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

STATEMENT

BY

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AT THE

UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL BRIEFING ON THREATS TO INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND SECURITY: CLIMATE AND SECURITY - "ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF ARMED CONFLICT AND CLIMATE-DRIVEN SECURITY RISKS"

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Excellencies, Members of the Security Council,

1. I thank **Under-Secretary-General Inger Andersen**, Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP); **Professor Charles Chernor Jalloh**, Member of the International Law Commission; and **Ms. Maranatha Dinat**, World Relief Haiti, for their deeply informative and thought-provoking briefings.

2. On this **International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflict** (6 November), the briefings are not only timely, they have also confirmed that the environmental impact of armed conflict as well as the escalating security risks driven by climate change demand the immediate and sustained attention of the Security Council. These are not only humanitarian or ecological concerns, as they bear directly and immediately on the maintenance of international peace and security.

3. In reflecting on Sierra Leone's journey, for instance, when the guns fell silent in 2002 after a decade of conflict, our primary forests and savannahs also fell silent. We witnessed loss of biodiversity, the forced migration of wildlife, and the abandonment of agricultural fields and swamps, all direct consequences of the armed conflict.

4. Only twenty years ago, UN assessments warned starkly about biodiversity loss and environmental decline in Sierra Leone. Today, by contrast, we can point to hopeful signs. In 2025, UNESCO recognized **Tiwai Island and Gola Forest as UNESCO World Heritage Sites**, the first in Sierra Leone, and a triumph of conservation and nurture that underscores how environmental restoration, when integrated into peacebuilding, can yield lasting stability.

5. Our experience is regrettably not unique. From scorched-earth tactics to the long-term consequences of nuclear testing and the widespread use of explosive weapons in urban areas, history records of the severe environmental toll of warfare. International law has progressively acknowledged these realities. Jurisprudence and advisory opinions have recognized environmental considerations in the conduct of hostilities and post-conflict responsibility, while contemporary cases have addressed remediation and compensation for environmental harm.

6. Today, multiple international bodies are clarifying and further developing the applicable rules. The **International Law Commission's** Draft Principles on the Protection of the Environment in Relation to Armed Conflicts (PERAC) provide practical guidance across the conflict cycle. The **International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea** and the **International Court of Justice** have illuminated States' obligations relevant to environmental protection, in particular sea-level rise and climate-change.

7. The **UN General Assembly** observes 6 November as the International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflict. **UNEA** resolutions and the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework reinforce the imperative of prevention, remediation, and resilient recovery.

8. Incidentally, the Security Council has also acknowledged climate- and environment-related security risks across several dossiers and thematic discussions, encouraging risk assessment and mitigation consistent with international humanitarian and human rights law.

Members of the Council,

9. Across regions, we regrettably see patterns of harm to the environment in ongoing conflicts despite the cited efforts by international bodies. Conflicts contaminate air, water, and soil; destroy agricultural land and ecosystems; and erode governance. The remnants of war, mines, unexploded ordnance, and toxic debris, compound risk, while climate change magnifies vulnerability.

10. These dynamics intensify fragility, drive displacement, and heighten food insecurity from the Sahel and the Great Lakes to Sudan to Ukraine's damaged industrial and agricultural landscapes, warranting attention by the Security Council.

11. UNEP and other assessments indicate that since 7 October 2023, the escalation in Gaza has driven severe, wide-ranging environmental degradation. Water systems have collapsed, allowing raw sewage to contaminate land and the coastal aquifer; soil compaction and millions of tonnes of hazardous rubble have left vast areas infertile; air quality has deteriorated from the burning of waste and debris; and solid-waste management has effectively ceased.

12. Gaza's biodiversity and vegetation have been decimated, tree crops, shrublands, and food-producing land destroyed, heightening the risk of long-term desertification. These shocks are intensifying the humanitarian crisis, fueling waterborne disease, deepening food insecurity, and compromising public health.

13. The scale and character of the damage raise serious concerns under international humanitarian law, which prohibits warfare expected to cause widespread, long-term, and severe harm to the environment. Absent urgent, coordinated recovery, safe debris clearance, soil and water remediation, and ecological restoration, Gaza faces a protracted environmental emergency that will endanger civilians and impede sustainable recovery for years to come.

Accordingly, what more can the Council do? Sierra Leone offers the following points:

14. Firstly, on **mainstreaming risk in Council practice.** The Security Council should systematically integrate conflict-linked environmental and climate risks into mandates, Secretary-General's reports, political guidance, and mission planning. This includes environmental risk analysis, mine action linked to agricultural recovery, and nature-based stabilization. Early-warning and climate-security assessments should identify hotspots, such as the Sahel and the Horn of Africa, where environmental pressures threaten to ignite or prolong conflict.

15. Secondly, **on ensuring a coherent international architecture.** We recognize that UN Climate Change Conferences meet to measure progress and negotiate multilateral responses to climate change. The Conference of Parties processes address political and financing dimensions of climate action. Complementing these, courts and tribunals, including the ICJ and ITLOS, have clarified State obligations with environmental implications, while the ILC has codified and progressively developed norms through PERAC. The Security Council must play its part on the security-related aspects, ensuring a multidimensional and effective response that bridges peace and security, humanitarian action, development, and the rule of law.

16. Thirdly**, on protecting the natural environment under international law, including IHL.** Parties to conflict must be reminded of their obligations to protect the natural environment. We underline the robust legal framework, customary and conventional IHL, international human rights law, and the progressive guidance in PERAC, applicable before, during, and after armed conflict. We encourage the Council to promote pre-deployment environmental training for peacekeepers, operational guidelines that minimize ecological harm, and context-specific environmental management plans for missions.

17. Fourthly**, implementation and accountability.** Sierra Leone supports enhanced cooperation to monitor, document, and remediate environmental damage, including capacity-building for data collection, environmental forensics, and transparent reporting. We note emerging discussions on recognizing **ecocide** as a serious international crime and encourage continued reflection on accountability pathways consistent with international law. Implementation of IHL and PERAC principles should be mainstreamed through training, reporting, and information-sharing across the UN system and field presences.

18. Fifthly, **from debris to resilient recovery.** Safe debris management, hazardous-waste handling, and resilient reconstruction are critical to public health and environmental

recovery after conflict. The UN system and partners should help conflict-affected countries adopt minimum standards for debris and waste, water and sanitation, and urban reconstruction, aligned with disaster-risk reduction frameworks and relevant UNEA resolutions. Investment in local technologies and community-driven approaches strengthens sustainability and ownership.

19. Sixthly, **on financing what we mandate.** Predictable, accessible financing is urgently needed for environmental remediation and climate adaptation in fragile and conflict-affected settings. We call for deeper partnerships among UNEP, DPPA, DPO, UNDP, OCHA, regional organizations, international financial institutions, and climate funds to align resources for remediation, stabilization, and adaptation. Flexible windows in the Green Climate Fund and other mechanisms should enable post-conflict countries to access financing for restoration, resilience, and clean-energy transitions.

20. Alongside these tracks, we wish to highlight practical actions, including to invest in national adaptation and mitigation strategies that safeguard livelihoods and natural resources; support for climate-resilient and regenerative agriculture backed by robust early-warning systems; and to fully mainstream environmental considerations into UN conflict prevention, mediation, peacekeeping and peacebuilding so that peace agreements and political processes address resource-based drivers of insecurity;

and foster local dialogue and cooperation among communities competing for scarce land and water.

21. Strengthening the UN Climate Security Mechanism and regional frameworks and expanding the deployment of Climate Security Advisers to missions where climate and security risks intersect, will enable tailored, context-specific interventions.

22. In closing, Sierra Leone emphasizes that protecting the environment during armed conflict is not an optional act of goodwill. It is a legal, moral, and strategic imperative. Environmental protection is not peripheral to peace. It is central to sustaining it.

23. The Security Council has an essential role in ensuring that conflict-related environmental risks are addressed within prevention, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding mandates. Our capacity to act decisively and coherently across humanitarian, development, and security pillars will determine whether we bequeath a more stable and sustainable world.

I thank you.