

The stability we need to raise the living standards of our people and to give them a sense of dignity and esteem, will be impossible to attain unless we give our youth the opportunity to experience the thrills and fantasies of youthfulness in place of AK47s and Bazookas. We should create opportunities for these young men and women to acquire those skills which will make it possible for them to excel in a world community where knowledge is a necessary tool for survival and where the African has suffered from centuries of exploitation and discrimination.

It is not surprising that the issues of human security have become topical these days. These have been identified as crucial challenges requiring urgent concrete action. At a Ministerial Summit on Human Security held in Bergen, Norway, in May 1999, developed countries underlined the importance of building human security partnerships with developing countries, and of bringing the concept of human security closer to the preoccupations of developing countries. Ghana welcomes that initiative which is reflected in our decision to call for this Conference on War-Affected Children.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is Ghana's expectation that this Conference will aim at demonstrating, in concrete terms, the willingness of our countries to confront the challenge of peace by building on our experiences as well as on the well-known African-led initiative, the ECOWAS Moratorium, and on the work of the proposed UN "Neighbourhood Initiative" involving a system which seeks to bring together groups of neighbouring countries linked with cross-border activities that affect children. Our sub-region has paid dearly for the many unnecessary inter-state and intra-state conflicts which have been ignoble phenomena of the Region in the past decade or so.

It is hoped that the conference will also seek to address the urgent need to raise awareness of the rights and protection needs of children during armed conflict and launch a process to create a West African Regional Framework for the Protection of Children. The Conference's most significant accomplishment hopefully and appropriately should be the commitment of respective governments and non-state actors to adopt and implement whatever concrete measures the Conference would come up with.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to draw your attention to the task ahead; by enumerating some of the expected outcomes of this Conference. These could include:

- (1) Proposals for the development of national legal frameworks for the protection of children in the sub-region;
- (2) The development of a mechanism to deter or punish warlords from recruiting child soldiers and abusing the rights of children during conflicts;
- (3) The inclusion in military training programmes of courses and appropriate training in child rights and the protection of children in situations of armed conflict;