

**BRIEF REMARKS BY THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN  
AFFAIRS, HON. JAMES VICTOR GBEHO**

**AT THE CLOSING CEREMONY OF THE CONFERENCE ON WAR-AFFECTED  
CHILDREN IN WEST AFRICA**

**Friday, 28 April, 2000**

**Your Excellencies ECOWAS Ministers,**

**Your Excellency the Executive Secretary of ECOWAS,**

**Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is with a deep sense of optimism that I make these few remarks as we bring to a close our two-day deliberations that focussed on the question of war-affected children in our sub-region. I am optimistic because of the high level of commitment we have demonstrated in this brief period to ensure that henceforth, the children and youth of our sub-region will be enabled to live in peace without fear, free from the trauma and other emotional scars of war.

We have outlined this commitment in the Declaration which we have just adopted. We have also tried to ensure that this commitment is translated into concrete action by adopting a Plan of Action which addresses the various aspects of the problem of war-affected children and we have even gone further by proposing measures which seek to prevent conflict in the first place.

What remains now is the implementation in our individual countries and societies of the various agreed measures so that the documents we have adopted do not become empty papers adorning the shelves of our offices. This is the least we can do to prevent a recurrence of the tragedies we have experienced in recent years, and to guarantee that the children and youth, who are the future leaders of our sub-region are enabled and empowered to grow up as responsible adults capable of advancing the programmes we have began, so that the sacrifices made over the years bring fruitful results.

At this juncture, therefore, I wish to appeal to each leader of delegation here, to make it a personal duty to ensure effective implementation and follow-up of the decisions we have taken and the goals we have set for ourselves. I trust that ECOWAS will be better positioned to co-ordinate our activities for enhanced results.

It is my expectation that at the ECOWAS Summit in Abuja next month, our Heads of State hopefully, will make a formal undertaking to ensure the full implementation of the documents we have adopted. However, I urge you, even as you prepare to depart, to engage your minds on how to sustain the momentum reached and create the environment conducive to the implementation of the Plan of Action.