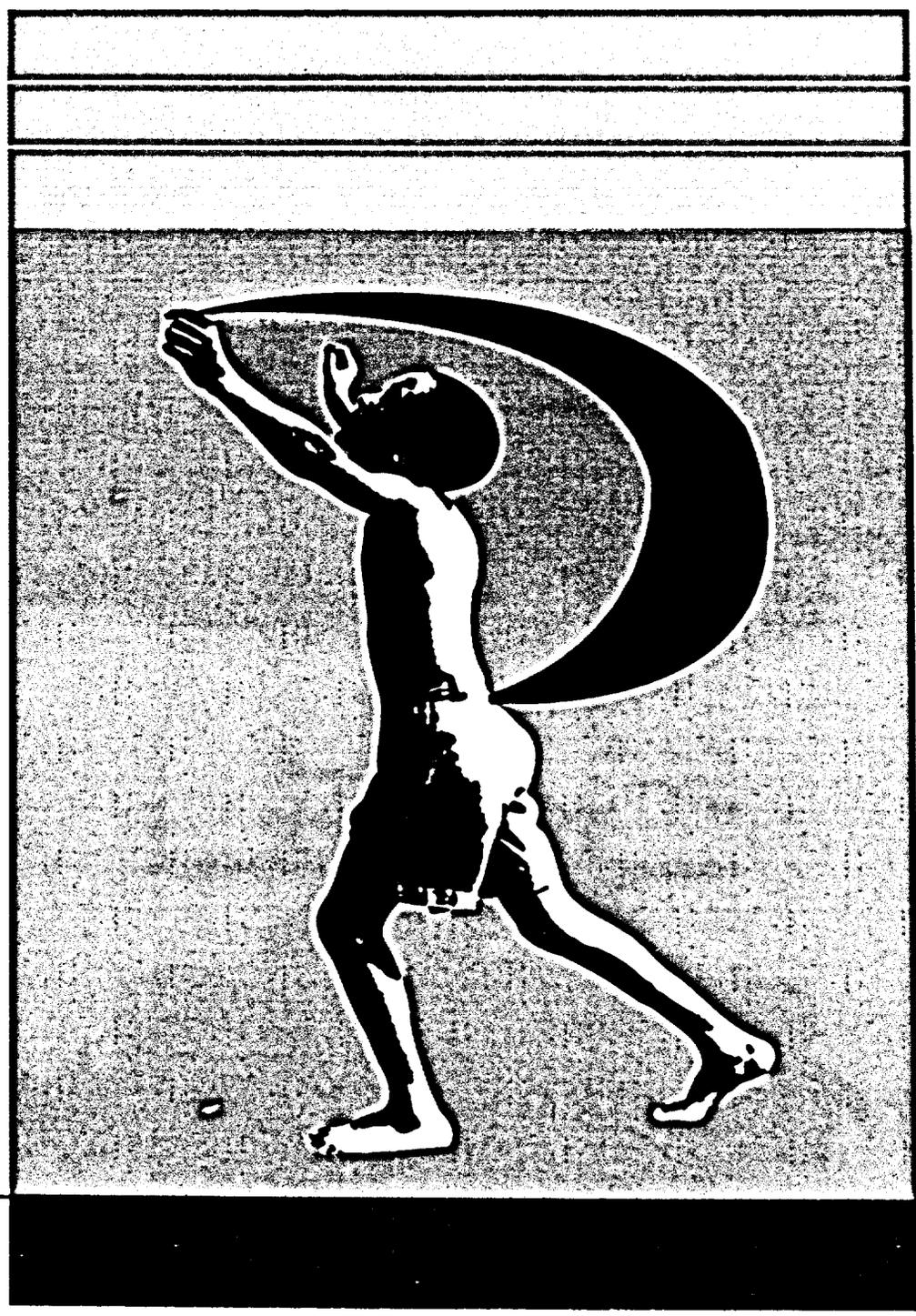


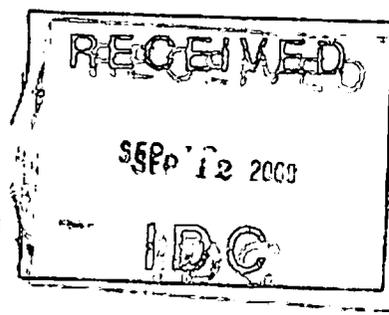
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PROCEEDINGS OF THE CONFERENCE ON WAR-AFFECTED CHILDREN IN WEST AFRICA

Accra, Ghana





PROCEEDINGS OF THE CONFERENCE ON WAR-AFFECTED CHILDREN

International Conference Centre Accra, Ghana 26-28 April, 2000

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FOREWORD

TO

THE COLLECTION OF, "SPEECHES, PROPOSALS AND PAPERS OF THE CONFERENCE ON WAR-AFFECTED CHILDREN IN WEST AFRICA

The plight of children caught in the cross-fire of civil wars and employed as child soldiers, is one of the most disturbing issues facing the world today. Millions of children have been killed in war. Countless others have been disabled, orphaned, displaced or psychologically scarred by the trauma of abduction, detention, rape and witnessing the brutal murder of family members.

