AFRICAN GROUP STATEMENT AT THE ASSEMBLY OF THE INTERNATIONAL SEABED AUTHORITY

DELIVERED BY

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AMBASSADOR AND PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF

SIERRA LEONE TO THE INTERNATIONAL SEABED AUTHORITY

ON AGENDA ITEM 8: ANNUAL REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL UNDER ARTICLE 166, PARAGRAPH 4, OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE LAW OF THE SEA (ISBA/30/A/2; ISBA/30/A/7/REV.1.)

21 JULY 2025

Thank you, Mr. President.

First, allow me to join you in welcoming the participation of **His Excellency Surangel Samuel Whipps Jr., the President of Palau,** and other high-level representatives.

Mr. President,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

1. I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the **African Group**. At the outset, we express our sincere appreciation to Madam Secretary-General for her comprehensive annual report, her presentation, and commend the entire Secretariat for its professionalism, efficiency, and commitment to the mission of the Authority.

2. The African Group reaffirms the foundational principle that the Area and its resources are the ***Common Heritage of Humankind***. This legal and ethical norm must be operationalized through five mutually reinforcing pillars: the peaceful use of the Area; the prohibition of appropriation including national and corporate appropriation; the preservation of the Area for future generations; the common management of resources; and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits. This principle must remain not only the legal but also the moral compass of all our work at the Authority.

3. We welcome the progress made in marine scientific research, capacity-building, and the operationalization of the Enterprise, each of which reflects the ISA's dual mandate as both regulator and promoter of equitable participation in the Area's resources. We particularly note with appreciation the Authority's increased engagement with developing States, including through national focal points, the Deep Dive learning platform, and the expansion of joint training and research centres.

4. The African Group commends the recognition of the ISA's distinct and exclusive remit within the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (**BBNJ Agreement**) and emphasizes that all governance mechanisms for areas beyond national jurisdiction must remain fully aligned with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. The Authority's jurisdiction, independence, and institutional integrity must be safeguarded.

5. On a national note, as the representative of Sierra Leone and the Coordinator of the African Group during the BBNJ negotiations, I am pleased to report that the Parliament of Sierra Leone has today ratified the BBNJ Agreement.

Returning to the African Group, Mr. President,

6. **Inclusivity** is a pillar of legitimacy. We stress the need for all member States, especially developing States, and stakeholders to the extent provided for by the Authority's framework, to participate effectively in the decision-making and substantive work of the Authority. We welcome the growing number of permanent missions to the ISA and encourage States that have not yet ratified the 1994 Agreement to do so, in order to strengthen universal participation in this legal regime.

7. We take note of the Secretary-General's report on the **restructuring of the Secretariat**, which seeks to enhance coordination, transparency, and functional efficiency without exceeding the approved budget. We, however, seek clarity on the balance between established staff and external consultants and encourage efforts to stabilize staffing through full recruitment of authorized posts. We further commend efforts to advance gender parity and urge further action on ensuring equitable geographical representation.

8. We commend the Authority's efforts to **promote gender equality**, particularly through the "See Her Exceed" mentorship programme. Increasing the participation and leadership of women in deep-sea science, technology, and policy is not only right, but also necessary for inclusive development.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

9. The **financial sustainability** of the Authority remains a concern. We commend the cost recovery mechanism applied to contractors and urge all Member States to honour their financial obligations. We particularly emphasize the critical role of the Voluntary Trust Funds in supporting the participation of developing countries, and we thank donors who continue to support these mechanisms.

10. On the **exploitation regulations**, and work of the Council, we recognize the significant progress achieved under the leadership of **Council President H.E. Duncan Muhumuza Laki of Uganda**, who

we commend. We reaffirm our commitment to constructive engagement and underscore the importance of finalizing a robust, and enforceable framework, one that upholds environmental standards, ensures benefit-sharing, and respects the dual mandate of the Authority.

Mr. President,

11. The full and functional **operationalization of the Enterprise** remains a strategic imperative for the African Group. It is the principal mechanism for ensuring developing country participation in commercial activities in the Area. We call for its immediate strengthening as a commercially oriented and autonomous organ, operating under the general policy of the Assembly and the strategic direction of the Council.

12. **Capacity-building** continues to be a top priority for the African Group. We welcome ongoing partnerships with the Indian Ocean Rim

Association and the UN Technology Bank for LDCs and applaud the Africa Deep-Seabed Resources Project. However, we remain concerned by the backlog of training obligations and the suspension of certain contractor programmes. We call on the Secretary-General to ensure compliance, revise inactive programmes, and reinforce a system of accountability.

13. We urge on all contractors and sponsoring States to honour their commitments. Programmes must be practical, transparent, gender-responsive, and inclusive of landlocked and least developed States. We encourage the use of national focal points to improve engagement and uptake.

14. As a Group, we believe responsible resource governance must be matched by strong **environmental stewardship**. The health and integrity of our oceans, already under immense threat, must be preserved. We support the development of regional environmental

management plans, environmental thresholds, and enhanced monitoring mechanisms in line with SDG 14.

15. Finally, **Mr. President,** the African Group, through the voice of Sierra Leone, reaffirms its strong support for the **memorialization of the Middle Passage**. The Atlantic seabed holds the silent memory of millions of enslaved Africans who perished during the transatlantic slave trade. In this 30th anniversary year, as we speak of heritage, justice, and stewardship, we must acknowledge this history. Memorialization within the ISA framework would be a meaningful and dignified recognition of that shared and painful legacy.

16. The African Group remains committed to working in partnership with all Member States to advance the shared goals of the Authority. Let us be guided by the enduring principle of the common heritage of humankind, by upholding equity, sustainability and solidarity.

I thank you.