

"Where ethnic loyalties prevail", says the UNICEF publication, "a dangerous trend develops. Rising sentiments of ethnic superiority, ethnic cleansing and genocide may be irreversible. Killing of adults may not be enough; generations of enemies and their children must also be exterminated." End of quote.

In pursuing the realisation of its integration objective in order to raise the living standards of the population, ECOWAS is of the view that protection of children and investments in their favour must be at the centre of any new development strategy.

In a declaration on child soldiers, ECOWAS acknowledges that enrollment of children into illegal armed conflicts deprives them of education, training and culture, and prevents them from being useful to their countries.

The use of children in armed conflicts has been facilitated by the proliferation of light weapons and small arms. In their bid to control this proliferation, the Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS on 31 October, 1998, declared a moratorium on the importation, exportation and manufacture of light weapons for a renewable period of three years.

The time has come to condemn the arms traffickers—those who have no fear of God nor man, illegally and readily provide instruments of death in exchange for money to satisfy their base needs. They deprive us of our human resources and at the same time exploit our mineral resources which they swap for instruments of death. Their internal accomplices and those who, for the same shameless craving indulge in this very trade must equally be condemned.

For this reason, on 10 December, 1999, ECOWAS adopted a Protocol on the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security. Its implementation will go a long way in providing children the protection guaranteed by the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We are convinced that the international community will not fail to support ECOWAS in the implementation of this mechanism which has in fact already taken off.

Excellency,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before concluding, I wish to thank all the participants to this meeting and particularly all the eminent personalities invited to present papers at the various conference workshops. I hope the outcome of our deliberations will be realistic and pragmatic, to enable us to implement them without delay, for the welfare of the children of our sub-region and in the interest of ECOWAS Member States.

I thank you.