

## **Leaders and War-Affected Children: Accountability and Commitment**

**Nigel Fisher**

Hon. Chairpersons Axworthy and Gbeho, Foreign Ministers of Canada and Ghana,  
Honourable Ministers,  
Government delegations,  
Young people,  
Representatives of civil society and international organisations,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of UNICEF, may I first express our appreciation to Governments of Canada and Ghana for their leadership in this initiative which brings us together to address the rights of war-affected children.

May I also transmit greetings from UNICEF Executive Director Carol Bellamy, at this moment around the corner in Dakar, at the World Education Forum: She will be highlighting the educational needs of children affected by armed conflict at the Dakar meeting, and will be with us in spirit today.

### **Leadership and accountability**

There are two words that do not yet appear in the draft Declaration and Plan of Action that this meeting may endorse - leadership and accountability. Certainly in the youth and NGO meetings of the last few days, and in the corridors, many seem to feel that these two words are precisely what this meeting is about - or should be about.

It is the quality and nature of leadership that will determine whether today's deliberations will go beyond rhetorical commitments to concrete action. And the accountability (or lack of accountability) of leaders - national and international leaders, government and corporate leaders, community and civil society leaders - will be a significant determinant of their will to translate one more declaration and plan of action into real action.

We are meeting today in a climate of healthy scepticism. In an interview on Ghana radio two days ago, the interviewer asked some of us: 'How can people believe that this meeting, its deliberations and pronouncements will actually have "bite", will lead to positive action and not just be one more conference like so many others?' The young people from the region, some deeply scarred by their experience of war, in their own meeting, asked whether they could expect clear, concrete, actionable outcomes from the ministerial meeting. They asked whether you will listen to them, will you heed their suffering?