STATEMENT

BY

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AT THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL

HIGH-LEVEL OPEN DEBATE ON

THREATS TO INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND SECURITY: CONFLICT-RELATED FOOD INSECURITY

UN SECURITY COUNCIL CHAMBER, UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS

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— **MADAM DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL,**

— **DISTINGUISHED MEMBERS OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL,**

1. I am pleased to return to this historic Chamber — for **the second time in two years during Sierra Leone's tenure on the Council**— to address an issue that tests our shared humanity and global stability: **conflict-related food insecurity**.

2. Last year, we discussed reforming this Council to make it more representative.

3. Today, we discuss how to make it more **responsive** — because even a reformed Council without moral standing will not preserve peace.

4. Sierra Leone's own history has taught us that **peace is not inherited — it is cultivated**, season by season, through peaceful settlement of dispute, justice, and equity.

5. And today, as we gather under this roof of our multilateral collective security scheme, we must remember that **hunger, too, is a form of violence — slow, silent, and corrosive.**

6. I thank **Her Excellency Deputy Secretary-General Madam Amina Mohammed**, **Assistant Secretary-General Joyce Musuya**, **Dr Ibrahim Assane Mayaki, and Mr. Maximo Torero Cullen** for their thoughtful briefings and for the leadership they continue to provide in addressing global food systems and humanitarian coordination.

DISTINGUISHED MEMBERS OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL,

7. The **Charter of the United Nations** begins with a promise "**to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war**."

8. That mandate extends beyond ending wars to **preventing the conditions that make wars inevitable**.

9. As former **UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld** warned, our task is "**to save humanity from hell**."

10. In our century, that "hell" is not only found on battlefields; it is found in **the empty bowl, the barren field, and the malnourished child.**

11. Conflict situations around the world — and the images that have filled our screens and newspapers — must convict us out of global complicity.

12. Emaciated infants clinging to life, mothers whose bodies can no longer produce milk, fathers unable to provide a single meal for their families, and children who brave siege and bombardment in search of food — only to lose their lives to unexploded ordnance — are not distant tragedies; they are moral failures of our collective humanity.

13. From **Gaza to the Sahel, from Sudan to Ukraine, and in parts of Haiti**, hunger has been weaponised — a silent siege that kills long after the guns fall silent.

14. It corrodes social cohesion, fuels displacement, and when combined with exclusion and despair, can ignite instability.

15. In **Africa**, the world's youngest region — where over 60 percent of the population is under 25 — rising expectations without opportunity or nourishment can quickly turn hope into unrest.

16. This is why Sierra Leone has called for this debate: to affirm that **food security is peace security**, not a secondary humanitarian issue.

DISTINGUISHED MEMBERS OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL,

17. I wish to highlight three main points:

18. My **first point - starvation is not collateral damage; it is a crime**.

19. International law prohibits the starvation of civilians as a method of warfare.

20. **Resolution 2417 (2018)** condemns its use; **Resolution 2573 (2021)** demands the protection of agricultural land, water, and energy infrastructure indispensable to civilian survival.

21. The **Geneva Conventions** and the **Rome Statute** classify deliberate starvation as a **war crime.**

22. The framework exists; what is **lacking is compliance and enforcement**.

23. This Council must ensure **unimpeded humanitarian access**, predictable **deconfliction mechanisms**, and the removal of **blockades and bureaucratic impediments** that **turn hunger into a weapon**.

24. Early-warning systems must track how conflict disrupts production, storage, markets, and transport so that **early warning leads to early action.**

25. The **Black Sea Grain Initiative** demonstrated that dialogue, even amid conflict, can sustain vital supply lines.

26. Above all, there must be **accountability.**

27. When civilians are deliberately starved, **perpetrators — State or non-State —** must face consequences.

28. No ambition can justify starving a child or destroying a harvest. The law forbids it. Our conscience forbids it.

EXCELLENCIES, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

29. My **second point** is that **food Insecurity must be viewed through the lens of a driver of conflict, as well as a peacebuilding imperative.**

30. Conflict destroys food systems — fields are mined or burned, livestock stolen or lost, roads and ports are blocked, markets shuttered, prices spike beyond reach — while **hunger deepens grievance and fuels renewed violence**.

31. This cruel cycle is evident in **Sudan, the Sahel, eastern DRC, Gaza, Yemen, and Haiti**, where food insecurity has reached catastrophic levels.

32. **There can be no sustainable peace on an empty stomach.**

33. **Food security must therefore be integral to peacebuilding**, not an afterthought.

34. **Peace agreements** must protect food systems and guarantee humanitarian access.

35. Post-conflict recovery must restore livelihoods — through seeds, tools, feeder roads, and access to markets.

36. Women and youth must be central to this transformation — as producers, traders, and innovators — because when families can plant, harvest, and sell in peace, reconciliation becomes real and durable.

DISTINGUISHED MEMBERS OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL,

37. My **third point**, which relates to the **peace and development nexus**, and as **President of Sierra Leone**, I bring to this agenda our own national experience — our **Feed Salone Initiative** — as both a local model and a regional contribution to the global pursuit of peace through food security.