The Conference on War-Affected Children in West Africa, held in Accra, Ghana was a step toward ending this tragedy. It produced significant positive outcomes both in terms of advancing respect for children's rights and security in the region, and the broader human security agenda of protecting people from violence.

This meeting brought a diverse group together in common cause. Young people, ministers from ECOWAS, civil society, journalists and Canada came together and built significant momentum towards the International Conference on War-Affected Children, scheduled to take place in September, 2000 in Canada, and the 2001 UN Special Session on Children. This conference was the right initiative at the right time, and it accomplished substantive and meaningful results.

The Conference produced the Accra Declaration and Plan of Action on War-Affected Children, which Ghanaian President Jerry Rawlings presented at an ECOWAS Summit in Abuja, for formal endorsement by the organization's Heads of State.

We also benefited from the wise counsel of Mr. Olara Otunnu, the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict. Without his support, vision and passion this agenda would not be where it is today. And Ambassador Lansana Kouyaté, Executive Secretary of ECOWAS, made a substantial contribution not least for his support in establishing an agency for regional conflict prevention, peacekeeping and security efforts.

As a sign of our commitment to this agenda, the Government of Canada and ECOWAS have signed an agreement to help implement the Accra Declaration and Plan of Action. As a first step, the Government of Canada will help set up a Child Protection Unit within ECOWAS dedicated to the protection of war-affected children.

As a further sign of Canada's support for the children's agenda, an International Conference on Children Affected by Armed Conflict, will take place in Winnipeg, Manitoba in September, 2000. The outcomes of the Winnipeg Conference along with the recommendations from the Accra Conference and submitted to delegates at the United Nations Special Session on Children in 2001.

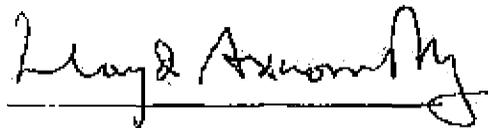
A much more comprehensive approach must be taken if we are to substantially and permanently improve the safety and security of the world's children. They require education, rehabilitation, medical care, counselling, opportunities for recreation, and vocational training and employment opportunities, as well as activities aimed at preventing their recruitment in the first place. In short, they are entitled to their childhood.

The Accra conference was a success because of the dedication of many people: within government and outside. This momentum must be carried on to Winnipeg and then New York. To do so, we must all remain involved. There are many more contributions to make and many who have yet to make theirs. Governments, parliamentarians, officials, armed forces, representatives of civil society organisations, and academics, the private sector and young people: all have a rôle to play.

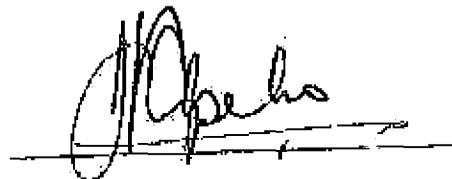
The collective work assembled within - the studies and reports, all of these contributions add to our knowledge and understanding of not only the children's agenda, but also of conflict prevention, management and peacekeeping.

In the Nkrumah tradition of "finding African solutions to deal with African problems", the Conference on War-Affected Children in West Africa, has made great strides. We encourage regional bodies to find regionally-appropriate solutions to the plight of war-affected children around the world. And we urge political and civil leaders to continue to build upon the principles and practices we have advanced.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Government of Canada
The Honourable Lloyd Axworthy

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lloyd Axworthy", written over a horizontal line.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Ghana
The Honourable James Victor Gbeho

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James Victor Gbeho", written over a horizontal line.

**ACCRA DECLARATION ON WAR-AFFECTED
CHILDREN IN WEST AFRICA**

PREAMBLE

At the invitation of the Government of Ghana in collaboration with the Government of Canada, with the active participation of the United Nations Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, and the Executive Secretary of ECOWAS, we ECOWAS Member States, meeting in Accra from 27-28 April, 2000, adopt the following declaration:

EXPRESSING DEEP CONCERN over the exploitation, abuse, torture, inhumane and degrading treatment of all war-affected children in the region,

DEPLORING the involvement of children in armed conflicts,

PAINFULLY AWARE of the trauma suffered by war-affected children and the grave consequences for themselves, their families, and communities,

DISTURBED by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons including the indiscriminate use of landmines in the sub-region,

MINDFUL that there are many countries in the region which do not yet have comprehensive national legislation for the protection of children and children's rights,

EXPRESSING CONCERN over the lack of commitment towards the implementation of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child,

RECOGNIZING the important role that training for military and other security agencies on the rights of the child can play in the protection of children, including child combatants,

MINDFUL of the important role that civil society plays in the protection, demobilization, reintegration and rehabilitation of war-affected children,

CONVINCED of the need for governments to promote democracy and good governance to increase tolerance and understanding,

AWARE that leadership and accountability are the responsibility of governments,

RECOGNIZING and APPRECIATING the role of neighbouring states in the reception and support of refugees,

ACKNOWLEDGING that children, as nation-builders, are the guarantors of the future,

RECOGNIZING the wish of the children to establish a children-to-children network,

RECOGNIZING that education and vocational training are important means of reintegrating war-affected children and of preventing the involvement of children in future conflicts,

RECOGNIZING the need for strengthened regional initiatives for the security and well-being of children,

FURTHER TO THE Declaration of ECOWAS Foreign Ministers on Child Soldiers, signed in March 1999 in Bamako,

