

Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights – full annual report
International Alert
January – December 2023

A. Commitment to the Voluntary Principles

A1 Describe how you have engaged in the Voluntary Principles Initiative over the past year.

In 2023, International Alert engaged in the steering committee of the Voluntary Principles through regular meetings, retreats and the annual plenary. International Alert also attended the NGO pillar meetings.

A2 Describe efforts to increase transparency, both internally and externally, regarding your efforts to implement or support implementation of the Voluntary Principles.

Through our 2023 annual report, International Alert will report publicly on the various ways we are working on security and human rights through our country and global programmes, especially in the Horn of Africa and DRC.

A3 Describe any efforts to engage in dialogue with other participants of the Voluntary Principles Initiative.

International Alert is a member of the advisory committee for the Business and Conflict Community of Practice and the expert group for Human Security Business Partnerships, working alongside other participants of the Voluntary Principles Initiative.

B. Procedures

B4 Provide a summary of the findings of the verification process as outlined in the NGO Pillar Verification Framework.

N/A

C. Promotion of the Voluntary Principles

C5. Describe your efforts to raise awareness of and promote understanding of the Voluntary Principles with both internal and external stakeholders.

In the **Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)**, through the ‘improving security, social cohesion and human rights in conflict mineral rich regions of Eastern DRC’ project, International Alert is supporting the DRC Government to operationalise the mining code. This promotes understanding of the Voluntary Principles and ensures human rights and security are protected on mining sites, while also reducing the incursion of conflict minerals in supply chains. International Alert is working with the private sector, government and multi-stakeholder structures to ensure the monitoring and implementation of the code. In 2023, the project delivered trainings to sensitise stakeholders (members of the reporting structure, political authorities, armed forces and police including mining police) on human rights and the mining code, which will be continuously monitored in mines through the project. This work is coordinated with other international organisations like DCAF and IOM.

International Alert continues to support enhanced business and human rights in the extractives industry in **Kenya**. In 2023 we supported communities and civil society organisations in Kwale and Marsabit counties to advocate for land rights, with the Bamburi community securing a lease document, empowering them to negotiate compensation with the mining company for use of their land. In Kwale, we facilitated capacity building sessions for the civil society organisations network, Kwale Mining Alliance, focusing on Conflict Sensitivity and Advocacy. In Marsabit, we facilitated the establishment of the Marsabit Renewable Energy Reference Group, which serves as a platform for various historically divided community groups to come together, fostering collective engagement and advocacy. We have provided ongoing support by organizing capacity building sessions and quarterly meetings for the reference group, fostering joint planning and enabling collective engagement efforts. The El-molo community petitioned the Senate to register their community land and the Sakuye/Dabel community lodged a petition with the Ministry of Mining, National Land Commission and County Commission over an unresolved land dispute with a major company.

In **Uganda**, International Alert supported enhanced engagement of oil companies on issues of business and human rights by grassroots civil society organisations in Uganda's Albertine Region. This has involved capacity building initiatives, multi-stakeholder engagement and promotion of dialogue.

At the **global** level, International Alert supported the Human Security Business Partnerships Framework as part of the Human Security Business Partnerships expert group. This framework actively promotes the Voluntary Principles through its guidance to help companies and investors work with communities, government and civil society.

C6. Describe efforts to engage and facilitate participation of non-member CSOs, affected communities, and other relevant stakeholders in the Annual Plenary Meeting or workshops.

N/A

C7. Describe your efforts to promote the adoption of the Voluntary Principles into relevant government or corporate policies, as well as international standards and/or guidelines.

In the **DRC**, International Alert engaged with the efforts - led by the Swiss government and facilitated by DCAF - to develop a roadmap for the DRC to become a member of the VPI. This built on a series of workshops that Alert organised in South Kivu in 2017/18, which kicked off this process with civil society. As a result, DRC became a member of the VPI in 2023.

Through the project 'Improving security, social cohesion and human rights in conflict mineral rich regions of Eastern **DRC**', International Alert has also begun to develop policy recommendations for national and regional governance of mineral chains. This includes engaging the private sector on both the supply and demand sides to ensure sufficient levels of due diligence are upheld and companies take proactive steps to improve security in their regions of operation.

