



**OPENING ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY
DR JULIUS MAADA BIO PRESIDENT OF
THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE AT THE
HIGH-LEVEL SEMINAR ON ILLEGAL
MINING IN THE ECOWAS REGION
FREETOWN, SIERRA LEONE -
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 31st, 2024**

**Speaker of the Sierra Leone Parliament,
Speaker of the ECOWAS Parliament,
Madam First Lady,
ECOWAS Commissioner for Infrastructure, Energy and
Digitalisation,
Ministers of the Government of Sierra Leone,
Your Excellencies, Ambassadors accredited to ECOWAS and the
Republic of Sierra Leone,
Representatives of International and Inter-African
Organisations,
Members of the Sierra Leone Parliament,
Bureau of the ECOWAS Parliament,
Members of the ECOWAS Parliament,
Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,
GOOD MORNING.**

- 1.** On behalf of the Government and people of Sierra Leone, I warmly welcome you all to our beautiful country, and particularly to our vibrant capital, Freetown.
- 2.** Sierra Leone is a country of breathtaking landscapes, including our beautiful beaches, diverse cultures and traditions. We are known for our warm hospitality and friendliness.
- 3.** We welcome you with open arms and wish you a pleasant stay. I implore you to explore the sites and sample our delicious dishes, particularly our famous “cassava leaves” and, of course, “Sierra Leone jollof rice”, which is the best in West Africa!
- 4. Honourable Members,** I take this opportunity to reiterate my gratitude to the ECOWAS Parliament for its invaluable support in strengthening the democratic process and good governance in the sub-region in general and in our country in particular.
- 5.** The dispatch of a mission to observe the General Elections on June 24, 2023, in our country provided a sufficient guarantee to the political players for transparent, inclusive and peaceful elections.

6. Also, I commend this Parliament's contribution to the promotion of peace, security and stability in the West African region under the abled leadership of the 5th Legislature.
7. I am particularly pleased to preside over the opening of the ECOWAS Parliament's 1st Parliamentary Seminar for 2024 and the last in the tenure of the 5th Legislature.
8. The theme for this August gathering, "**Illegal mining and its consequences in the ECOWAS region**", is timely.
9. Illegal mining and trafficking in precious minerals negatively impact peace, stability, security, development, governance, the rule of law, the environment and the economy.
10. Our sub-region has contended with illegal mining even before our nations gained their independence. Therefore, I thank the ECOWAS Parliament for organising this workshop, which underscores the importance of collective action in addressing challenges that transcend borders.

Honourable Members, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

11. Hosting the final Parliamentary Seminar of the current Legislature of the ECOWAS Parliament in Sierra Leone marks a full-circle moment.
12. If you may recall, the 1st Parliamentary Seminar of the 5th Legislature was held in Sierra Leone from March 23 to 24, 2021.
13. This was the first face-to-face event that brought together all the Members of the ECOWAS Parliament following the lifting of the COVID-19 restrictions.
14. Immediately after that Seminar, the Parliament continued its activities in our beautiful capital, with the work of the 1st Extraordinary Session of the year from March 29 to April 02, 2021.

15. At that session, Members analysed and adopted the reports of the committees and validated several major documents, including the Parliament's Strategic Plan.
16. **Honorable Members**, through your legislative activities and actions in Sierra Leone and other Member States, you have made invaluable contributions to achieving the Community's integration and development objectives as articulated in the **ECOWAS Vision 2050**.
17. You have equally strengthened democracy and good governance in our Member States. On behalf of my colleagues, Heads of State, please accept the expression of my deepest gratitude for your dedication and tenacity to our people during these unprecedented times in our sub-region, Continent and globally.

Honourable Members, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

18. Our Continent possesses over 60 different types of minerals, accounting for a third of the world's mineral reserves.
19. The ECOWAS region is richly endowed with abundant reserves of a large variety of non-renewable natural resources comprising mineral resources (including gold, uranium, bauxite, iron ore, diamonds, phosphate and manganese), crude oil and natural gas. These extractive resources account for a significant portion of Africa's proven assets.
20. Mining and other extractive industries have the potential to transform economies. The Extractives Industry sub-sector is the main source of Government revenues in many of our countries, and it accounts for more than half of all exports.
21. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the illegal mining of precious minerals is the prospecting and extraction of minerals with high economic value, undertaken without appropriate land rights, exploration and mining licenses or mineral transportation and other permits.

22. Illegal mining of precious minerals is often accompanied by serious human rights abuses and can have severe environmental impacts, including deforestation, land degradation and pollution.
23. Illegal mining and trafficking of precious minerals are often linked to economic crimes, such as tax evasion, fraud and corruption, by exploiting loopholes in regulatory frameworks.
24. Due to the high profits associated with precious minerals and the often-low risks of being arrested or prosecuted, organised criminal groups are exploiting this sector.
25. Hence, as policymakers, we must make concerted efforts to strengthen further the legal and regulatory frameworks to curb illegal mining significantly.
26. I express my appreciation to all participating nations and stakeholders for their commitment to finding sustainable solutions to combat illegal mining.

