout the country. Some communities in Bong County are Zoweinta, Green Hill Quarry and Lamco Camp. Nimba County communities include Gbapa, Zolowee, Sehyi-Geh, Flumpa, and Sanniquellie. Grand Bassa County communities include Big Fanti Town, Moore Town and Barconie Town.

In addition, Green Advocates has identified civil society organizations that are not members of the NGO Pillar and will create awareness of the VPSHR as well as encourage them to join the VPI. Those organizations include Sustainable Development Institute, Rights and Rice Foundation, Foundation for Communities Initiatives, Village Development Fund and our partner organizations. Green Advocates leverages opportunities to raise awareness and promote understanding of the Voluntary Principles and their importance at meetings it has participated in as relevant. For Example, attendance at Annual General Meeting of ArcelorMittal held in Luxemburg in April 2024.

## **7. Describe your efforts to promote the adoption of the Voluntary Principles into relevant government of corporate policies, as well as international standards and/or guidelines.**

Liberia transitioned to a new government in 2024 and a lot of changes has occurred thereby slowing efforts to implement the VPSHR. Green Advocates is seeking working relationship with Liberian government agencies and extractive companies to do risk assessments to develop guidance on the use of public and private security forces.

## **Country Implementation**

### **8. Describe efforts to strengthen the rule of law in the countries where you work.**

Liberia has three distinct and independent branches of government. The Legislative branch makes the laws, the Judicial branch interprets the laws and the Executive branch executes the laws.

The courts are functional adjudicating cases from all levels and there are 16 judicial circuit courts with the highest court in the land being the Supreme court

Liberia is a state with a dual legal system. Traditional chiefs and elders in rural areas enjoy jurisdiction over family law, land disputes and petty crimes. Formal courts cover these issues in all areas (albeit more accessibly in cities and towns) and enjoy exclusive jurisdiction over serious crimes, such as rape and murder. The rule of law still remains a major challenge in Liberia despite these efforts to build confidence in the justice system.

Green Advocates has been engaging the Liberia National Police to embed the VPSHR training in its Vital Installation Training which curriculum includes human rights issues, conflict resolution and the appropriate use of force.

### **9. Describe efforts to conduct and monitor risk assessments for potential human rights violations in the areas where you work.**

Green Advocates engaged communities on the benefits and processes for the conduct and monitor of risk assessments in their communities and Companies areas of operations for potential human rights violations and reporting cases of human rights violations. Consultations and trainings were carried out in the Salala Rubber Corporation where Green Advocates represent 22 affected communities in a case of land grab, forceful displacement of indigenous people, SGBV, pollution and bad labor practice against the International Finance Corporation. Security training was also offered to these communities to spot potential threats and harms and how to avoid and prepare themselves.

In Nimba County, communities affected by operations of ArcelorMittal has commended private security firm, Security Expert Guard Agency of Liberia (SEGAL) after a damning initial report that puts the private security in complicit with state security for human rights abuses. This security working practice change occurred after the meeting of SEGAL and Green Advocates and verified by a second assessment visit to the communities.

### **10. Describe your efforts to strengthen policies, procedures and guidelines related to the implementation of the Voluntary Principles.**

Green Advocates was not able to strengthen policies, procedures and guidelines related to the implementation of the Voluntary Principles in its engagements with private security and public security in Liberia. However, at the Board Annual Strategy Retreat of the VPI Steering Committee held in New York, Green Advocates contributed to the following reforms documentations:

- Reforms to Verification Presentations and Annual Reporting;

- Reforms to Applications and Engaged Member Process;
- Reforms to the VPI Grievance Mechanism.

One major announcement made during meetings with public and private security officials is to emphasize that individuals credibly implicated in human rights abuses as far back as the civil war era should not be allowed to provide both public and private security. In so doing, the Liberia National Police issues clearance for everyone seeking employment in the security sector.

### **11. Describe your efforts to engage with or support engagement with the public security sectors and/or private security sectors in the countries where you work.**

Green Advocates has made use of the library of the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights (VPSHR) using resources to support implementation of the VPSHR. Green Advocates also developed a tool on the VPSHR in simple Liberian pidgin English cartoon stories for use by communities to easily understand the VPSHR in Nimba County. Our work has been focused on communities affected by multinational corporations operating in Liberia. This Bottom – Up approach is crucial to ensuring peace and stability within the communities in relation to frequent protests that often turn violent.

Green Advocates was labeled by previous Liberian government as “Anti – Development” and our offices closed down. Our efforts with both public and private security have been to build a new relationship working together to promote the VPSHR in Liberia. Green Advocates continues to consult regularly with various public and private security institutions – to discuss security sector challenges and consider strategies for improvement.

### **12. Describe efforts to hold Voluntary Principles participants accountable for upholding their roles and responsibilities as members of the Voluntary Principles Initiative.**

Green Advocates asks questions in board meetings about participants accountability for upholding their roles and responsibilities as members of the Voluntary Principles Initiative (VPI). In November 2024, Green Advocates brought to the attention of members the unfolding Human Rights situation in Mozambique and requested updates from the Secretariat on alarming and deep concerns that the Mozambican government intensified crackdown on peaceful protesters and human rights defenders. The crackdown was been marked by brutal police repression, arbitrary arrests, internet blackouts, and increasing restrictions on press freedoms—all aimed at silencing citizens demanding accountability, human rights, and transparency in governance. This repression, compounded by violent police actions signaled the VPI Secretariat to officially write the Mozambican government requesting information on the situation.

## **Lessons & Issues**

### **13. Lessons or issues from this reporting year, as well as plans or opportunities to advance the Voluntary Principles for the organization.**

- FUNDING is the major obstacle to implementing the VPSHR in Liberia;
- Lack of resources to reach out to communities affected by companies and security forces;
- Projects termination by USAID and US State Department impeding work in the communities;
- Government and companies are reluctant to meet Green Advocates to discuss the VPs after receiving letters and several follow-ups;
- Provision of pro bono services for community members are not readily available;
- Obtaining FOI and litigation process can be overwhelming and takes very long time;
- Private securities request for training on the VPSHR was not implemented;
- Many communities, companies, government, public and private securities are not aware of VPSHR;
- Companies (ArcelorMittal Liberia) made false declaration in their annual report about implementing the VPSHR in Liberia;
- Adequate documentation on Risk Assessment is not available by private securities;
- Local communities are more receptive to learn about the VPSHR;
- Public and private securities use disproportionate force to quell protests leading to deaths in some areas;
- Media engagement is needed to promote the VPSHR.

Action plans to implement the VPSHR in the coming year are as follows:

- Reach out to additional 5 additional private security companies to create awareness on the VPSHR;
- Continue collaboration and discuss with the Liberia National Police to provide VPSHR training;
- Reach out to 5 additional corporations to create awareness on the VPSHR;
- Continue communities' engagement and awareness on the VPSHR;
- Reach out to relevant Liberian Government ministries to create awareness on the VPSHR;
- Reach out to 5 Liberian Civil Society organizations to create awareness on the VPSHR;
- Reach out to United Nations organizations and Diplomatic Missions in Liberia to create awareness on the VPSHR;
- Plan a stakeholder workshop implementing the VPSHR in Liberia;