OPEN LETTER — A Charge to Global Leaders to Address the Digital & Governance Design Failures Undermining the Energy Transition

Build on established best practices to ensure data and natural resource stewardship to achieve a Just Energy Transition and Sustainable Development Goals.

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March 2, 2026

To: *The Global Council for Responsible Transition Minerals, International Renewable Energy Agency, UN Secretary-General's Panel on Critical Energy Transition Minerals, UNEP International Resource Panel, UNFCCC Just Transition Work Program, Public Officials at all levels Concerned with Securing Energy and Sustainable Development for their Citizens*

The global energy transition is materially intensive. It will require unprecedented volumes of energy transition minerals, metals, and materials (ETMs), including those used in renewable generation, grids, storage, and digital infrastructure. International institutions are considering aggregating national geological data to identify possible locations to mine these materials from deposits below ground.[1,2,3] However, many of these datasets originate from infringements of resource sovereignty, and the majority of below-ground deposits are located in Indigenous and agrarian lands.[4,5]As a result, any globally held repository of such geological data carries forward historic violations of Land and data sovereignty, many of which remain unredressed.[6]

The **design** of the data repository and its **governance** will both equally determine whether it reduces risks in line with Sustainable Development Goals and the principles of the Just Transition, or if it instead intensifies resource-driven conflict. It is well established that the lack of effective democratic governance of mining and data infrastructure development is linked to increases in inequity, vulnerability, and violence.[7] Building an ETM repository presents a unique historic opportunity to innovate beyond the dominant anti-democratic trends in both data regimes and ETM procurement.

Your leadership is critical to defining both the design and governance of this repository to ensure that it is relevant, generates broad global buy-in, and contributes to reducing risks associated with fossil fuel combustion, digital infrastructure construction, and controversial new mining operations in climate-critical ecosystems. Your inaction now risks locking in highly extractive, poorly governed, and socially damaging systems, which will ultimately undermine progress toward the energy transition and sustainable development goals. At this pivotal moment, we charge the addressed to exercise coordinated leadership to collaboratively design an ETM repository for the public interest, following the guidance outlined below.

Principle 1: Rise to our historical moment: The science, technology, and governance investments must be equal to the task of operationalizing the UN Guidance for Action on Critical Energy Transition Minerals in the creation of an ETM data repository.

> Action item: Establish an IPCC-like entity according to these included principles to coordinate the currently highly fragmented scientific, policy, and business efforts toward meeting the common challenges of provisioning the energy transition.
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> Process guidance: Following the example of the process that led to the 1988 establishment of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)[8], jointly convene a World Conference on Provisioning the Energy Transition that includes scientific, Land-based and policy expertise.
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> Expected outcome: An authoritative, globally respected source for policy-relevant scientific information on ETM sources to guide action at all levels.

Principle 2: Redefine extraction: Mainstream a whole-of-supply-chain approach to ETM sourcing: any ETM, in any form, is a potential ETM stock.

> Action item: Issue an official statement that acknowledges that, based on the latest research, it is now necessary to reassess the prevailing view that below-ground mining is the primary viable pathway for achieving the energy transition.[9,10,11,12,13]
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> Process guidance: Undertake a systematic review within your organizations and partner entities to identify current policy documents, reports, and recommendations to revise and update away from the narrow focus on below-ground mining.
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> Expected outcome: A transformative redirection of scientific, policy, and industry momentum around ETM sourcing toward the transition to a circular economy and a significant reduction in future needs for mining below-ground ETM.

Principle 3: Ethics as the design process: Continuously implement best practices for inclusion, consent, outreach and state-of-the-art-science into the design, operation, and governance of data repositories.

> Action item: Issue an open call for database architects that proactively reaches highly impacted and underrepresented communities—especially laborers and those hosting data or extractive infrastructures—so they can represent themselves. Invest sustained human and IT capacity to ensure meaningful participation and enforceable rights to grant or withhold consent.[14]
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> Process guidance: Anchor this process in established international standards, including: the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and ILO 169 which establishes the right to Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC); the 2010 Nagoya Protocol which establishes fair and equitable benefit-sharing, and redress for historical injustices tied to resources, knowledge, and data from Indigenous lands and territories; and relevant ILO Conventions on the creation of jobs and working conditions in which people can work in freedom, safety and dignity. Embed transparency in both content-generation and decision-making, clearly designating for human-only, human-in-the-loop, and AI-reliant analysis and content. Partner with community-trusted organizations and ethicists to ensure context-, culture-, and language-appropriate outreach and engagement. Refer to the signatories.
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> Expected outcome: Widespread buy-in to build and steward an ETM data repository based on mutually agreed principles, leading to greater global coordination, less conflict in ETM sourcing, and a robust data source to enable compliance with existing treaties and transparency measures.