FURTHER ALSO to the UN Security Council Resolution 1261 (1999) and 1265 (1999) concerning war-affected children and the protection of civilian populations in situations of armed conflict,

CALL FOR the immediate release by armed groups in the sub-region of all children abducted and held against their will,

RESOLVE to ratify and fully implement the provisions of international instruments on the rights of the child,

CALL UPON ECOWAS Member States to take all necessary steps to fully implement and respect the aforementioned United Nations Security Council Resolutions, the four Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, as well as the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the International Labour Organization Convention 182 Concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, the draft Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, and the Ottawa Treaty to Ban the Stockpile, Production, and Use of Anti-Personnel Mines and further calls upon all Member States to sign and ratify the protocol once it is open for signature,

COMMIT to ratify the Statute of the International Criminal Court and to bring to justice those who commit violations against children,

COMMIT to working closely with civil society groups to ensure the protection, disarmament, and demobilization of child combatants and reintegration and rehabilitation of war-affected children into their families and communities,

RESOLVE to establish and strengthen programs for the rehabilitation of all war-affected children, as well as programs for the successful reintegration of those children within communities.

AGREE, in cooperation with donor agencies to work towards ensuring that all children have access to quality basic education, and as part of that effort, develop school curricula to support awareness of human rights and good governance principles, alternate dispute resolution methods, tolerance, and techniques for conflict management,

DECIDE to incorporate child rights and the protection of children in armed conflict, into training programs for military forces and other security agencies,

RESOLVE to develop specific programs to provide information, education and communication materials on child rights in order that the media are well informed to contribute to the rights, welfare and protection of children, and to develop media activities, particularly radio programmes, for the benefit of war-affected children, sensitive to, and consistent with the best interests of the child,

RESOLVE to implement early warning/response systems in the region to prevent armed conflicts and the victimization and abuse of children and their involvement in these conflicts,

COMMIT to promote sub-regional, cross-border initiatives to reduce the flow of small arms and light weapons, the recruitment and abduction of children, the displacement of populations and the separation of families, as well as illicit trade in natural resources,

CALL on the international community to provide more support to host countries and UNHCR, in order to reduce the social, economic, environmental and security impact of refugee outflow within the sub-region,

Call on ECOWAS Member States to provide, with the support of UN agencies and donors, full protection, access and relief to refugees and internally displaced persons, the vast majority of whom are women and children, in accordance with international refugee law and the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement,

COMMIT to support the Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security signed by all ECOWAS Member States at the Lome Summit on 10 December, 1999,

STRONGLY URGE ECOWAS Member States to support the implementation of the ECOWAS Moratorium in order to halt the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the sub-region,

RESOLVE, with assistance from the international community, to keep duty tours of ECOWAS peacekeepers to a reasonable length, in keeping with UN Standards,

ESTABLISH an office within ECOWAS for the protection of war-affected children in the sub-region and DECIDE to review the activities of ECOWAS in the protection of war-affected children in the region and agree to remain actively seized of the matter,

AGREE to institute, in solidarity with any country in a conflict situation, an annual "West African Week of Truce for War-Affected Children" in all ECOWAS Member States, to coincide with the Day of the African Child (June 16) and to raise public awareness about the plight of war-affected children in the region,

COMMIT to work with community leaders to support efforts to strengthen and apply these norms in recognition of the important role of traditional values and norms which provide for the protection of children in situations of conflict,

COMMIT to take measures to involve young people as participants and advocates in the movement for the protection of war-affected children, including developing children-to-children networks within West Africa,

CALL on the donor community, UN agencies, and international NGOs, to support and strengthen national institutions, local NGOs, local civil society, and communities to offer support and build local capacities for protection and advocacy for war-affected children,

DECIDE to dedicate a meeting of ECOWAS Foreign Ministers within the next twelve months to examine the role of national governments and ECOWAS in the protection of all war-affected children,

ECOWAS Member States urge the international community to provide expertise, as well as moral and financial support for the implementation of these initiatives.

CONFERENCE ON WAR-AFFECTED CHILDREN IN WEST AFRICA PLAN OF ACTION

At the invitation of the Government of Ghana in collaboration with the Government of Canada, with the active participation of the United Nations Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, and the Executive Secretary of ECOWAS, we, ECOWAS Member States, meeting in Accra from 27-28 April, 2000, adopted a Declaration on War-Affected Children. Pursuant to this Declaration, we, ECOWAS Member States agree to cooperate with representatives of civil society organizations, international organizations, and donor agencies, to carry out the following actions,

A. PROTECTION

(i) Implementing Norms and Standards

CALL FOR the immediate release by armed groups in the sub-region of all children abducted and held against their will,

RESOLVE to ratify and fully implement the provisions of international instruments on the rights of the child,

CALL UPON ECOWAS Member States to take all necessary steps to fully implement and respect the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1261 (1999) and 1265 (1999), the four Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, as well as the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the International Labour Organization Convention 182 Concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour and the draft Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict and further call upon all parties to sign and ratify the protocol once it is open for signature,

- a. Host training sessions on the application and implementation of the international instruments on the rights of the child, especially the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the draft Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict;
- b. Following adoption of the Plan of Action, designate a national body responsible for coordinating and monitoring the implementation of International Instruments on the rights of the child, and provide the name and address of this body to the Legal Division at the ECOWAS Secretariat;

- c. Following adoption of the Plan of Action, bring into force national legislative and regulatory measures to set the minimum age for military recruitment at 18 years;
- d. Following adoption of the Plan of Action, bring into force comprehensive national measures - including legislative, regulatory and administrative measures - on the protection of children which incorporate the substantive provisions of the above international instruments on the rights of the child;
- e. Disseminate information on the key provisions of international instruments on the rights of the child. This information should be readily available to local populations in West Africa, in non-technical style and translated into local languages and dialects. The information should be communicated both orally and in written format.

