

As with efforts to deal with the abuse of small arms and to ban landmines, Africans are leading the world in developing practical means and action to advance the protection of civilians in war and to promote human security. To that end, this conference will be an important contribution to global action in dealing with war-affected children. I will ensure that decisions made here will be fully integrated into efforts in Winnipeg.

One of the most basic human instincts is to protect one's child from harm and suffering. Children represent our global future and the desire to guard them from the many forces that can destroy their hope and innocence is universal.

Doing so is an essential part of our broader aspiration to promote human security and to create stable, peaceful societies.

In considering our responsibilities to our children, I am often reminded of a saying by the Opaskwayak Elders of the Cree Nation in Canada to the effect that "a child is a gift or loan from the Great Spirit; and one is given the responsibility to raise and care for that child. Since a child is a gift from the Great Spirit, the child is sacred and must be treated with respect and dignity."

This is truly a sentiment with universal meaning. Here in Ghana this week, I look forward to working with you in living up to that sacred trust, in seeking ways to make a real difference in helping war-affected children in West Africa.

Thank you.