

WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF JOSEPH MULALA NGURAMO

***Nonresident Senior Fellow, Atlantic Council Scowcroft and Freedom and Prosperity Center
Submitted to the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa***

Date: March 25, 2025

Location: Room 2200, Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, DC

Hearing: "Metals, Minerals, and Mining: How the CCP Fuels Conflict and Exploitation in Africa"

Thank you, Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Jacobs, and other Members of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa for the invitation to testify on Metals, Minerals, and Mining: How the CCP Fuels Conflict and Exploitation in Africa.

My name is Joseph Mulala Nguramo. I am a Congolese National and grew up in the war-torn region of Kivu in Eastern Congo—particularly Goma. I was honored to graduate from the United States Military Academy at West Point in 2014. And I am currently a Nonresident Fellow with the Freedom and Prosperity and Scowcroft Centers at the Atlantic Council. I am grateful to the United States of America (USA) and the American people for the great opportunity to dedicate my professional career to the building of US-African relations as well as promoting democracy, freedom, and good governance. I am humbled and honored to be invited here to share my thoughts on these issues. I am representing myself and expressing my personal opinions only. While I am not testifying on behalf of any organization, I serve as a nonresident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council. The Atlantic Council does not take positions on specific issues or advocate for individual donors. The Atlantic Council requires maintaining independent control of the content and conclusions of any sponsored projects.

My testimony will look at the impact of Chinese mining activities across Africa and particularly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC); how it fuels conflicts, corruption, instability, bad governance, its implications to US National Security in the region and provide potential solutions.

The DRC's wealth in natural resources is estimated at \$24 Trillion--representing 70% of global Cobalt, and proven reserves of Gold, Coltan, Lithium, Copper, and diamonds.

As long as, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) controls the Mining Sector in the DRC, the entire region remains economically fragile and is threatened by civil unrest. The CCP has been playing a predatory game globally — fueling conflicts and corruption, encouraging bad governance, emboldening the rise of autocratic and tyrannical regimes--leading to a significant regression of democracy around the world, as the Atlantic Council Freedom and Prosperity reports have demonstrated.

Currently, the volume of trade between Africa and China is estimated at \$ 282.1 Billion – and rising steadily by about 1.5% annually, as of last year. Yet almost all investments are in the Mining and Infrastructure Sectors, without long-term benefits to the countries' Gross Domestic Products (GDPs) and populations. Indeed, China routinely operates in the shadows of governments that lack transparency, and care little for Accountability, Transparency, Human Rights and Democracy. I wish to argue that political and social stability and prosperity in the DRC is essential to US National Security. And the United States should play a leading role in the stabilization of the region--especially as related to the current crisis—which has displaced millions of people out of their homes; exacerbated the humanitarian tragedy and has put the region at the brink of a war—as the world saw in the 90s.

In the DRC ongoing civil unrest and an unmitigated humanitarian crisis are largely due to China's ruthless and irresponsible grip on the country's natural resources. Controlling almost 90% of the Congo Mining Sector, China has failed to use its economic and financial power to defend and promote the Rule of Law, Freedom, and Quality Governance. But China has, instead, mastered strategies to take advantage of a country in chaos—often bribing government officials to acquire Mining concessions. The case of a legal battle between AVZ Minerals, Cominiere (DRCG), Zijin Mining and the Australian Stock Exchange (ASX) dispute over the Manono Lithium mine, at the International Chamber of Commerce in Paris, is one of the classic examples among many of the CCP's bribery and aggressive dirty tactics to securing minerals and fueling corruption and conflicts across Africa. The Ciminiere(DRCG) was found guilty and was ordered to pay \$ 42.4 million to the ASX.

Additionally, the human conditions of artisanal miners in the mining owned by China and protected by DRCG Presidential Guards and Senior Civil and Military officers is catastrophic and unacceptable. We see cases of child and forced labor—averaging 40,000 children--digging cobalt for Chinese buyers without adequate protective equipment and payment. Some of these children are under 10 years old---leaving them exposed to toxic substances—causing serious health and environmental problems, per Amnesty International investigations.

In North Kivu, Chinese traders buy tantalum and gold from the M23—a Rwandan backed armed group—collecting some \$885 million in 2023, per UN experts. In the Ituri province, part of the reasons of the prolongation of the Stage of Siege, has been the complicity among Chinese traders, Congolese senior military and government officials to protecting Gold Mines for their self-interests. Tons of gold, worth hundredth of millions of dollars, are smuggled out of the E—DRC and with revenues that are unaccounted for, according to the Sentry reports.

The case of the Tenke Fungurume(Previously owned by Freeport-McMoran), which China Molybdenum acquired in 2016 for \$2.65 billion. By 2022, DRC has earned billions in taxes and royalties—However, many Congolese are still lacking the basic needs such as access to decent jobs, education, healthcare and food. In 2023, under the mining revision contract negotiations, China paid Gécamines(DRC State National Mining Company) about \$800 million. But it has been difficult to determine the transparency and accountability of these revenues, according to the DRC Inspector General of Finance (IGF). Where did the money go and what did it do for the average Congolese person? The current Felix regime has failed to, transparently, answer those questions to ensure good governance and build trust among its population. And in many ways, this failure of governance and equally sharing the resources has increased inequality, poverty--and has accentuating the internal DRC political crisis—with ramifications to destabilize the whole region.

