

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

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

Accra International Conference Centre

27 April, 2000

**Your Excellency the President of the Republic of Ghana,
Your Excellency the Executive Secretary of ECOWAS,
Your Excellencies, Colleague Ministers,
Honourable Ministers,
Excellencies Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Niimei, Naamei, Nananom,
Representatives of Development Partners,
Youth Representatives,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.**

I wish to welcome you all to this Conference on behalf of the Governments of Ghana and Canada. It is our hope that you will enjoy our modest but sincere hospitality and that you will find the arrangements made for this Conference acceptable. I am particularly happy that in response to our invitation almost all delegations include high level military officers. The military and civilian authority must after all function in a co-operative manner to ensure peace and security in all of our countries.

If I may sum up in a few words, the aim of this historic Conference on War-Affected Children is to seek to halt the future conscription of children into conflict situations and to rehabilitate and re-integrate those African children, especially in the West African sub-region, who have already been affected by conflicts. Regrettably, their numbers are many and their circumstances, tragic.

In the last decade or so, the West African sub-region has seen some of the most violent conflicts in which unspeakable abuses have been visited on our own children. As a result of the physical and psychological damage that they suffered, our own societies and nations have been left with scars that continue to haunt our collective conscience.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, fortunately, Ghana and Canada which are co-hosting this Conference are not alone in appreciating the tragic circumstances of these children or our determination to address the fundamental causes. Your enthusiastic response to our invitation to participate in the Conference and your very presence here attest to the importance we all attach to the subject of war-affected children in our sub-region. I hope, therefore, that this Conference will not only achieve its objectives but that it will serve as a rallying point for Governments and peoples in the sub-region to strengthen our existing co-operation.