



## 2023 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.

Last year was a year of transition in terms of PAX' representation in the VPI, as representation is gradually being taken over by another staff member. We participated in meetings of the working groups on Mapping and Implementation, in NGO-pillar meetings and in membership application processes. We also had numerous engagements with members of the government and corporate pillars, e.g. during the Annual General Plenary in London, about specific issues. In addition, we participated in a materiality assessment conducted by one of the corporate pillar members.

#### **B. Procedures**

Nothing to report.

#### **C. Promotion**

We have advocated with members and the secretariat for the VPI to engage more effectively with external standard setters. 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 hope that the issue will be taken up by the Mapping and Implementation working groups as a priority area and that the staffing of the VPI will be adjusted accordingly.

We have for over a dozen years invited the prospective corporate member OMV AG to engage in a dialogue about human rights due diligence. This has been flatly ignored. During the London Plenary, we informed the company representative that its application risked not to run smoothly because of salient outstanding security and human rights issues.

#### **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. Although we don't directly address their roles and responsibility as members of the VPI, we do actively advocate for this company to live up to its commitment to the human rights norms underlying the VPSHR and to address its human rights legacy in Colombia as part of this commitment. In general however there is not a lot of connection between our in-country work and the VPSHR, as our work is mostly focused on targeting underlying conflict drivers and protecting and strengthening international human rights norms, while the VPSHR has a more narrow focus on security operations, which we believe is a gap. We had hoped that the development, promotion and implementation of the Conflict Assessment tool would start bridging this gap, but that doesn't seem to have progressed much.

#### **D. Lessons and issues**

Progress in mandatory due diligence legislative processes make it urgent to promote the Conflict Assessment tool as the international standard of achievement.

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 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”.