

FOREWORD

TO

THE COLLECTION OF, "SPEECHES, PROPOSALS AND PAPERS OF THE CONFERENCE ON WAR-AFFECTED CHILDREN IN WEST AFRICA

The plight of children caught in the cross-fire of civil wars and employed as child soldiers, is one of the most disturbing issues facing the world today. Millions of children have been killed in war. Countless others have been disabled, orphaned, displaced or psychologically scarred by the trauma of abduction, detention, rape and witnessing the brutal murder of family members.

The Conference on War-Affected Children in West Africa, held in Accra, Ghana was a step toward ending this tragedy. It produced significant positive outcomes both in terms of advancing respect for children's rights and security in the region, and the broader human security agenda of protecting people from violence.

This meeting brought a diverse group together in common cause. Young people, ministers from ECOWAS, civil society, journalists and Canada came together and built significant momentum towards the International Conference on War-Affected Children, scheduled to take place in September, 2000 in Canada, and the 2001 UN Special Session on Children. This conference was the right initiative at the right time, and it accomplished substantive and meaningful results.

The Conference produced the Accra Declaration and Plan of Action on War-Affected Children, which Ghanaian President Jerry Rawlings presented at an ECOWAS Summit in Abuja, for formal endorsement by the organization's Heads of State.

We also benefited from the wise counsel of Mr. Olara Otunnu, the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict. Without his support, vision and passion this agenda would not be where it is today. And Ambassador Lansana Kouyaté, Executive Secretary of ECOWAS, made a substantial contribution not least for his support in establishing an agency for regional conflict prevention, peacekeeping and security efforts.

As a sign of our commitment to this agenda, the Government of Canada and ECOWAS have signed an agreement to help implement the Accra Declaration and Plan of Action. As a first step, the Government of Canada will help set up a Child Protection Unit within ECOWAS dedicated to the protection of war-affected children.

As a further sign of Canada's support for the children's agenda, an International Conference on Children Affected by Armed Conflict, will take place in Winnipeg, Manitoba in September, 2000. The outcomes of the Winnipeg Conference along with the recommendations from the Accra Conference and submitted to delegates at the United Nations Special Session on Children in 2001.