NATIONAL STATEMENT BY

HIS EXCELLENCY DR. JULIUS MAADA BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE

AT

THE GENERAL DEBATE OF THE 80TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

HIGH LEVEL WEEK

ON

24th SEPTEMBER 2025

UNGA HALL

PRESIDENT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY,

SECRETARY-GENERAL,

EXCELLENCIES,

DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

I congratulate Her Excellency Annalena Baerbock on her election as President of the General Assembly to lead this historic 80th Session of the Assembly.

I thank her predecessor, His Excellency Philémon Yang, for his distinguished leadership during the 79th Session.

I commend Secretary-General António Guterres for his steadfast commitment to the ideals of the United Nations during these increasingly turbulent times.

PRESIDENT,

It is both an honour and a solemn responsibility to address this Assembly at the 80th anniversary of the United Nations.

This assembly of nations is not just ceremonial. It is a call for the world's conscience to act with unity, determination, and vision.

Our theme — "Better Together: 80 Years and More for Peace, Development and Human Rights" — both celebrates and summons.

It reminds us that cooperation delivers progress.

It also demands that we re-imagine multilateralism so that peace, dignity, and equality are not promises on paper but realities in people's lives.

This anniversary is not a time for complacency, but for courageous renewal.

Today, we face deepening inequalities, climate crises, geopolitical fragmentation, technological disruption, and entrenched conflicts.

No nation can meet these challenges alone.

We need bold multilateralism and a United Nations that is not only reformed but reinvigorated.

The UN must be more than a meeting place. It must be a working place — for peace, for people, for our planet.

PRESIDENT,

Sierra Leone is a Small State that has relied on the UN Charter and now helps to uphold it.

We speak with independence and conviction because we have lived the cost of its absence.

I also serve as Chair of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government, and Coordinator of the African Union Committee of Ten Heads of States and Government on Security Council Reform (C-10).

For both myself and the people of Sierra Leone, these roles are not just titles; they are responsibilities.

They reflect Sierra Leone's conviction that principled multilateralism is the surest defence of law, equity, and peace.

Since 1945, the Charter's promises of sovereign equality, non-aggression, and human dignity have been the bedrock for Small States like ours.

In 1961, when Sierra Leone first addressed this Assembly, our founding Prime Minister, Sir Milton Margai, pledged that our voice would be independent and principled — guided not by bitterness, but by conviction. That pledge remains our compass.

We stand for justice and equality. We uphold the right of all peoples to self-determination.

We speak truth to power and act in defence of humanity and the rule of law.

Small states are not inherently small. Our sovereignty is equal, and our responsibilities are the same.

Leadership is not the loudest voice in the room. It is the clearest voice for justice.

PRESIDENT,

Our current term on the UN Security Council has deepened these convictions.

Guided by the Charter, we have championed peace through dialogue, upheld international law, and promoted prevention as the first duty of collective security.

We have supported efforts to stabilise the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, de-escalate tensions in the Middle East, and support political transitions in Lebanon and Syria for peace and stability.

We have also seen the Security Council's limits — its paralysis in the face of grave human suffering.

Nowhere has this failure been more heart-wrenching than in Gaza.

A preventable genocide was not prevented. Mass starvation that could have been avoided was not avoided.

A broadly supported two-State solution is being obstructed by division and inaction.

We therefore welcome all Member States that have recently announced their long overdue recognition of the State of Palestine.

Yet much more remains to be done: we must bring an end to the war and ensure the release of all hostages and prisoners.

Sierra Leone has not wavered. We have spoken with independence, voted with principle, and pressed for urgent action to end atrocities and revive hope.

We say again: Ceasefire now in Gaza! Ceasefire now in Sudan! Ceasefire now in Ukraine!

These are not just slogans; they are calls to conscience; calls to action.

They are echoes of the UN's founding pledge to "save succeeding generations from the scourge of war."

A veto should never be a verdict against humanity.

PRESIDENT,

Across the world, the UN's authority and legitimacy are being tested.

Selective adherence to international law; disregard for Security Council and General Assembly resolutions; deprivation of funding; attacks on peacekeepers and humanitarian workers; disinformation that corrodes trust; and an over-reliance on unilateral action.

For countries like Sierra Leone, this is not an abstract debate. We know what a working United Nations means.

At our darkest hour, during one of the most brutal civil conflicts in modern history, the UN stood by our side.

The United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) — one of the largest peacekeeping operations of its time —helped disarm over 75,000 combatants, restore civilian governance, and support democratic elections.

The Special Court for Sierra Leone and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, both backed by the UN, ensured justice and reconciliation.

When the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL) closed in 2014, it signalled something rare in our world — a successful transition from war to peace.

We saw Blue Helmets on our streets. We saw ballots returned to our citizens' hands. We saw our nation breathe again.

When the UN works, lives are saved. When it fails, lives are lost.

We must ensure the UN delivers for all. To do so, we must:

respect and implement UN decisions;

protect those who serve under the UN flag;

invest in prevention and peacebuilding; and

reform the Security Council so its authority and legitimacy match today's world.

The United Nations cannot protect the vulnerable if it cannot protect its own authority.

As a nation, Sierra Leone does its part and contributes troops to peacekeeping missions.

We serve as an elected Security Council Member and offer our experience in peacebuilding to the world.

Sierra Leone's story is proof that multilateral solidarity works — when grounded in trust, mutual respect, and genuine investment in national ownership.

PRESIDENT,

Peace is inseparable from development. In Sierra Leone, our Medium-Term National Development Plan, aligned with the SDGs and the African Union's Agenda 2063, prioritises people-centred growth.

