



South Centre Statement at the Expert Conversation on Human Rights in the Life Cycle of Renewable Energy and Critical Minerals

21 May 2025, Palais des Nations, Room V

Special Rapporteur, distinguished delegates,

The global transition towards a low-carbon economy is taking place and will require increased demand for critical minerals. Projections indicate this demand will quadruple by 2040, creating a situation where the pursuit of 'green' energy is connected to new extractive pressures that have environmental and social repercussions.

Focusing only on reducing emissions, without a proper assessment of the entire supply chain, might create challenges from a sustainability and justice perspective.

The lifecycle of critical minerals—from exploration and extraction to processing and disposal—generates human rights impacts. These impacts disproportionately affect marginalised populations, including women and Indigenous communities in the Global South.

Instances of forced and child labour, unsafe working conditions, land dispossession without Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC), and environmental degradation, including water contamination and habitat destruction, have been documented by Regional HR Courts and UN Agencies and Special Procedures.

This has led to the term "green extractivism," describing situations where mineral extraction for green technologies replicates negative patterns associated with traditional fossil fuel extraction, often leading to the concentration of land, capture of natural assets, and the displacement of local communities.

Current governance frameworks for critical mineral mining present significant complexities, mainly due to the voluntary nature of many international standards that lack robust independent enforcement to guarantee human rights.

In addition, investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) mechanisms empower corporations to challenge state regulations for environmental protection or ensure a just energy transition. This creates a "regulatory chill," undermining states' ability to implement necessary safeguards and potentially diverting resources from essential social and

environmental programs. This hinders the pursuit of ethically sourced minerals and a truly just transition to clean energy.

From the perspective of developing countries, a just energy transition should include safeguarding livelihoods, protecting vulnerable communities, ensuring universal access to affordable and clean energy, and upholding the rights of local communities impacted by energy projects.

Therefore, discussions on critical mineral governance should consider economic diversification, social dialogue, local community participation, accountability, non-discrimination, transparency, and corporate responsibility to conduct human rights due diligence throughout their supply chains and access to remedies for victims.

Achieving this global framework will require international cooperation on finance, technology transfer and adaptation, and capacity building. Developing countries require policy space and support for local value addition and to move beyond raw material export, in line with the principles of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities.

A global response towards the sustainable use of critical minerals for the energy transition must extend beyond climate action to fundamentally integrate social justice and human rights. This necessitates a holistic, rights-based approach, deeply informed by the perspectives and development aspirations of local and Indigenous communities in developing nations, and crucially, ensuring the just sharing of benefits derived from their resources.

Thank you.