38. Sierra Leone's experience teaches that **peace must be fed — literally and figuratively — every season.**

39. Our flagship **national development initiative**, **Feed Salone**, places food security at the heart of national development.

40. It aims to raise productivity, reduce import dependence, create rural jobs, and build climate resilience.

41. The Programme stands on **FOUR PILLARS**:

42. FIRST is PRODUCTION, which involves access to seeds, mechanisation, irrigation, and research.

43. **The SECOND pillar is RESILIENCE,** focusing on climate-smart practices and land restoration.

44. **The THIRD pillar is MARKETS AND VALUE CHAINS,** involving rural infrastructure, processing, and finance.

45. **The FOURTH pillar is HUMAN CAPITAL,** which involves empowering women and youth, improving nutrition, and linking protection to productivity.

46. Our goal is not merely to grow food, but to **grow peace** — putting livelihoods in people's

hands, dignity in their homes, and hope in their communities.

47. **Sierra Leone** is also advancing regional cooperation on early warning, strategic reserves, and trade facilitation so that **grain can move when people need it most.**

48. As **Chair of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government,** Sierra Leone's voice carries the shared aspirations of a region determined to transform its challenges into opportunities.

49. From the **Sahel to the Atlantic**, **ECOWAS Member States** are integrating food security into peacebuilding, climate adaptation, and trade frameworks.

50. The **ECOWAS Regional Food Security Reserve** and our **Early Warning and Response Network (ECOWARN)** are being expanded to anticipate crises, coordinate humanitarian corridors, and stabilise markets.

51. These efforts are part of a continental commitment under the **African Union's Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP)** and the **Malabo Declaration on Agricultural Transformation.**

52. We commend the **United Nations agencies, international financial institutions, and private-sector partners** whose innovations and investments continue to sustain millions.

53. Together, we must now move from fragmented responses to a **coordinated global food security compact.**

EXCELLENCIES,

54. Intentions must now become implementation.

55. I propose **SIX CONCRETE ACTIONS** as part of a solution-driven approach:

I. **Protect Food Systems in Conflict.** Integrate protection of civilian food assets — such as fields, herds, storage facilities, mills, and sources of water and energy for agriculture — into Council mandates and sanctions regimes.

Have **standard language in Council documents, mandates, and sanctions criteria**. The Council must also ensure the implementation and compliance with its resolutions, including **Resolution 2417 (2018)**.

II. **Institutionalise Early Warning.** This requires regular, integrated UN reporting on the impacts of conflict on food systems and humanitarian access, enabling the Council to act before famine occurs.

III. **Safeguard Access and Deconfliction Mechanisms.** Condemn and sanction the obstruction of humanitarian relief, as well as the diversion and deliberate withholding of food aid as a tactic of war. Support predictable, needs-based humanitarian corridors and ensure deconfliction.

IV. **Advance Accountability.** Promote impartial investigations into starvation crimes; support the integration of starvation prohibitions into domestic law; and, when appropriate, allow accountability measures to proceed.

V. **Link Peacebuilding Finance to Food Security.** Ensure that peacebuilding strategies and financing instruments prioritise livelihoods, rural infrastructure, and climate-smart agriculture as essential peace dividends, rather than optional extras.

VI. Lastly, **promote women and youth empowerment** by supporting programs that enhance land tenure, access to finance, skills training, and market opportunities for young agricultural entrepreneurs, transforming potential conflicts into foundations of stability.

EXCELLENCIES,

56. Starvation is never a natural outcome of conflict — it is a choice — a choice to break the law and betray our shared humanity.

57. This Council has the duty to deter that choice and to hold violators to account.

58. Sierra Leone's voice in this Council is that of a nation that has journeyed from fragility to stability — and of a region that continues to choose dialogue over division.

59. As **President of Sierra Leone**, I have witnessed the power of principled engagement, even in difficult times.

60. We may not always have the same interests, but we must always defend the same humanity.

61. Africa is not here to be pitied for its challenges but to be **partnered for its solutions.**

62. Our Continent holds **60 percent of the world's arable land**, the **youngest population**, and the **greatest potential for innovation in sustainable agriculture**.

63. What we need is not sympathy, but solidarity — to **unlock Africa's power to feed itself and to help feed the world**.

64. Preventing tomorrow's wars requires treating **food security as central to peace and security**, not peripheral to it.

65. Sierra Leone will continue to do its part: through **Feed Salone** at home, through **ECOWAS** in our region, and through **principled, bridge-building leadership** in this Council.

66. Let us reaffirm faith in the **multilateral system** as the only credible platform to prevent starvation, uphold international law, and preserve our shared humanity.

67. Together, let us ensure that **no child is starved into submission, no harvest held hostage, and no community driven to violence by hunger.**

68. If we align our **laws with our conscience**, our **mandates with the needs of people**, and our **resources with the scale of the challenge**, we will redeem the Charter's promise to succeeding generations.

69. Let us plant the seeds of justice, water them with compassion, and guard them with courage — so that **peace may take root not only in our resolutions, but in the daily lives of those we serve.**

70. For peace is not a season; it is a covenant we must renew with every act of humanity.

I THANK YOU.