At a **global** level, in collaboration with three other international organisations, International Alert successfully campaigned to incorporate amendments on conflict sensitivity in the European Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive. As a result, the Directive includes text on the importance of responding to contextual risks. There is language in a recital to the Directive on the need for heightened due diligence in conflict affected contexts.

Through our partnerships with KfW Development Bank and the European Investment Bank, International Alert's peace and conflict assessments have supported investment decisions. This includes security and human rights considerations in line with the Voluntary Principles.

D. Country Implementation

D8. Describe efforts to strengthen the rule of law in the countries where you work.

In **Nepal**, International Alert has mobilised municipal transitional justice networks to strengthen access to justice for conflict victims through storytelling, data collection, advocacy and dialogue. As a result, six municipalities of Madhesh Province officially collected and maintained the data of conflict victims for the first time. One municipality also adopted a municipal level policy to support the conflict victims. This has established conflict victims' data in the local government registry. It will also help local government to formulate programmes and policies and allocate budgets to support the reparative needs of the conflict victims.

International Alert is strengthening access to justice in **Rwanda** and **DRC** by improving citizen understanding of their rights. In both countries, International Alert is also working with authorities to reflect on how the judicial systems can be rendered more accessible to improve inclusive access to these legal systems in border areas.

In **Kyrgyzstan** and **Kazakhstan** International Alert supported the drafting of a legal framework for water management by small basin councils, which is being discussed by central government.

D9. Describe efforts to conduct and monitor risk assessments for potential human rights violations in the areas where you work.

In the **DRC**, project staff visit mining sites to assess their compliance to human rights protections, security provisions and conflict sensitive dispute resolution. International Alert does this with local multi-stakeholder structures which are semi-state structures and have a mandate to work on these sorts of conflicts. International Alert is also working with civil society partners to train them on how to undertake this due diligence themselves, building a cadre of experts. Mining sites that meet the required standards are certified and regularly monitored for their compliance.

D10. Describe your efforts to strengthen policies, procedures and guidelines related to the implementation of the Voluntary Principles.

N/A

D11. 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.

In **Nepal**, International Alert has been working with the police to strengthen relationships with communities, increase the public's confidence in reporting a case or complaint, and help the police better serve local populations. Our Community Score Card is a systematic process of non-confrontational dialogues designed to improve collaboration and mutual accountability between the community and police. In 2023, this initiative engaged approximately 3,000 community members and 600 police officers across 10 clusters of project locations. Together, they actively participated in formulating need-based plans, jointly implementing these plans, and collaboratively evaluating the outcomes and results.

In **Nigeria**, the Police Act 2020 is the reference point for police reforms in Nigeria, but there is weak understanding of its provisions in the country. International Alert has been working to enhance awareness among citizens and the police, using this as the basis for reforms in police resourcing,

human rights protections and community policing. This includes conducting reflection sessions on the rights, privileges, duties and responsibilities with Police Public Relations Officers and citizens, and conducting two pieces of research on 'Public Perception about the Police and Police understanding of the police act 2020'.

In the **Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo**, until recently, certification has been near impossible for informal artisanal mine sites. Thanks to the ongoing efforts by International Alert staff, communities and partners (including the private sector and authorities) to improve security around the mines and transport routes, accreditation and permissions have been received for the country's first certified conflict-free "blue mine" export. Preparations to start exporting are underway.

D12. Describe efforts to hold Voluntary Principles participants accountable for upholding their roles and responsibilities as members of the Voluntary Principles Initiative.

E. Lessons and Issues

E13. Lessons or issues from this reporting year, as well as plans or opportunities to advance the Voluntary Principles for the organization.

International Alert's new organisational strategy prioritises **global** work on 'peace economies' - building on our long track record working on responsible business practice and supporting inclusive and resilient economies. This includes ambition to expand our support to investors and businesses in navigating risks and implementing standards (including on security and human rights), while having a positive impact on peace and social outcomes.

The **DRC's** recent adherence to the Voluntary Principles offers a concrete opportunity to support the DRC government in improving respect for human rights in the mining sector (both industrial and artisanal). It has sparked political interest at the national level in ensuring that Voluntary Principles are being met. International Alert is broadening out and scaling up its partnerships, working with actors who are well placed to apply lessons learned in artisanal mining to the industrial space. This includes supporting civil society to hold actors in the mining sector to account on responsible mining and due diligence standards.