

NOTES FOR AN ADDRESS BY
THE HONOURABLE LLOYD AXWORTHY, MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE
CONFERENCE ON WAR-AFFECTED CHILDREN IN WEST AFRICA

Accra, Ghana
April 28, 2000

This has been a landmark conference. It proves that when people come together and work toward defined goals, much can be accomplished.

This conference was born from our partnership with Ghana and your commitment to security in the sub-region. Together we had one overarching goal: to put an end to the suffering that war has brought to the children of West Africa.

Let me take a moment to pay tribute.

West Africa has been a leader and model for all of us.

You did not wait to take action when you saw acute suffering in Liberia and Sierra Leone. ECOMOG [Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group] has taken great risks to make the sub-region safe. Your commitment to peace and security has been great and deserves support.

During the past two days, we have discussed a wide range of issues and adopted a holistic agenda — one that deals with the root causes of conflict and one that will help us better understand and prevent the future exploitation and suffering of children.

You have put forward some very concrete recommendations, recommendations that Canada will help where it can to implement.

- First and foremost, Canada will support the call for the immediate release of all children abducted and held against their will by armed groups.
- Canada supports establishing programs to rehabilitate and reintegrate these children. It is important that in doing so local traditions and values are employed. This will not only heal wounds and close breaches, but will also help to unite societies and prevent a repeat of the violence of the past.
- Incorporating child rights and protection of civilians in military training programs will also have a positive impact.
- Prevention is key. Implementing early warning and response systems will undoubtedly help protect all members of society, especially the most vulnerable.