

missions. Third, training should be provided for all personnel in the field missions with regard to the rights and protection of children and women. I have proposed similar elements for UN peace operations; these are now being put into practice in newly mandated operations.

#### **10. Developing Neighbourhood Initiatives in West Africa**

Although most of today's conflicts are internal, the victimization of children is often exacerbated by cross-border activities, such as the flow of small arms and light weapons, the transfer and use of landmines, the recruitment and abduction of children, the movement of displaced populations and the separation of families. Threats facing children within countries in conflict often cannot be brought under control without addressing these cross-border dimensions.

I have therefore proposed the development of "neighborhood initiatives" to bring together actors in a sub-regional setting where countries are linked by cross-border activities affecting children. The purpose is to engage governments, insurgency groups, civil society organizations and humanitarian agencies in dialogue, which would ultimately lead to specific agreements and concrete measures to protect children from cross-border threats. Among the sub-regions selected as pilot cases is West Africa: I look forward to working closely with ECOWAS on this project.

The Conference should commit to promoting cross-border initiatives for the protection of children. Examples of such initiatives include:

- **ECOWAS Small Arms Moratorium** - It is clear that, in West Africa, as elsewhere, there is a strong correlation between the easy availability of small arms and light weapons and the increased brutalisation of children and women. I strongly urge the participants at this Conference to give impetus to a more effective implementation of the Moratorium.
- **Child Protection Unit within ECOWAS Secretariat** - I would urge the setting up of a Child Protection Unit as part of the ECOWAS Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security. Its main task would be to ensure the protection of children's rights and their well-being throughout the sub-region particularly relating to cross-border concerns.
- **Cross-border recruitment of children soldiers** - The Conference should commit to taking measures to end the cross-border recruitment of children for use as combatants.
- **Illicit exploitation of natural resources** - The Conference should commit to taking measures to curb the illicit exploitation of natural resources, which fuels war machines which brutalise children and deprive them of much needed resources;
- **Displaced Persons** - The Conference should commit to taking measures to facilitate the reunification and return of displaced children and families.