COMMIT to ratify the Statute of the International Criminal Court and to bring to justice those who commit violations against children.

(ii) Demobilization, Disarmament, Rehabilitation and Reintegration

COMMIT to working closely with civil society groups to ensure the protection, disarmament, and demobilization of child combatants, and reintegration and rehabilitation of war-affected children into their families and communities,

- a. Identify trained local or national groups to serve with ECOMOG Stand-by Units, to assist with disarming, demobilizing, reintegrating and rehabilitating war-affected children as mandated in the Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace-keeping and Security including addressing the gender-specific challenges of reintegration;
- b. Ensure the close collaboration and coordination between all governments and civil society groups active in the region in the provision of services to war-affected children, with particular attention to gender dimensions.

RESOLVE to establish and strengthen programs for the rehabilitation of all war-affected children, as well as programs for the successful reintegration of those children within communities,

- a. Raise media awareness on issues relating to war-affected children;
- b. Ensure that the particular and differentiated needs of war-affected children are taken into account in the provision of services to war-affected populations, and to

ensure that such considerations are mainstreamed in service design, development and delivery in keeping with efforts to institute the Sphere Project: Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response and other relevant instruments;

- c. In areas prone to conflict, the social services infrastructure should be structured and expanded to care for the specific needs of girl and boy child soldiers and war-affected children and to enable continuous assessment of each individual child;
- d. Ensure the overall protection of the girl child as provided for by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Beijing Platform for Action. Pay particular attention to sexual exploitation, abuse, and trauma, including those associated with pregnancy.
- e. Consult extensively at the community and national level to ensure that rehabilitation and reintegration programmes are carried out in collaboration with civil society, community leaders, traditional and religious authorities, including women's and children's organizations,
- f. Allocate a percentage of the national budget to demobilization, reintegration and rehabilitation programmes, wherever there are children affected by armed conflict.

(iii) Education

AGREE, in cooperation with donor agencies to work towards ensuring that all children have access to quality basic education, and as part of that effort, develop school curricula to support awareness of human rights and good governance principles, alternate dispute resolution methods, tolerance, and techniques for conflict management,

- a. Provide the resources required to maintain educational services for children, including refugee and internally displaced children in conflict and post-conflict situations;
- b. Provide for the sensitization of other students, parents and school authorities to accept all war-affected children, including child soldiers, as students and to recognize their particular needs by developing flexible teaching methodologies geared to instruct these children;
- c. Review and modify school curriculum and course materials to integrate peace education and remove discriminatory gender, ethnic, and religious stereotypes;

- d. Support and encourage the efforts of community leaders, parents, elders, teachers, and religious leaders to reclaim valuable traditional values;
- e. Provide for economically viable and marketable (or artisan-oriented) skills or vocational training to allow young men and women to earn a sustainable livelihood.

B. PREVENTION

(i) Addressing Fundamental Political, Social, Economic Factors

- a. Resolve to take political, social and economic preventive measures to address factors which tend to contribute to the occurrence or recurrence of conflict and to that end calls on ECOWAS Member States to ensure good governance and democratic practice, more equitable patterns of resource distribution within countries, national cohesion and elimination of conditions of extreme poverty and despair.

(ii) Military Education and Training

DECIDE to incorporate child rights and the protection of children in armed conflict, into training programs for military forces and other security agencies,

- a. Devise, share and incorporate military training manuals and programs on International Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, focussed particularly on children's rights;
- b. Intensify existing training programs for military forces and other security agencies, to be more sensitive to issues of child rights and gender;
- c. Develop a network of military institutions sensitive to the rights of the child, gender and specialized training on International Humanitarian Law issues. This network will ensure periodic evaluation of the effectiveness of these International Humanitarian Law training programs;
- d. Adopt measures to improve the gender balance among peacekeepers in national armed forces;
- e. Explore ways and means to enforce compliance with international instruments on gender and the rights of the child;

- f. Include women's and children's organizations in the training of military forces, police and other security agencies.

(iii) Media Awareness and Activities

RESOLVE to develop specific programs to provide information, education and communication materials on child rights in order that the media are well informed to contribute to the rights, welfare and protection of children, and to develop media activities, particularly radio programmes, for the benefit of war-affected children, sensitive to, and consistent with the best interests of the child,

- a. Host information sessions for local media organizations on the provisions of international and regional instruments on the rights of the child, including United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1261 (1999) and 1265 (1999), the four Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, as well as the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the draft Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, and Security Council Resolutions 1261 and 1265 and encourage and assist local media organizations to monitor the effective adherence to these instruments;
- b. Organise information sessions to media organizations on the provisions of the Statute of the International Criminal Court, including on the definitions of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes;
- c. Develop media information, particularly radio programmes, devoted to the needs and interests of children and young people affected by conflict. This would serve to give voice to children's concerns, offer education, training, and entertainment, promote tolerance, reconciliation, and raise awareness of the rights and protection of children.

