

YOUTH RESOLUTION ON WAR AFFECTED CHILDREN IN WEST AFRICA

We, 21 children/young people, aged between 15 and 20 years, from 11 different member countries of ECOWAS, participated in the "Youth Workshop on War-Affected Children in West Africa" held in Accra from April 24-26, 2000 to examine the difficult situation with which many of us are confronted in our sub-region where wars continue to rage and conflicts easily become violent.

Organized by UNICEF and the Canadian Government, the workshop provided us with an opportunity to develop a common position on key concerns affecting our survival, protection and development to put before a high level conference of ECOWAS ministers and other policy makers.

The issues discussed were:

- The realisation of our rights, as set forth by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and their violation in general and in situations of armed conflict in particular;
- The definition of conflict and war and the protection of children affected by armed conflict;
- The rehabilitation and reintegration of child soldiers;
- The repatriation and resettlement of refugees and displaced children;
- The health care to respond to the physical and psychological damage caused by the war and to ensure the right to life survival and development;
- The specific situations faced by boys and by girls;
- Reintegration of children into families and communities;
- The fundamental importance of education.

REALISING that children and women are the first and most vulnerable victims of war and conflicts that undermine the region, delay development and hinder the realisation of children's rights;

RECOGNISING that war results in fear, violence, suffering, uncertainty and touches not only the countries directly affected but also other countries especially the neighbouring ones, whose stability and security may be compromised under the circumstances;

SEIZING the opportunity offered by this meeting to launch an appeal to the Governments of West African countries through the Honourable Ministers represented here, and to the international community meeting on the occasion of this important conference;

NOTING that education must be taken as a key strategy in establishing a culture of peace;

WE HEREBY RECOMMEND, generally:

- That all measures be taken to stop the proliferation and perpetuation of war and conflict through preventive actions based, among others, on the promotion of a culture of peace, fraternity and tolerance dear to our continent;