

dealing with human security challenges. They also have recommendations for action. I look forward to hearing them.

The results of this conference—hopefully—will catalyze practical, sustainable action to address the enormous impact that war has had on the children of West Africa and serve as a model for future conferences in other regions.

There are many challenges. One of them is the pre-meditated abduction of children from their families, homes and communities. I hope that one of the specific actions to come out of this conference is a release program for children. To those armies or rebel groups responsible, the message should be clear: if you have taken children—let them go; if you have children in your ranks—set them free.

It is now up to governments gathered here to decide what they are ready to do and what they are ready to commit.

For our part, Canada has already been active in promoting human security in the region. We have devoted over \$10 million to peace and humanitarian efforts in Sierra Leone—much of it aimed at helping war-affected children lead normal, secure lives.

Working with Sweden, we have supported efforts to include child rights and protection issues in training curriculums for military staff of West African armed forces. Similarly, we have assisted the UN Centre for Crime Prevention in its efforts to curb trafficking of women and children in the region. And our Peacebuilding and Human Security Program provided financial support for the journalists and youth workshops associated with this conference.

We are prepared to do more—in the region and in the world. That is why Canada is pleased to co-sponsor this conference with our Ghanaian hosts and why we will build on the experience here to prepare for the global conference on war-affected children, which will take place this September in the city of Winnipeg in Canada. It will bring together like-minded governments, international institutions, NGOs and youth to develop an international plan of action.

Canada also continues to be a strong supporter of the work of Olara Otunnu, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict. We have made a substantial financial contribution to his office, and will collaborate with him to assist in fulfilling his mandate. He has done much to raise the profile of this subject around the world and we welcome his presence here in Accra.

Recognizing the important work of civil society, Canada has over the past two years provided financial support for the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, an international organization that played a key role in the successful negotiation of the Optional Protocol on Children in Armed Conflict.