(iv) Early Warning Systems

RESOLVE to implement early warning/response systems in the region to forestall armed conflicts and the victimization and abuse of children and their involvement in these conflicts,

- a. Designate focal points (community members, traditional authorities, and other organisations) which are represented throughout the country to act as early warning contact centres. Also, designate a government agency, international organisation, or representative of civil society in national capitals to collect,

compile and report immediately on signs of potential conflict;

- b. Bolster ECOWAS early warning capacity so that the four Observation and Monitoring Zonal Bureaux can network with designated centres in national capitals and oversee an early warning network with the aim of protecting children from involvement in conflicts;
- c. Ensure that media representatives are afforded the necessary freedom to recognize and report responsibly and accurately on potential and actual conflicts;
- d. Identify groups or individuals who are willing and able to function as non-partisan mediators, and provide support that they may be mobilized at short notice to defuse conflict situations;
- e. In conflict prone areas, encourage dialogue between opposing factions by holding periodic meetings with community leaders and other local authorities, including women and young people.

C. REGIONAL INITIATIVES

(i) ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Mechanism

- a. **Integrating Child Protection into ECOWAS Peacemaking Initiatives**
Ensure that the protection and well-being of children features systematically in any negotiations to end war and peace accords.
- b. **Integrating the protection of children into ECOWAS peacekeeping operations**
Ensure that the following measures are incorporated into ECOWAS peacekeeping operations:
 - That the protection and rights of children are explicitly provided for in the mandates of ECOWAS Peacekeeping missions;
 - That child protection advisers are attached to ECOWAS field missions;
 - That appropriate training is provided for all peacekeeping personnel with regard to the rights and protection of children.

COMMIT to promote sub-regional, cross-border initiatives to reduce the flow of small arms and light weapons, the recruitment and abduction of children, the displacement of populations and the separation of families, as well as illicit trade in natural resources.

CALL on the international community to provide more support to host countries and

UNHCR, in order to reduce the social, economic, environmental, and security impact of refugee outflow within the sub-region.

CALL on ECOWAS states to provide, with the support of UN agencies and donors, full protection, access and relief to refugees and internally displaced persons, the vast majority of whom are women and children, in accordance with international refugee law and the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

COMMIT to support the Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security signed by all ECOWAS Member States at the Lome Summit on 10 December, 1999,

- a. Ratify in the shortest time possible the Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security;
- b. Fully support, both morally and financially, a role for the Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security, in the protection of children in areas of potential conflict, and war-affected children;
- c. Ensure, through work with donor organisations, that the four Observation and Monitoring Zones, mandated in Article 24 of the Protocol (in Banjul, Ouagadougou, Monrovia, and Cotonou) are fully functional within a reasonable time, and that their monitoring and reporting functions include early warning and monitoring on children's rights and security. Monitoring should include social, political, economic and military indicators relating to the security of children.

(ii) ECOWAS Moratorium

STRONGLY URGE ECOWAS Member States to support the implementation of the ECOWAS Moratorium in order to halt the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the sub-region,

- a. Fully support the Programme for Co-ordination and Assistance for Security and Development, and in particular, the implementation of a regional arms and light weapons registry and database;
- b. Assemble an ECOWAS experts high-level group to assess implementation of and non-compliance with the ECOWAS Moratorium at national levels, and to recommend measures to be taken against individuals or states proven to have violated the ECOWAS Moratorium on small arms and measures to encourage full implementation;

- c. Ensure that national military, police, and customs officials and all other security agencies and customs administration training programs include sessions on the ECOWAS Moratorium on small arms and light weapons, as well as instructions regarding identification of behaviours which constitute an infraction of the ECOWAS Moratorium.

(iii) Peacekeeping Duty

RESOLVE, with assistance from the international community, to keep duty tours of ECOWAS peacekeepers to a reasonable length, in keeping with UN Standards.

(iv) Institutionalizing Child Protection within ECOWAS

ESTABLISH an office within ECOWAS for the protection of War-Affected Children in the region and agree to remain actively seized of the matter,

- a. Establish within the ECOWAS Secretariat, a Desk or focal point dedicated to the protection of war-affected children which deals with emergency assistance, humanitarian and human rights issues, including early warning capacity and adequate vocational training. This Desk or focal point should draw on expertise and growing knowledge base housed in the Programme for Assistance and Coordination for Security and Development (PCASED) to ensure that the impact of arms proliferation on war-affected children is addressed;
- b. In so doing, build ECOWAS capacity to monitor the implementation of, and adherence to, international instruments on the rights of the child, and to monitor contraventions of the provisions of these conventions;
- c. Institute ECOWAS measures against states, groups or individuals which use child soldiers or which assist in the use of child soldiers;
- d. Obtain the support and collaboration for such measures from the international community.

