



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

STATEMENT

BY

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EMBASSY OF SIERRA LEONE IN BELGIUM**

**AT THE ASSEMBLY OF STATES PARTIES TO THE ROME STATUTE OF
THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT TWENTY-THIRD
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**UNDER AGENDA ITEM 8
“GENERAL DEBATE”**

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(Please check against delivery)

**Madam President,
Honourable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,**

1. I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Attorney-General and Minister of Justice of the Republic of Sierra Leone.

Madam President,

2. At this critical juncture for international law and criminal justice, amidst the paradoxes we face and the urgency to protect the gains made, the Republic of Sierra Leone reaffirms its unwavering commitment to the International Criminal Court (“Court” or “ICC”), international criminal justice, and the Rome Statute system.

3. The unprecedented external attacks and threats against the Court, its officials, and those cooperating with it, strike at the very integrity of international law and criminal

justice. These attacks, though not new, reflect an increasingly complex and volatile global environment in which the ICC operates. This moment demands not only sober reflection on the challenges the ICC faces but also a unified and resolute response from all States Parties to the Rome Statute.



4. Sierra Leone, having experienced its own painful journey of conflict and reconciliation, understands the transformative role of international justice in healing wounds and preventing future atrocities. Our commitment to the ICC and the principles of the Rome Statute remains steadfast. However, we must also acknowledge the formidable obstacles standing in the way of accountability.




5. In this context, the principle of universality, justice applied impartially and without fear or favor, is being tested. If we, as States Parties, fail to uphold our collective responsibilities, we risk reducing the Court to an institution of limited reach and influence. It is our duty to ensure that the ICC remains independent, impartial, transparent, and free from political interference.

6. Given the troubling developments in conflict zones across all regions, the ICC's ability to investigate and prosecute crimes within its jurisdiction has never been more crucial. We must, therefore, reaffirm our steadfast commitment to the principles of the Rome Statute and demonstrate unyielding support for the ICC's independence, its fight against impunity, and its mission to deliver justice to those who have suffered the most egregious violations of international law.




Madam President,



7. The external threats against the Court and its officials are a direct result of the Court fulfilling its mandate. Rather than attacking the Court, we must commend its leadership and staff for their dedication to this crucial task. Sierra Leone commends **President Judge Timoke Akane** and the presidency of the Court for their exemplary leadership, and we would also like to thank **Prosecutor Karim Khan**, and **Registrar Osvaldo Zavala Giler**, the leadership across various organs, and Court officials for their tireless efforts in upholding justice and accountability for the most serious


crimes under international law. Their unwavering commitment continues to promote global justice and the fight against impunity.

8. Sierra Leone welcomes the Court's ongoing activities, which reflect an intense engagement with significant issues, resulting in a high workload during the intersessional period (2023-2024). We note with appreciation the 29 cases and 16 situations currently before the Court, including the situation in Afghanistan, and the 3 preliminary examinations conducted by the Office of the Prosecutor (OTP).



9. For the Court to fulfill its mandate, Sierra Leone stresses the importance of continued cooperation from States Parties, particularly in executing arrest warrants. We acknowledge the ICC Prosecutor's requests for arrest warrants and the issuance of such warrants in various situations under investigation. We urge adherence to judicial processes in cases of disagreement, reinforcing the supremacy of law and rejecting the notion that “**might is right.**”

10. **We also commend the ICC for its strategic planning, including the Court-wide strategic plan and the OTP's policy papers.** The Assembly Presidency's retreat with the ICC Heads of Organs in May 2024 was an invaluable platform to enhance mutual understanding and strengthen the Rome Statute system. Similarly, the judicial retreat fostered discussions to improve judicial efficiency. **These efforts are essential to closing the impunity gap, and require the collective will of States Parties and sustained civil society support.**



11. Sierra Leone also welcomes the progress made in reviewing the Court's activities, particularly through the **Independent Oversight Mechanism** ("IOM") and the Independent Expert Review (IER). These initiatives are vital for strengthening the Court's effectiveness, efficiency, and institutional culture.



Madam President,

12. The Court's role in the fight against impunity for the gravest crimes, war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity, remains indispensable. In this regard, we

recognize the importance of this Assembly's focus on agreeing to the modalities for the review of the crime of aggression. We believe harmonizing the law on the exercise of jurisdiction over the crime of aggression with other core crimes under the Rome Statute is essential for consistency and for reinforcing our collective commitment to global justice and accountability.

13. The **universality of the Rome Statute** is crucial in closing the impunity gap. We welcome **Armenia** as the 124th State Party to the Rome Statute and applaud Ukraine's decision to ratify the Rome Statute, eagerly anticipating its membership in early 2025.


Madam President,



14. Sierra Leone reaffirms its steadfast commitment to the Court's mandate and objectives, and by extension, to the principles of international criminal justice. Our commitment is unwavering, particularly in support of the victims of atrocity crimes. We strongly endorse the **Trust Fund for Victims**, which plays a vital role in providing reparations,

including restitution, compensation, and rehabilitation for victims of Rome Statute crimes. We commend the Trust Fund's efforts, notably in the Ongwen case, which provided support to over 24,000 individuals in 2023.


15. As we remain committed to supporting the TFV's vital work, the Government of Sierra Leone is accordingly, pleased to have nominated **Mr. Ibrahim Sorie Yillah** for re-election as a member of the Board of Directors of the Trust Fund for the Benefit of Victims, for the one seat allocated to African States, scheduled to be held in The Hague, this session.



16. As we congratulate the Board Members already elected by the Assembly, we wish to further note that Mr. Yillah, who has served successfully as Vice Chair of the Board in this historic period, including the strengthening of the Trust Fund for Victims to deliver on its important mandate, has the requisite competence, qualifications and experience to ensure his continuing valuable contributions in advancing the principles, objectives, and

purpose of the Trust Fund. We look forward to the support of all States Parties in this important re-election bid.

17. Let me close, **Madam President**, by returning to the call to action. The challenges we face are significant, but they are not insurmountable. Let us use this moment to renew our collective commitment to justice, accountability, and the protection of human dignity. The victims of atrocity crimes, in all situations before the Court, deserve no less.



18. **Sierra Leone remains firm in its belief that international criminal justice is not a luxury but a necessity for global peace and security.** We call on all States Parties to strengthen their support for the ICC, to respect the Court's decisions, and to ensure the rule of law prevails across the world. **Let us ensure that the ICC remains an institution that reflects the aspirations of the global community, independent, impartial, and capable of delivering justice without fear or favor.**

I thank you.