

The 2023 – 2024 Annual Report of Green Advocates International (GAI) on the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights in Liberia.

Introduction

This report demonstrates the commitment of Green Advocates International (GAI) to implementing the Voluntary Principles and the activities on the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights. Green Advocates has enhanced the promotion of the VPs in Liberia creating awareness in local communities where GAI works and engaged stakeholders within the NGO pillar of the initiative.

Green Advocates engaged stakeholders in the Liberian government to create an awareness on the Voluntary Principles Initiative (VPI). GAI has engaged private companies operating in Liberia on the training of private security personnel and Government Security Forces deployed to their concession areas on the VPs.

This report highlights the progress made, challenges, lessons learnt and recommendation over the reporting period.

A. Commitment to the Voluntary Principles

Green Advocates is a member of the Steering Committee and Board Member of the Voluntary Principles Association since May 2023. Green Advocates is committed to the promotion and implementation of the VPs in Liberia through workshops in communities and informing stakeholders about the Voluntary Principles. Green Advocates participated in all the steering committee meetings, NGO pillar meetings as well as active participation in the Verification Presentation by Corporate Members and Engaged Members during the year under review intended to strengthen the work of the VPI. Green Advocates has engaged the Secretariat of the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights to provide online webinar training on the Voluntary Principles for its staff during the past year.

Green Advocates International attended the VPI Steering Committee two-day retreat on November 30th and December 1st, 2023 in Geneva, Switzerland as a member of the Steering Committee with the following objectives:

1. Agreement on standard by which SOEs are evaluated for membership
2. Agreement on the parameters of any long-term governance changes
3. Update on mapping exercise
4. Agreement on future expansion of the VPI to other sectors
5. Agreement on parameters for financial sustainability for working groups; criteria for new groups and a short list of promising jurisdictions.

6. Conduct any outstanding Steering Committee business including a vote on DRC Application, CEPSA application, discussion around State-owned Enterprises.

B. Procedures

Green Advocates has participated in the annual plenary meetings (Toronto 2022 and London 2023) where it informs the gathering on the activities of the organization and its efforts in promoting the Voluntary Principles. GAI is also a member of the VPs steering committee since the London Annual Plenary in 2023 where it contributes to the progress and implementation of the VPs through discussion on issues of relevance to the VPs especially at the NGO Pillar level and voting on admission of new members to the VPI as well as the Verification Presentation by Corporate Members and Engaged Members intended to strengthen the work of the VPI.

C. Promotion of the Voluntary Principles

1. Green Advocates and partners prepared a Directory to monitor, create visibility, document, issue alerts and report on attacks, reprisals and killing of Frontline Grass Defenders across West Africa. The tool was created by Cadasta and was launched at a workshop in Monrovia with participants from 15 West African Countries and beyond in January 2024 and supported by Global Witness, Business and Human Rights Resource Center, International Land Coalition, etc.

Green Advocates promoted the Voluntary Principles in community workshops in Cape Mount County, Margibi County and Nimba County during the past year at community meetings using cartoon stories tool developed by Green Advocates to create awareness of the VPI.

D. Country Implementation

Advocacy engagements with relevant stakeholders: Green engaged with the ministries of Finance and Development Planning and Justice on the awareness of the Voluntary Principles Initiative.

Green Advocates conducted an investigation into the allegations of human rights violations, land grab, poor crops compensation, private and public security brutality, water and air pollution, forest and biodiversity loss by communities around the concession area of the steel giant, ArcelorMittal in Nimba, Bong and Grand Bassa Counties respectively. This research was conducted in collaboration with NGOs and communities in Mexico, Brazil and South Africa where ArcelorMittal has similar operations under the banner of the Fair Steel Coalition. Key recommendation from the report to the company is that Arcelor Mittal adopt a zero-tolerance policy for attacks, reprisals, violence, stigmatization and persecution against the environmental and human rights defenders, establishing safety protocols, an accessible grievance

mechanism and internal investigations, given the alleged involvement of employees in the threats and violence against defenders. In Addition, it was recommended to home states and third states to adopt a mandatory due diligence law, addressing access to effective remedies for human rights abuses that occur in other countries, by businesses domiciled or with significant commercial ties to their jurisdiction. It must be noted that Arcelor Mittal documented in its 2021 annual report that it conducted Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights to all its staff for which GAI has engaged the company to verify.

Green Advocates collaborated with NGO Pillar member, LITE-Africa and West African Network for Peace (WANEP) to apply for European Union funding on a project on Business and Human Rights with the Overall objective: to prevent corporate harm and ensure corporate accountability by supporting the role of civil society actors in the implementation of the United Nations Guiding Principles (UNGPs), and related EU legislation on human rights and environmental due diligence. In addition, Green Advocates and Fund for Peace applied for a Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI) Grant funded by the Wellspring Philanthropic Fund to conduct research on violence against women (VAW), violence against children (VAC) and other forms of violence driven by gender inequality. However, the both proposals were unsuccessful.

Green Advocates provide pro bono legal service to community members and communities who are affected by the operations of multinational corporations as well as national governments. These communities' members face reprisals, intimidations, arrests, brutality and jail without charge for their advocacies against human rights violations.

E. Lessons and Recommendation

Awareness of the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights is very minimal in Liberia and is only heard of in communities where Green Advocates work.

Government has been slow to embrace the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights during the year under review as it was a national election year and most officials were out on campaign trails.

Companies operating in Liberia have no idea about the Voluntary Principles and its relevance to security and human rights.

Funding support for NGO Pillar members of the Voluntary Principles should be allocated to promoting the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights via training and engagements with communities, companies and national governments in country that will enable wide spread awareness of the VPs so as to garner national support and implementation.