(v) West African Week of Truce for War-Affected Children

AGREE to institute, in solidarity with any country in a conflict situation, an annual "West African Week of Truce for War-Affected Children" in all ECOWAS Member States, to coincide with the Day of the African Child (June 16), to raise public awareness about the plight of war-affected children in the region,

- a. Identify national groups charged with coordinating educational activities for the week of truce;
- b. Ensure the coordination of relief and humanitarian services including vaccination and registration of children during the week of truce;
- c. Support efforts to disarm and demobilize all children who have been involved in armed conflict and ensure that the principle of best interests of the child is taken into account when doing so;
- d. Rehabilitate and reintegrate war-affected children during and in the period leading up to the week of truce, in addition to taking all necessary steps for family reunification and the physical and psycho-social healing of all war-affected children;
- e. Institute measures on the week of truce to encourage and mobilize families to register all children who were not registered at birth;
- f. Engage international groups as official cease-fire monitors in areas of conflict, during the week of truce.

COMMIT to work with community leaders to support efforts to strengthen and apply traditional values and norms which provide for the protection of children in situations of conflict, in recognition of the important role of these values and norms in African societies.

COMMIT to take measures to involve young people as participants and advocates in the movement for the protection of war-affected children, including developing children-to-children networks, and links within West Africa.

CALL ON the donor community, UN agencies and international NGOs, to support and strengthen national institutions, local NGOs, local civil society, and communities to offer support and build local capacities for protection and advocacy for war-affected children.

DECIDE to dedicate a meeting of ECOWAS Foreign Ministers within the next twelve months to examine the role of national governments and ECOWAS in the protection of all war-affected children.

ECOWAS Member States urge the international community to provide expertise, as well as moral and financial support for the implementation of these initiatives.

YOUTH RESOLUTION ON WAR AFFECTED CHILDREN IN WEST AFRICA

We, 21 children/young people, aged between 15 and 20 years, from 11 different member countries of ECOWAS, participated in the "Youth Workshop on War-Affected Children in West Africa" held in Accra from April 24-26, 2000 to examine the difficult situation with which many of us are confronted in our sub-region where wars continue to rage and conflicts easily become violent.

Organized by UNICEF and the Canadian Government, the workshop provided us with an opportunity to develop a common position on key concerns affecting our survival, protection and development to put before a high level conference of ECOWAS ministers and other policy makers.

The issues discussed were:

- The realisation of our rights, as set forth by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and their violation in general and in situations of armed conflict in particular;
- The definition of conflict and war and the protection of children affected by armed conflict;
- The rehabilitation and reintegration of child soldiers;
- The repatriation and resettlement of refugees and displaced children;
- The health care to respond to the physical and psychological damage caused by the war and to ensure the right to life survival and development;
- The specific situations faced by boys and by girls;
- Reintegration of children into families and communities;
- The fundamental importance of education.

REALISING that children and women are the first and most vulnerable victims of war and conflicts that undermine the region, delay development and hinder the realisation of children's rights;

RECOGNISING that war results in fear, violence, suffering, uncertainty and touches not only the countries directly affected but also other countries especially the neighbouring ones, whose stability and security may be compromised under the circumstances;

SEIZING the opportunity offered by this meeting to launch an appeal to the Governments of West African countries through the Honourable Ministers represented here, and to the international community meeting on the occasion of this important conference;

NOTING that education must be taken as a key strategy in establishing a culture of peace;

WE HEREBY RECOMMEND, generally:

- That all measures be taken to stop the proliferation and perpetuation of war and conflict through preventive actions based, among others, on the promotion of a culture of peace, fraternity and tolerance dear to our continent;

- That the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and all other International Instruments and standards protecting children in situations of armed conflict, be ratified, implemented and their provisions respected by West African States;
- That special mechanisms for monitoring the implementation of these instruments and for investigating violations of rights be created at the national level by respective governments in collaboration with civil society and at regional level by ECOWAS. Such mechanisms should report regularly;
- That States and all others responsible for these violations be held accountable through appropriate mechanisms, and be sanctioned, taking into account the interests of children;
- That a network of children's organisations of ECOWAS countries be established by ECOWAS and all concerned, recognising the importance for children and youth to meet, share experiences and participate in finding solutions together;
- That the highest priority be given to the realisation of our right to accessible, quality, formal and non-formal education for all, as well as vocational skills training, taking into account article 28 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which provides for free and compulsory primary education, these being the basic conditions for our proper growth and development.

WE RECOMMEND SPECIFICALLY, among other things, on:

A. PROTECTION OF CHILDREN

- Ensure the provision of quality basic services to all children, including physical and psychological health and psycho-social care and assistance for children, victims of violence, children with disabilities, etc.;
- Encourage the creation of rehabilitation centres for children affected by war providing psycho-social assistance, health care, family tracing;
- Strengthening communities and families to protect and care for the children;
- Ensure the creation of "safe zones" for children and women during war. These zones must be protected and those who violate them must be brought to justice.

B. CHILD SOLDIERS

- To prohibit the use of children under 18 as soldiers;
- Those who still recruit children as soldiers must be brought to justice;
- To ensure that the process of demobilization and rehabilitation of child soldiers includes appropriate programmes of special education to facilitate their reintegration.

C. REPATRIATION AND REINTEGRATION

- All West African States, especially war torn countries must assume responsibility and assist refugees to be repatriated and resettled in the countries of their origin;

- All States must create an enabling environment for the reintegration of former refugees, especially the most vulnerable groups such as orphans, child soldiers, children separated from their families, into communities and families of origin by, for instance, supporting the families in difficulty with basic services.

