

We are encouraged by the interest and commitment, being shown by Canada, to help address the situation and I hope other economically powerful nations will join in the search for peace in Africa.

In January this year when the Canadian Foreign Minister called on His Excellency, The President, at the Castle, they pledged to mobilize efforts to protect children.

Mr. Chairman,

Ghana and Canada agree that the plight of war-affected children is one of the most disturbing human security problems the world faces.

The cynical trend of targeting children as fighters and as victims has exacted a devastating toll. Since the mid-1980s, millions of children have been killed, disabled, orphaned, displaced or psychologically scarred by the trauma of abduction, detention, rape and witnessing the brutal murder of family members. We are told that hundreds of thousands of girls and boys world-wide serve in armed forces and rebel gangs.

Mr. Chairman,

West African governments and organizations have played a leadership role in the World to ponder the causes and consequences of conflict and deliberate on possible remedies.

The objective should be to prevent conflict, and as a priority initiative, to prevent the involvement of children in conflict.

A right solution must take into account the characteristics of the region, including pervasive poverty, growing incidence of corruption, obstacles to trade and development, lack of basic resources including schooling and nutritious food, and shelter. Good governance issues and strong leadership are also paramount considerations when debating ways and means to prevent conflict.

The Ministerial Conference on War-Affected Children in West Africa, that will take place tomorrow and Friday, will be one in a series of ECOWAS-focussed initiatives which are contributing to greater regional co-operation on peace and security issues. Clearly, unified ECOWAS co-ordination is vital to ensuring peace and stability and human security.

Despite tremendous progress in all nations in the quality of life, and how long we can expect to live, at the start of the 21 st century, the welfare, rights, and protection of war-affected children are increasingly at risk. There are new risks that citizens did not face ten years ago.

Children in some isolated conflict zones, are more likely to die from machine gun fire, than from longstanding threats to child survival like malaria, tuberculosis and measles.