

I must add that the IOM is greatly concerned with the fate of these target groups after the crisis periods. When the last shot has been fired, who is going to get involved in soothing the hurt of the rape victims? What about those who have contracted HIV? The disabled? All who have suffered physical and mental trauma, making it so difficult for them to pick up the pieces, face an uphill task in bringing together their families and living a normal life!

Countries like Gabon, Mali and Ghana are sounding the alarm today and trying with UNICEF to prevent similar tragedies by introducing strategies to prevent trafficking in children, for example among certain countries in ECOWAS (Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, Benin and Togo). In cooperation with the IOM, two projects are in the course of being funded:

- An emergency action plan to fight transboundary trafficking in children for purposes of economic and labour exploitation;
- The fight against trafficking in children in Benin.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The issue of child soldiers is a political and structural problem in Africa. Here is what the IOM would like to see specifically included in the Declaration and Action Plan emerging from your work:

- A clear political determination, not only from the international community, but from the states concerned themselves, to comply with the existing international instruments, such as the children's rights conventions, African Charter of Children's Rights and Welfare, etc.; this must lead to an immediate cessation of the involvement and use of children in these conflicts;
- Specific activities to offset the various kinds of structural deficits in these countries, touching on education, health, vocational training, civilian life awareness training, etc...;
- Only through such means can the demobilization and reintegration of these children in their society of origin, and especially a return of the skills required to reconstruct countries, be effected in a spirit of respect for the dignity of the human person.

What IOM can do in the context of ECOWAS:

- Assist the countries in a program to demobilize child soldiers;
- Assist the countries in a program to reintegrate child soldiers in civilian life, touching on: education, vocational training and the use of a normal health care system;
- Set up a data base on child soldiers;
- Transport target groups to, and conduct research in communities of origin in order to promote family reunification.