WE RECOGNIZE AND APPRECIATE the priority given to the issue of children affected by armed conflicts as demonstrated by the adoption of new important instruments and by the great number of meetings held at international, regional and national levels;

In light of these positive steps and in consideration of our recommendations resulting from two-and-a-half days of work, we would like to ask you, Honourable Ministers of West African Governments and representatives of the international community, a few questions that you may wish to take into account during your meeting:

- What are the actions that you plan to undertake in order to translate these commitments into real promotion and protection of our rights?
- How do you plan to carry out these actions?
- What support is the international community willing to offer?
- What resources (human, material and financial) are our States and the International Community ready and willing to make available?
- What will be, and who will ensure, the follow-up to this important meeting, and the implementation of recommendations resulting from your efforts and ours?

We would like to conclude by thanking UNICEF and the Canadian and Ghanaian governments and the children and people of Ghana for the support that made it possible for us to come to this country and share important experiences.

Made in Accra, 26 April 2000

GUIDELINES FOR JOURNALISTS COVERING CHILDREN IN WAR AND CONFLICT

**Adopted by Participants in the Workshop for Journalists
on War-Affected Children**

Organised by UNESCO, Accra, 24-29 April 2000

A. RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

The right to freedom of expression is a fundamental human right. All rights and duties of a journalist originate from this right. From this also derives the right of the public to be informed. Journalists in war and conflict situations shall, accordingly, uphold as a supreme professional obligation the public's right to accurate information.

Journalists shall consider it their obligation to publicize early warning signs to potential conflict situations.

Journalists shall pay attention to covering efforts at resolving conflicts, rehabilitation and social reintegration, not ignoring efforts made through local initiatives.

B. PROFESSIONAL COMMITMENT OF JOURNALISTS

Journalists shall maintain a high degree of commitment and professionalism in the discharge of their duties. In furtherance of this principle:

1. Journalists shall maintain independence of conscience from all factions in war and conflict;
2. Journalists should constantly guard against being used as propaganda tools;
3. Journalists should endeavour to establish links with civil society and any other credible sources in order to develop a high degree of mutual trust and confidence;
4. Journalists covering situations of armed conflict shall properly familiarize themselves with issues affecting the conflict;
5. Journalists shall endeavour to expose by any means available acts of atrocities and their perpetrators at all times;
6. Journalists should make every effort to avoid being compromised with such things as incentives which might influence them to deviate from the established professional ethics.

C. SENSATIONALISM

In view of the volatile nature of armed conflicts, journalists shall take the greatest care in the choice of language, images and information so as not to aggravate the conflict situation.

Where information is true but potentially explosive and the journalist thinks it is of public interest, he/she must take great care in publishing the story.

D. ETHNIC DISCRIMINATION

Journalists must avoid fanning ethnic sentiments, particularly among children.

E. PROTECTION OF CHILDREN

Journalists shall at all times strive to uphold the principle that children involved in violent conflicts are victims whether they are combatants or non-combatants.

The use of children as fighters is an abuse; journalists shall never present such abuse as an attractive venture.

Journalists should avoid portraying illegal combat camp life as an attractive haven for children.

Pictures and stories that glorify child combatants as heroes and heroines shall be avoided. Where pictures of child combatants must be used, journalists must accompany such pictures with captions that discourage children from war.

Journalists shall, as much as possible, focus more on issues and events, and less on individual children or their experiences.

Where it is necessary to focus on the experiences of individuals, journalists shall do so without mentioning real names, revealing real identities either in the story, photographs or images, of the children.

Journalists in their stories shall substitute the term "child-soldier" with "child-combatant," on the grounds that a child by definition cannot train to become a soldier.

Journalists shall not present child combatants as "doomed-for-life" since this may make social and cultural reintegration more difficult.

Journalists shall endeavour to disclose the identity of people who abuse children. This should be aimed at uncovering criminals to the process of justice.

In filing stories, all effort shall be made to reflect the perspectives of children, including direct quotes.

Where this is not possible, journalists shall explore other sources apart from children such as opinion leaders, members of the civil society and individuals mindful that the protection of the identity and the interest of the child is paramount.

It shall be the duty of every journalist to rectify any information he/she publishes about children that is found to be incorrect.

F. PRIVACY OF CHILDREN

Journalists are obliged at all times to protect the identity of the children who suffer, or inflict on others violence such as sexual crimes, murder, and other crimes.

G. RIGHTS OF JOURNALISTS

Taking into account the grave risks journalists are exposed to in the discharge of their work, journalists assigned to cover dangerous situations shall be given full personal insurance coverage by their employers.

A journalist shall comply with, and shall benefit from, the protection specified under International law, in particular the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 1977.

A journalist shall not be compelled to perform or express a position contrary to his or her convictions.

CONFERENCE ON WAR-AFFECTED CHILDREN IN WEST AFRICA

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CIVIL SOCIETY DAY

**His Excellency the Honourable Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ghana,
His Excellency the Honourable Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada.**

It is my singular and esteemed privilege to present to you on behalf of all participants and contributors to the Civil Society Day, their recommendations which they hopefully pray will be received and supported by your esteemed Governments.