China has significant financial and economic interests in the DRC, and, to just name an additional example, in Sudan—and yet the countries are at the precipice of collapsing—becoming failed states. No different from the tragic situation in Haiti. While the United States Government (USG) has come to characterize the ongoing massacre in Sudan as a genocide, I will focus more on the DRC--because the nature and character of the ongoing conflict between Rwanda and DRC--are of

magnitude to destabilize the entire region and significantly impact USA National Security interests and beyond.

The DRC's minerals have become essential in a world transitioning to Clean Energy and are key components in the manufacturing of microchips and semiconductors, which are used in our critical infrastructures and advanced weapon systems technology including Missile Defense, submarines, medicine, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Fighter Jets, communications equipment and Research and Development (R&D). Unfortunately, the current DRC Government lacks the vision, competence and effective leadership to ensure a safe and consistent supply of these products. It has, instead, allowed China to control its Mining Sector. Given this situation, the US and its allies' national security will experience growing dependence on China's Global Supply Chain. This process will be precipitated as the DRC and Rwanda are on the brink of war-- and the stability of the entire region is threatened. The latest developments in Sudan and the African Great Lakes Region are cause for alarm.

The CCP mercantilist model is aimed at securing monopolies over critical natural resources. To that end it aims to create "illegitimate" and unstable political systems in places like the DRC and Sudan, planting the seeds of civil unrest, violence, and wars. Despite its dominance in the DRC Mining Sector, the CCP has failed to advocate for implementing good governance, defending Human Rights, fighting corruption, and protecting fair and good elections - to ensure sustainable stability and prosperity. For examples, China demonstrated no interest in the transparency and legitimacy of the DRC's Presidential Elections in 2019 and 2023. Not surprisingly, China has remained silent about the DRC Government's abuse of power and corruption.

A similar trend of violence and humanitarian catastrophe can be observed in Sudan. Despite investing billions of dollars in Oil, China has stood by as Sudan has become a failed state. China even opposed United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions to hold the Sudanese government and the rebels accountable for genocide – all in the interest of its own gain. In exchange, the Sudanese Government backed China's stance on issues like the Hong Kong National Security Law and the Xinjiang Conflict. If China wants to be seen as a global leader, at least, it should care about these issues such as addressing corruption, bad governance and protecting

human rights. Claiming the policies of non—interference in other countries is an unacceptable excuse, because we have seen the CCP interfering in internal affairs of its neighboring countries and beyond such as launching a global network of espionage, surveillance and repression against its people and adversaries, according to the different Five Eyes, US Congressional Reports on China and Global Threats Assessments.

According to *Transparency International's* 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index, about 90% of African countries scored below 50, indicating high levels of corruption and mediocre governance. Just the Sub-Saharan Africa alone scored an average of thirty-three out of one hundred, making it the lowest-scoring region globally. US Government reports on Global Business Climate, Religious Freedom, Human Trafficking and Rights support and document these allegations. China remains indifferent. As long as China empowers undemocratic regimes for its own gain, the future of democracy remains fragile.

Through its *Belt and Road Initiative*, the CCP controls about 40% of Global Energy reserves. It does so by disregarding human costs and the nature of governments it works with. Just in the DRC alone, China has come to control almost 90% of the Congo Mining Sector—led by Chinese Companies such as China Molybdenum, Huayou Cobalt and NORINCO. The CCP defense contractor NORINCO, as it turns out, also acquired stakes in the DRC Defense and Security Sector and has been supplying weapons and military drones to various participants in the ongoing DRC-AFC/M23 conflict. China, by failing to control the distribution of military weapons, continues to fuel the conflict. Due to the fragility of the region and complexity of the crisis between DRC and Rwanda, China should have put in place some guardrails and mechanism of selling and providing its weapons so that they don't fall in wrong hands and continue to fuel these wars--especially because MONUSCO is withdrawing with high risks of increasing violence against civilians population-- and which could be exacerbated by the fact that, the UN has removed/lifted the notification measures/requirements for arms shipments to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, according to the UNSC 2667(2022).

Alternatively stated, combined with its veto power at the UNSC, China has failed to use its economic and financial power in Africa to defend and promote the rule of law, freedom, and quality

governance—and to help prevent/dissuade conflicts. Ultimately, political, and social chaos in Africa benefits China's economic interests by keeping Western investments and collaboration at bay.

To conclude, the Chinese model is based on exploiting Africa's natural resources to the detriment of US National Security Interests. Concurrently, it props up corrupt political systems held in place by predatory and kleptocratic elites who enrich themselves at the expense of their citizens. These systems perpetuate poverty and lead to regional conflicts and wars, as can be witnessed in Sudan and the DRC.

The US National Strategy approach countering China in Africa should be a bipartisan concern—transcending Administrations and short-term thinking. The USG needs a comprehensive and coherent long term GRAND STRATEGY—not just focused on Europe, Asia and Latin America. Africa is the future of the world, because of its growing and dynamic young population and abundance natural resources. I hope that the US Government and its allies will do their utmost to avert a regional war in the DRC and bring stability to the region. There have been years of passivity and inaction regarding Africa, and the US has been too slow to recognize how its own National Security interests are tied to peace and economic development on the African continent, especially Central Africa. It is crucial that the US counter China's grip on the natural resources within the region – in the interest of its own security and democracy and human rights in Africa. The United States should take its responsibilities, as the moral Global Leader of the International rules-based world order. If the USA fail to lead who else will? Certainly, in the absence of US Global Leadership and engagement, the vacuum will be filled by autocratic, repressive, tyrannical and authoritarian regimes, as we are seeing in Venezuela, Cuba, North—Korea, Russia, Sudan and the DRC—unfortunately backed and aligned with China.

I appreciate your attention to these issues and welcome any questions you might have.