

There are activities worldwide assessing the problem and striving to disarm, rehabilitate and reintegrate war-affected children. Moreover, efforts are ongoing globally to put the legal and institutional infrastructure in place to ensure that the rehabilitation and reintegration process is carried out with great sensitivity and efficiency.

Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We watched as small arms and light weapons proliferated in the region. We heard of atrocities being committed, and we were aware that the lives of innocent civilians were at risk. We disliked it all. But we lacked a mandate to intervene or plan to follow, so we said, the situation will not last. It is heinous, we said, for warlords to enlist 8-year olds as soldiers, but we said it would not happen here. Besides, we said, who but a savage would give drugs to children and would stoop so low as to tell a child that if killed during conflict, he would go straight to heaven.

Yet, as we are all aware, these atrocities do occur and we cannot afford to be complacent anymore about instability, intolerance, and the encroachment of human rights and on the rights of children in particular .

Each and every ECOWAS member state has a role to play to ensure sustainable peace in the region. In order to lift the region out of a perpetual cycle of turmoil and rebuilding, we must willingly achieve political and economic linkages with our neighbors.

The Protocol Relating to the Mechanism of Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacckeping, Peacemaking and Security, was signed by all ECOWAS Member States at the Lome Summit on 10 December, 1999. It is a giant leap in the right direction. The agreement by Heads of States of ECOWAS nations to support an early warning mechanism shows that there is sufficient political will to carry commitments through to active engagement.

But there are many degrees of separation between this type of worthy state-level initiative and the plight of a child who is commanded to murder his own people and plunder homes in familiar territory.

Mr. Chairman,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In order to ensure respect for the rights of children, we must first raise awareness of these rights. Secondly, we must heighten the respect for these rights. Also important is the creation of a legislative framework, as Ghana and others have done, for enforcement of all legal entitlements. Once again, we see, the level of activity shifts from the local non-governmental level to the national and governmental level.