Honourable Members, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

27. There is immense economic potential in our mineral resources if managed effectively. There are lucrative opportunities for the future development of new uranium deposits in Niger; iron ore in Guinea and Senegal; bauxite in Guinea; gold in Mali, Ghana and Burkina Faso; and even phosphate in Mauritania.
28. These mineral resources contribute up to 5% of regional exports, making them the main or second source of foreign exchange earners for many West African countries.
29. Togo, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania and Niger are all examples of countries that depend heavily on mineral exports.
30. But it must be said that all this wealth has not yet led to the economic emergence of the West African region for several reasons, the principal of which is illegal mining.

31. The losses to West Africa's economies resulting from illegal mining amount to millions of dollars every year. These losses are further compounded by the lack of agricultural land, pollution, environmental degradation, and the challenges posed by rising insecurity through banditry and insurgency, as well as the financing of terrorism.
32. For this reason, the theme of this final seminar of the 5th Legislature, "**Illegal mining and its consequences in the ECOWAS region**", is timely in recommending solutions to put an end to this scourge, which is seriously damaging our countries at every level.
33. In Sierra Leone, we have witnessed firsthand the devastating effects of illegal mining. Our once pristine landscapes have been marred by unregulated mining activities, leading to deforestation, water pollution and loss of biodiversity.
34. Moreover, illegal mining deprives our Government of much-needed revenue and aggravates social tensions within our communities.
35. However, we are not alone in facing this challenge. Illegal mining is a transnational issue that requires a coordinated regional response. That is why forums like this are crucial for fostering collaboration and sharing best practices among ECOWAS Member States.
36. **Honourable Members**, in Sierra Leone, we are taking decisive actions to tackle illegal mining head-on. We are intensifying efforts to streamline the licensing process, enhance monitoring mechanisms, and clamp down on illegal mining operations.
37. Additionally, we are investing in education and skills development programs to provide viable alternatives to those involved in illegal mining.
38. However, we recognise that no single country can address this complex issue alone. We must work hand in hand with our regional partners, sharing best practices, intelligence, and resources to combat illegal mining across borders effectively.

39. The ECOWAS Parliament plays a crucial role in facilitating such cooperation, and I urge all Member States to strengthen their commitment to collective action.
40. As we deliberate over the next few days, I urge you all to reflect on the importance of collective action. We must strengthen our legal frameworks, enhance cross-border cooperation, and invest in sustainable mining practices that benefit our economies and the environment.
41. Furthermore, we must address the root causes that drive individuals into illegal mining, such as poverty, lack of alternative livelihoods, and weak governance.
42. By promoting inclusive growth and empowering local communities, we can create opportunities for economic development while safeguarding our natural resources for future generations.

Honourable Members, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

43. I am fully convinced that, from the presentations and fruitful debates of this seminar, recommendations will emerge that will accelerate the implementation of regional policy frameworks to eradicate illegal mining in West Africa and strengthen areas of regional collaboration for a viable mining sector.
44. I challenge you as a Parliament to come up with resounding conclusions that would contribute immensely towards addressing the unacceptable poverty levels in the region through the proper exploitation of our richly endowed mineral resources for the benefit of all.

Honourable Members, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

45. Let me at this juncture single out for mentioning and commendation, the Speaker of the Parliament, the Right Honourable Dr. Sidie Mohamed

Tunis. An accomplished businessman, politician and an experienced law maker, Dr. Tunis has done us proud.

46. The various initiatives of the Institution under his leadership have remained unprecedented and unmatched in the history of the ECOWAS Parliament.
47. The Government and the great people of Sierra Leone are proud of you because you have demonstrated your capabilities as a worthy Ambassador of Sierra Leone and the region in general.
48. I am aware that the 5th Legislature of the ECOWAS Parliament, comes to an end in less than two months. I feel pleased that my endorsement of Dr. Tunis as Speaker of the 5th Legislature yielded fruitful results for our region.
49. I thank you, Right Honorable Speaker, for the surge in the Parliament's visibility and, most importantly, for making the Parliament more accessible to the people of the community.
50. I can only hope that the leadership of the next Legislature will continue on this path of progress for the good of the Parliament and the overall good of our region.
51. With these few words, I **declare open the Parliamentary Seminar on Illegal Mining and its Consequences in the ECOWAS region.**
52. I wish you all fruitful deliberations.

LONG LIVE ECOWAS. I THANK YOU.