

# Recognising the clear link between illicit trading of natural resources and conflict

Thank you very much, President.

President Excellency, thank you for convening this important debate, and I thank our briefers as well this morning for their insights. I'd like to highlight three considerations.

First, as today's briefers and previous speakers have underlined, we recognise the clear link between illicit trading of natural resources and conflict. From Somalia to Sudan to the Democratic Republic of Congo, the illicit trade in natural resources of charcoal, timber and gold has helped fund conflict and the activities of armed groups.

And we should bear in mind that increased global demand for critical minerals – essential to decarbonisation and our green growth goals – risks exacerbating the illegal sourcing of natural resources without appropriate action.

So we do need a concerted and coordinated effort to tackle illicit trafficking as a root cause of conflict, and in this context, I welcome the African Union's efforts including conflict prevention, including the work of Commissioner Bankole and his department. As a Council, too, we should look at ways to strengthen the UN Security Council's sanctions regimes both against individuals and entities that illegally exploit natural resources to fund or prolong or provoke conflict. The Council acted in Somalia by banning the export of charcoal to inhibit Al-Shabaab's revenue streams; we can and should do more across other mandates.

Second, President, we need stronger regulation and governance efforts to tackle the illicit trafficking of natural resources, including stringent certification and verification processes.

And in this context, the UK is proud to support a number of international mechanisms that deliver this, including the OECD's Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Mineral Supply Chains and the Kimberley Process that helps stem the flow of conflict diamonds.

Finally, President, we share the view of previous distinguished speakers of the dangerous consequences of the exploitation of Africa's natural resources by private military companies.

There is significant independent reporting outlining the exploitation of gold resources in Sudan and the Central African Republic through Wagner Group's subsidiaries like Meroe Gold. Gold extraction and smuggling operations risk undermining local stability, present significant ecological and human rights

risks and are a significant loss to Sudan.

The United Kingdom reiterates our concerns over Wagner Group's activities in Africa, which undermine effective resource governance and offer no sustainable solutions to Africa's security challenges.

In concluding, President, I thank you again for convening this important debate during Gabon's Security Council Presidency.

Thank you.