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CONFERENCE ON WAR-AFFECTED CHILDREN IN WEST AFRICA

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"For the Sake of our Children"

An Overview and Proposals for the Protection of War-Affected Children in West Africa

A Worldwide Phenomenon

The preamble of the Charter of the United Nations enjoins us "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war." Yet today we are witnessing unspeakable abominations being committed against children in situations of armed conflict. This suffering bears many faces: children being killed; children being made orphans, children being maimed; children being uprooted from their homes; children being raped and sexually abused; children being deprived of education and health care; children being exploited as child soldiers; and children left with deep emotional trauma.

All non-combatants are entitled to protection, but children deserve special attention and require special protection. Children are innocent and especially vulnerable. They are less equipped to adapt or respond to conflict. They bear no responsibility for conflict in the first place, yet suffer disproportionately from its excesses. Moreover, children represent the hopes and future of every society; destroy them and you have destroyed a society.

Over the last decade, 2 million children were killed in conflict situations, over 1 million were made orphans, over 8 million have been seriously injured or permanently disabled and over 10 million have been left with grave psychological trauma.

At present, in approximately 50 countries around the world, children are suffering from the effects of conflicts and its aftermath. Today, there are over 20 million children who have been displaced by war within and outside their countries. Some 300,000 young persons under the age of 18 are currently being exploited as child soldiers. And approximately 800 children are killed or maimed by landmines every month.