We are transforming our agricultural sector to ensure food security. We are investing in a digital economy that fosters inclusion and innovation.

We are deepening investments in human capital development through Free Quality Education, and in healthcare, particularly maternal and child health.

We are expanding renewable energy to support industrialisation and climate resilience.

Climate change is an existential threat to Sierra Leone.

Our Greenhouse Gas emissions are negligible, yet our people and our wide coast bear the costs — erosion, flooding, and pressure on food systems and fisheries.

We have mainstreamed climate adaptation and strengthened disaster preparedness.

In fulfilment of the commitment made at the Third United Nations Oceans Conference, Sierra Leone has ratified the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Treaty.

As the 60th State to deposit its instrument of ratification, Sierra Leone is proud of the collective endeavour to trigger the entry into force of the BBNJ Treaty — a historic milestone for multilateralism and the collective stewardship of our ocean commons.

We urge all countries to do the same so the high seas and the Area are governed for the common good.

Climate justice is not charity. It is a legal and moral responsibility.

If the poorest are left to pay the highest climate price, there is no justice.

Developed nations must honour their commitments: $100 billion per year in climate finance, technology transfer, and capacity building.

We welcome the International Court of Justice's Advisory Opinion on Climate Change, affirming states' obligations to prevent environmental harm and to protect future generations.

In that spirit, Sierra Leone is proud to present the candidature of Professor Dr. Charles Chernor Jalloh to the International Court of Justice — a distinguished jurist and tireless advocate for the rule of law. We respectfully solicit the support of all Member States in the November 12 elections this year.

PRESIDENT,

As Chair of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government, I proudly note our Community's 50th anniversary.

For five decades, ECOWAS has embodied regional integration and collective security, often acting decisively when others hesitated.

ECOWAS moved early in Sierra Leone's peace process — before and alongside the UN — to end our civil conflict.

It has done so in Liberia, the Gambia, and elsewhere to defend democracy and stabilise the region.

These are African solutions to African challenges — open to global partnership, anchored in regional legitimacy and trust.

Partnership with Africa must move from promise to practice.

As Chair of the ECOWAS Authority, I recently embarked on a regional tour, including a second visit to Burkina Faso in two years. This was to demonstrate solidarity and rebuild trust between ECOWAS Member States and the Alliance of Sahelian States.

I commend the leadership of Burkina Faso for its willingness to engage, and I look forward to continued dialogue with the leadership of both Mali and Niger.

In my role as Chair of the ECOWAS Authority, I have placed emphasis on:

Advancing and safeguarding democratic governance, with a strong commitment to upholding constitutional order and reflecting the people's will.

Countering terrorism and strengthening our regional security architecture, including operationalising the ECOWAS Standby Force and implementing counter-terrorism strategies.

Enhancing economic integration by promoting trade liberalisation, developing cross-border infrastructure, and advancing towards a common ECOWAS currency.

Strengthening the credibility of institutions through reforms that promote transparency, efficiency, and services focused on citizens.

We urge the United Nations to deepen its partnership with ECOWAS and other African regional mechanisms, in the spirit of Chapter VIII of the UN Charter.

Africa is not a problem to be solved. Africa is a partner to be empowered.

PRESIDENT,

During Sierra Leone's tenure as an Elected Member of the Security Council (2024–2025), we have highlighted the urgent security challenges in West Africa and the Sahel, where terrorism and violent extremism transcend borders and destabilise the entire region.

However, Africa's lack of permanent representation continues to hinder the Council's ability to act decisively and contextually.

We have advocated for a comprehensive approach to counter-terrorism in the Sahel — linking security with development, governance reforms, and regional cooperation, and strengthening the UN–AU–ECOWAS partnership.

Too often, however, the Council's response has been hindered by narrow geopolitical interests, delaying action that could have saved lives.

Our experience confirms a clear truth: lasting peace requires inclusivity, ownership, and legitimacy.

The Council's structural imbalance undermines its credibility and must be addressed to ensure the safeguarding of collective security.

PRESIDENT,

In my capacity as Coordinator of the African Union Committee of Ten on Security Council Reforms, I speak on behalf of a Continent still excluded from permanent representation on the Council.

Africa, home to 1.3 billion people and the largest regional bloc in the United Nations, still has no Permanent Seat.

This is unjust and untenable. It undermines the credibility of the Council and the legitimacy of its decisions.

The Common African Position, expressed in the Ezulwini Consensus and Sirte Declaration, calls for:

At least two permanent seats for Africa, with full rights and perogatives, including the veto if retained; and

Two additional Non-Permanent Seats.

This is not a request. It is a demand for equity. It is a test of the UN's commitment to fairness and its own Charter.

During our Security Council presidency in August last year (2024), we gave this issue unprecedented prominence.

As we mark the 80th anniversary of the United Nations and the 20th anniversary of the Ezulwini Consensus and Sirte Declaration, let this be the moment that the International Community answers Africa's call.

Let us not pass on to the next generation a Security Council that fails to reflect the world it serves.

PRESIDENT,

The United Nations at 80 must look forward.

Sierra Leone stands ready — committed to principled multilateralism, to speaking with independence and conviction, and to working for justice, solidarity, and the dignity of all peoples.

Let this anniversary be a turning point —measured not in speeches, but in service; not in declarations, but in delivery.

Let us build a United Nations more representative, more responsive, and more resilient.

The world does not need a louder UN. It requires a braver UN. Now is the time to make the UN work for all.

Together, let us forge a future of peace, shared prosperity, and human dignity. For in unity, we are not only better — we are stronger.

THANK YOU!