

programme, which includes preventing child soldiers, is needed.

Despite the negative impact of child soldiering in some parts of West Africa, all is not bad. In the civil war in the former Portuguese colony of Guinea-Bissau and the separatist war in the southern Senegal region of Casamance there was no child soldiering.

Experts hold that Guinea-Bissau is probably the West African country with the highest rate of individual citizens holding weapons, with certain estimates hinting that close to 50% of the 1.5 million inhabitants of the country bear firearms. The majority of these weapons, believed to have been procured through illicit means, are concentrated in the capital Bissau, with smaller stockpiles, predominantly leaked or stolen from national weapons arsenals, are perceptible in Bafata, Gabu, Cansunco and the northern parts of the country.

In the Sudan, by 1996, some 20,000 children aged between 6 and 17 years were either forced out of their homes or recruited into Government or into the numerous factions of the Sudan Peoples Liberation Army or militia. Nobody has faced the music so far. This is not acceptable.

In the two Districts of Gulu and Kitgum in Northern Uganda, some 8,000 children including thousands of young girls, were forcefully recruited into the Lords Resistance Army (LRA). This brutal, irregular force, is armed and financed by an African State. Yet, no action is being undertaken against this State for breaking International Conventions and thereby destroying the future of Africa. This is not acceptable.

According to a UN Survey, Angola is the 'worst place in the world to be a child.' It is estimated by UNICEF (1999) that 40 per cent of children die before the age of 5. And yet this country is the richest in Africa in terms of natural resources. This situation is unacceptable.

RENAMO of Mozambique formed by Ian Smith of Rhodesia and supported and financed by apartheid South African governments, had thousands of child soldiers. RENAMO, "consistently and systematically practised forced recruitment, even preferring children to adult combatants". RENAMO is now in Parliament, so why not the RUF, whose brutality is beyond description?

Some form of justice is needed in Africa, if we are to demonstrate that we are serious about protecting children. "Justice, justice and more justice," is our call.

### **Some Instruments at Our Disposal for Preventing Child Soldering**

1. The International Criminal Court will help put those who recruit child soldiers behind bars. Support is needed to make this Court a reality.
2. The 1949 Geneva Protocols and the two 1977 Additional Protocols require publicity in Africa. Educating government and rebel leaders on these important documents should be the goal of African civil society.
3. The African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights