PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE TO THE UNITED NATIONS

STATEMENT

BY

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AMBASSADOR AND PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE

AT THE ARRIA-FORMULA MEETING ON

"THE GLOBAL RACE FOR CRITICAL MINERALS: ADDRESSING RESOURCE-DRIVEN INSECURITY IN AFRICA"

ECOSOC CHAMBER, UNHQ

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Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Colleagues,

1. I wish to thank the briefers again for their insights and all delegations participating in this vital discussion. Sierra Leone is honoured to convene today's Arria-formula meeting with co-sponsorship from Guyana, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Liberia.

2. The global race for critical minerals risks becoming a new chapter in an old story, a story deeply etched into the fabric of Africa's modern history. The legacy of colonialism and the scramble for Africa were premised on one enduring reality: the extraction of mineral wealth from the continent without regard for the development, dignity, or sovereignty of its people.

3. From gold and ivory in the pre-colonial trade to diamonds and uranium during the Cold War, and now cobalt, coltan, and lithium in the era of energy transition, Africa has remained a source of global mineral supply, but rarely of

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equitable benefit. This historical injustice has been compounded by weak governance structures, illicit financial flows, and violent conflict.

4. It was in recognition of this imbalance that the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 1803 (XVII) on the **Permanent Sovereignty over Natural Resources**, affirming that "*the right of peoples and nations to permanent sovereignty over their natural wealth and resources must be exercised in the interest of their national development and of the well-being of the people.*"

5. That principle remains as urgent and relevant today as it was in 1962. Yet, its promise is far from realized.

Colleagues,

6. Our own history in Sierra Leone is illustrative. The illicit diamond trade, particularly during the 1990s, financed brutal rebel insurgencies and fueled a devastating civil conflict. These "blood diamonds" became a global symbol of how ungoverned resource extraction can

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fracture societies, fund atrocities, and deny States their rightful revenues.

7. But we also offer a story of reform and resilience. Through the **Kimberley Process Certification Scheme**, strong political will, and international solidarity, we undertook significant steps to curb the trade in conflict diamonds. We later joined the **Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI)** and undertook legal and institutional reforms to enhance accountability and benefit-sharing.

8. Today, Sierra Leone has established a **Sovereign Mineral Wealth Fund** to ensure that revenues from our mineral resources are transparently managed and sustainably invested for the benefit of current and future generations. We had the opportunity to share this initiative during the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development, as part of our broader strategy to align natural resource governance with long-term national development goals."

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9. While challenges remain, our experience proves that transformation is possible.

9. At the **global level**, presently, we face a new frontier of resource-driven insecurity. **Critical minerals** like lithium, cobalt, tantalum, and rare earth elements are essential to the global clean energy transition. Yet, their extraction in fragile and conflict-affected States, including those in Africa, in particular in Central Africa and the Sahel, continues to fuel violence.

10. The **Security Council,** for instance, in **Resolution 2773 (2024)**, condemned the illicit exploitation and trafficking of natural resources by armed groups and criminal networks. The Council recognized these activities as not only violations of sovereignty and international law but also as drivers of instability, State fragility, and underdevelopment.

11. Indeed, in African countries in conflict, we see the tragic irony of abundance turning into adversity. Armed groups finance their operations through illicit mining, cross-border smuggling thrives in the absence of state control, and the

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very minerals that should fund public services instead finance private wars.

12. Terrorist organizations and criminal networks are now deeply embedded in the value chains of critical minerals, particularly in the Sahel. This illicit economy thrives on porous borders, weak institutions, and lack of traceability., requiring States cooperation.

13. Multiple mechanisms seek to govern mineral extraction and trade. These include: The **Kimberley Process** for diamonds; the **ICGLR Regional Certification Mechanism** for tin, tantalum, tungsten, and gold; the **OECD Due Diligence Guidance**; and the **EITI** for transparency in the extractives sector.

14. Yet, implementation gaps persist. Corporate due diligence is still largely voluntary. Traceability systems are patchy and underfunded. Sanctions enforcement is uneven. The result is a governance regime unable to keep pace with the complexity of transnational mineral supply chains.

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15. We must therefore move beyond voluntary norms. Member States in the exercise of their sovereignty over natural resources must enact or implement binding obligations on companies to conduct supply chain due diligence and ensure that violations are met with robust accountability mechanisms, including sanctions where appropriate.

16. We call for harmonization and capacity-building to support the adoption of these standards across Africa with the consent of the States in line with the sovereignty principle. The UN system, including through peace operations, political missions, and expert panels, should play a more active role in monitoring compliance and reporting violations.

17. Sierra Leone fully supports the **Africa Mining Vision (AMV)**, the African Union's blueprint to transform the continent from a mere supplier of raw minerals to a producer of value-added products. The AMV calls for integrating mining into development strategies, formalizing

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artisanal mining, protecting the environment, and ensuring community benefit from resource revenues.

18. This is a development and peacebuilding imperative. Mineral wealth must translate into inclusive growth, not inequality; into schools and clinics, not slush funds or stockpiles of arms.

19. We also urge investment in border security, customs infrastructure, and the digitalization of regulatory systems. Development partners must support countries in building the institutions needed to oversee the sector effectively.

20. Technology can be a powerful enabler. Sierra Leone supports the deployment of **blockchain**, **satellite tracking**, and **AI-powered traceability tools** across mineral supply chains. These innovations can shed light on opaque transactions and restore public trust in how natural resources are managed.

21. Artisanal miners, especially women and youth, must not be left behind in this transition. Formalization, skills training,

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and access to markets and finance are critical to ensuring that the benefits of mineral wealth are shared broadly.

22. This is a defining moment. The clean energy transition must not replicate the extractive injustices of the past. It must be guided by principles of **equity**, **sovereignty**, and **accountability**.

23. We urge the **UN Security Council** to sustain focus on mineral-financed insecurity. Member States to support mandatory due diligence and enforcement. International financial institutions to prioritize resource governance in fragile States respecting the sovereignty principle and national ownership. And multinational corporations to align with the **UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights** and the goals of the **African Mining Vision**.

24. **In Conclusion**, the international community has a choice: allow the global race for critical minerals to become another scramble for Africa, or forge a new

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path of mutual benefit, shared prosperity, and sustainable peace.

25. Sierra Leone stands ready to work with all partners to realize this vision, one where the mineral wealth of Africa is no longer a source of conflict and exploitation, but a foundation for dignity, justice, and development.

I thank you.

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