

AT ITS FIRST TECHNICAL MEETING

National Working Group on VPSHR approves terms of reference and the work plan

- Three months after its establishment, the National Working Group on the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights held on Wednesday, 23 February, its first technical meeting where several matters were discussed, with emphasis on the functioning of the group, the definition of the annual work plan and presentation of ideas on the Cabo Delgado working group, presentation of the terms of reference and baseline study status.



Established in November 2021 by the Ministry of Justice, Constitutional and Religious Affairs, the National Working Group on the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights in Mozambique is an initiative that counts with the Secretariat of the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) and the technical support of the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF). The group is composed of the Government of Mozambique, the national and international private sector, civil society and observers.

Speaking at the ceremony's opening, Alexandra Sheppard, British Deputy High Commissioner in Mozambique, began by saying that the holding of the first technical meeting of the National Working Group three (3) months after its constitution evidences the commitment of the actors involved with the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights (VPSHR) in the country.

"The UK Government was one of the founding members of this Initiative for the value it has in getting governments, businesses and non-governmental organisations to work together to minimize the risks of human rights abuses and security-related incidents in communities, and to promote good corporate social responsibility practices."

The UK Deputy High Commissioner reiterated the UK Government's commitment to continue to work with other international partners in co-funding the Security and Human Rights Implementation Mechanism, known as SHRIM. "This mechanism greatly complements our Voluntary Principles Initiative efforts by supporting the implementation of good security and human rights practices in challenging areas of work, as is the case here."

The declaration of intent to create a safe and stable environment for businesses and their employees results in increased confidence for operators and investors, who are concerned about compliance with international norms and standards. "But Government commitment is also needed to improve and raise the implementation of the Voluntary Principles by companies, given the need to address issues of state-society relations, the behavior and oversight of security forces, and accountability in decision making that go far beyond the boundary lines of any given exploration or mining area. These are national issues that require national solutions, and this National Working Group is an opportunity to outline and adopt local solutions to national problems."

National working groups in the area of the Voluntary Principles have been highly successful in other quarters of the world, such as in Ghana, where the national group has worked to improve trust and reach mutually acceptable solutions. "And it has facilitated training and constructive dialogue between



Alexandra Sheppard, Deputy British High Commissioner in Mozambique



Representative of the Canadian High Commission in Mozambique

local governments, communities and the private sector in resolving complaints transparently and ensures that public and private security forces are acting in a responsible and proportionate manner."

Alexandra Sheppard noted that Mozambique is a country that has already shown strong leadership in the area of the Voluntary Principles, having been the first African coun-

try to work on a national action plan in 2013. "And we hope that the establishment of this group will be a mechanism to demonstrate leadership, including in terms of developing a Roadmap to enable the effective implementation of the Voluntary Principles, and become the second potential African signatory to the Voluntary Principles platform, after Ghana."

Speaking on behalf of the Minister of National Defense, Colonel Paulo Gabriel said that the National Working Group is a platform that allows materializing the institutional commitment to strengthen and consolidate relations between the Defense sector, civil society and the international community. "The Ministry of National Defense maintains a partnership with CDD whose objective is to train the military in matters related to the promotion and protection of Human Rights in the area of commitment of the Armed Forces in Cabo Delgado."

As a result of this partnership, the Ministry of National Defense participated in various activities, with emphasis on virtual and face-to-face workshops in the cities of Maputo and Pemba, with a view to training its staff and members of the Armed Defense Forces of Mozambique (FADM) to better apply the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights in the area of operations in Cabo Delgado. "The Armed Forces have been developing and strengthening civil-military relations with the aim of maintaining good relations with local communities and their leaderships, a preponderant factor for the fight against terrorism in Cabo Delgado."

The representative of the High Commission of Canada, the country that assumes the global presidency of the Voluntary Principles Initiative, advocated the importance of working with rich countries in natural resources to manage the balance between the exploitation of these resources and the protection of human rights. "Well managed, natural resources can be the engine of development, including for marginalized communities."

The Minister of Justice, Constitutional and Religious Affairs was represented by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry, Manuel Didier Malunga. In his intervention, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Justice, Constitutional and Religious Affairs said that the discovery of natural resources and their extraction brought with it numerous challenges related to security and protection of human rights in communities, a situation that justifies the importance of the creation of the National Working Group on Voluntary Principles.

"Alignment between community engagement activities and the security function is a critical component in implementing the Voluntary Principles, as well as in cooperating with external stakeholders in the process. This is because it is impossible for a company on its own to successfully implement the Voluntary Principles without coordinating with stakeholders (Government, civil society, local communities)."

The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Justice, Constitutional and Religious Affairs



Colonel Paulo Gabriel, Ministry of National Defense



Manuel Didier Malunga, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Justice, Constitutional and Religious Affairs

highlighted the need for the extractive sector must develop sustainable policies that guarantee the development of communities in the same proportion as the economic exploitation that comes from the earnings, as well as fortify security measures and pro-


tection of Human Rights. "The Government advocates the extraction and exploitation of natural resources in a sustainable manner, establishing a common platform for dialogue with the private sector and other stakeholders."



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