

5. Placing the Protection and Well-Being of Children on the Peace-Making Agenda of ECOWAS

Children suffer disproportionately in times of war, as we have witnessed in Liberia and Sierra Leone. They therefore have a particularly high stake in peace. The protection and well-being of children should feature systematically in any negotiations to end war and in peace accords. During my visits to Burundi, Sierra Leone, the Sudan and Colombia, governments and insurgency groups have agreed to place this issue on the agendas of the peace processes currently underway in their countries. I call on ECOWAS to promote this practice in its own peace-making initiatives.

To bring an end to impunity for egregious violations of children's rights in time of armed conflict, I am recommending that all aspects of peace processes involving amnesty, truth, or justice should highlight the abuses perpetrated on children, as well as the circumstances that enabled those abuses to occur. And when amnesty legislation is contemplated in transitions from war to peace, we must ensure that the perpetrators of child rights violations are not exempted from responsibility for their actions.

6. Placing Children at the Centre of Post-Conflict Programs for Reconstruction and Healing

Apart from the re-establishment of security and the consolidation of peace, the most daunting challenge a country faces in the aftermath of war is the "crisis of young people"—the desperate conditions of young children and adolescents. The prospects for recovery for countries like Liberia and Sierra Leone will depend very much on rehabilitating their scarred young people and restoring to them a sense of renewed hope. Some of the key issues that need to be addressed in this context are:

- Physical rehabilitation of the injured and the maimed;
- Psycho-social rehabilitation of traumatized children;
- Disarmament, demobilisation and rehabilitation of child combatants;
- Return, reunion and resettlement of displaced children and families;
- Programmes to address the special needs of sexually abused young girls, including their health, campaigns of sensitisation of local communities and trauma counselling;
- Rehabilitation of basic educational services for the benefit of children, including vocational training for adolescents;
- Rehabilitation and provision of basic medical services for children.

A number of local and international actors have been active in responding to the needs of war-affected children in the West African sub-region. There is a need to evaluate and assess the effectiveness of these interventions on behalf of children, focussing in particular on the experiences of Liberia and Sierra Leone.