Now is the time. In 2026–27, several key multilateral meetings[15] and related state-led processes offer a narrow but critical window of opportunity to take the first decisive steps to ensure the repository's design and governance is democratically defined. Acting now is essential to prevent a closed-doors process that privileges a minority of below-ground mining interests over the global majority and our shared climate and development goals. Without your leadership today's profoundly destabilizing forces will further constrain the path toward a more peaceful and prosperous tomorrow.

The undersigned call upon the addressees to act decisively in the upcoming meetings, consultations, and institutional processes to establish the repository's public-interest design and governance, and to coordinate with national-level and multilateral institutions shaping energy, minerals, finance, climate, and industrial policy.

Sincerely,

The Undersigned

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References

[1] IRENA and NUPI (2024), Critical materials for renewable energy: Improving data governance. International Renewable Energy Agency, Abu Dhabi.

[2] The Global Council for Responsible Transition Minerals. (2024). *Interim report: Key recommendations for global cooperation on transition minerals* (Interim Rep.). Global Council for Responsible Transition Minerals, Paris Peace Forum.

[3] Brazilian Mining Institute (IBRAM). (2025). *Critical and strategic minerals at COP30: Move forward with a policy for Brazilians and for the global community* (Green Paper). IBRAM.

[4] Owen, J.R., Kemp, D., Lechner, A.M., Harris, J., Zhang, R. and Lèbre, É., 2023. Energy transition minerals and their intersection with land-connected peoples. *Nature Sustainability*, *6*(2), pp.203-211.

[5] Owen, J.R., Kemp, D., Schuele, W. and Loginova, J., 2023. Misalignment between national resource inventories and policy actions drives unevenness in the energy transition. *Communications Earth & Environment*, *4*(1), p.454.

[6] "The exploration, development and disposition of such resources, as well as the import of the foreign capital required for these purposes, should be in conformity with the rules and conditions which the peoples and nations freely consider to be necessary or desirable with regard to the authorization, restriction or prohibition of such activities." Resolution 1803 (XVII) on Permanent Sovereignty over Natural Resources. Paragraph 2. (1962). "Indigenous peoples have the right to redress, by means that can include restitution or, when that is not possible, just, fair and equitable compensation, for the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned or otherwise occupied or used, and which have been confiscated, taken, occupied, used or damaged without their free, prior and informed consent." UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Article 28. (2007)

[7] UN Secretary-General's Panel on Critical Energy Transition Minerals. United Nations. "Resourcing the Energy Transition: Principles to Guide Critical Energy Transition Minerals Towards Equity and Justice." (2024).

[8] "The IPCC was created to provide policymakers with regular scientific assessments on climate change, its implications and potential future risks, as well as to put forward adaptation and mitigation options." IPCC. Webpage (2026).

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[10] Bruyninckx, H. H. D. et al. (2024). Global Resources Outlook 2024: Bend the trend-Pathways to a liveable planet as resource use spikes. *United Nations Environment Programme*

[11] International Energy Agency (IEA) (2024), Recycling of Critical Minerals: Strategies to Scale up Recycling and Urban Mining.

[12] UN Secretary-General's Working Group on Transforming the Extractive Industries for Sustainable Development, 'The UN Guidance for Action on Critical Energy Transition Minerals' (UNECE 2025).

[13] Holley, E. A., Hadden, K. M., Hammerling, D., Eggert, R., Spiller, D. E., & Nelson, P. P. (2025). By-product recovery from US metal mines could reduce import reliance for critical minerals. *Science*, *389*(6767), 1325–1331.

[14] IEEE Recommended Practice for Provenance of Indigenous Peoples' Data. IEEE, Standards Committee: SSIT/SC - Social Implications of Technology Standards Committee. Active Standard. Published: 2025-11-14. Accessed February 25, 2026.

[15] First International Conference on the Just Transition Away from Fossil Fuels, April 28-29 in Santa Marta, Colombia; OECD Critical Minerals Forum, April 28-29 in Istanbul, Türkiye; Meeting on the UNFCCC Just Transition Programme, June in Bonn, Germany; G7 Meeting June 15-17 in Évian, France; Group of 77 (G77) Meeting, September 2026 in New York, USA; 2026 OECD Conference of Mining Regions and Cities, October 28-30 in Antofagasta, Chile; UN Climate Change Conference COP 31, November 9-20 in Antalya, Türkiye; Future Minerals Forum, January 2027 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia; African Mining Indaba, February 2027 in Cape Town, South Africa.