Before I do so, however, permit me, your Excellencies to extend on their behalf their greetings, felicitations and sincere appreciation to the Government of Ghana and the Government of Canada for convening this conference which brings to the table the very sensitive and delicate issue of war-affected children in our sub-region.

It is hoped by all parties to the Civil Society Day that both governments will maintain this much needed and desired dialogue between government and civil society.

Once again, do accept our sincere thanks and greetings.

FACTORS WHICH CIVIL SOCIETY IDENTIFIED AS CAUSING CONFLICTS

- Lack of a culture for the respect of human rights on the part of governments which has resulted in their failure to ratify and implement international and regional instruments on the protection of human rights in general and on children's rights in particular.
- Bad governance, evident in the lack of decentralized systems, has resulted in the inequitable distribution of resources, a consequence of which is massive migration to cities, marginalization of social groups leading to resentment and aggression, a rise in poverty, and impoverishment and social aversion to the state system.
- The growing phenomenon of children in especially difficult circumstances, such as street children, especially in the urban areas of African states, has created a potentially explosive situation. This is a result of economic deprivation, stigmatization, lack of education and a normal family environment. This may stem from inadequate national/social policies.
- Lack of rigorous legislation in the acquisition and importation of small arms, and selective enforcement of said legislation has resulted in the proliferation of small arms and insecurity.

- The exposure of children to weapons of war through local production, distribution, utilization and through exposure to harmful electronic and print media without effective monitoring systems and legislation in place.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS ARISING FROM THE WORKSHOPS

Prevention

- Strengthen military capacity to deal with war-affected children in the heat of conflict, especially with the child combatants as the military often comes face-to-face with them and may be the only people available to deal with these children.
- Prevention of conflict must be a holistic effort involving government, civil society and communities; this collaboration should be strengthened to deal with the root causes of conflict.

Rehabilitation and Reintegration

- Governments and the international community should be encouraged to give priority to the rehabilitation and reintegration of children in post-war societies by providing and strengthening social structures that are critical for healing and re-socialization.
- The plight of girls should be highlighted; national structures and programs to address the needs of the girl child in the post-war society should be given attention.

Advocacy

- Governments should sign and ratify conventions and protocols on the rights and protection of the child including the Rome Statutes on the establishment of the International Criminal Court and the Optional Protocol on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, when it is opened for signature.
- Governments should publish the international and regional conventions on the rights of the child in their local dialects and circulate them widely within their jurisdiction.
- Upon review, the ECOWAS Moratorium should be developed into a legally-binding agreement in order to ensure that the issue of small arms proliferation in the sub-region is addressed.

Education

- Governments and the donor community should adopt a participatory approach and involve communities in all aspects of programming.
- Priority should be placed on government and donor coordination in the development of projects to avoid duplication of effort and inefficient/inappropriate use of resources.

**YOUTH WORKSHOP ON WAR-AFFECTED CHILDREN
IN WEST AFRICA**

At the Miklin Hotel

Accra, GHANA, 24-26 April 2000

PROGRAMME

Sunday, April 23, 2000: Arrival of participants

Evening: dinner & team building

Core Facilitator: Nyaradzai Gumbonzvanda

Day One: Monday, April 24, 2000

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| 7.30-8.15 | Breakfast/Registration |
| 8.30-8.40 | Demonstration of Interpretation Equipment |
| 8.40-8.45 | Short meditation |
| 8.45-9.15 | Opening and Welcome Addresses, Chaired by Fidelia Adomanko-Mensah
UNICEF – Omar Abdi, Representative
Ghana National Commission on Children – Alberta Quartey, Chairperson
Canadian High Commission – Janet Graham, Canadian High Commissioner |
| 9.15-10.15 | Announcements, Objectives and Expectations |
| 10.15-10.45 | BREAK |
| 10.45-12.30 | Introduction to Child Rights & Responsibilities:
The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African
Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
<u>Purpose of the exercise:</u> To create awareness on children's rights and
responsibilities. |
| 12.30-1.30 | LUNCH |
| 1.30-2.30 | Video presentation and discussion |
| 2.30-3.30 | Linking Child Rights and War: How does war affect children's rights, i.e.
which rights are violated in situations of war and conflict. Which articles
address protection of children in war and conflict.
<u>Purpose of the exercise:</u> To link children's rights with the concept of war. |
| 3.30-4.00 | BREAK |

- 4.00-6.00 Strengthening group cohesion and expression through games
- 6.00-7.30 DINNER
- 7.30-8.30 'My Moment of Pride'
Each participant, including adults, can share a moment in their life that he/she felt really proud of him/herself.
Purpose of exercise: To help build self esteem and it is a positive way to end the day.
- 8.30-9.00 Evaluation of day one.

Day 2: Tuesday, April 25, 2000

- 7.30-8.15 Breakfast
- 8.30-8.40 Warmer, little game, etc.
- 8.40-9.15 Evaluation of Day One: Participants write in logbook
- 10.00-10.30 Group Sessions:
1. Define the concept of war/conflict
2. How does war affect children
- 10.30-11.00 BREAK
- 11.00-11.30 Plenary: Groups report on their discussions
- 11.30-12.30 Group Sessions:
Group 1: Protection of children in war and conflict: what can be done at family, community, government and international levels
Group 2: Child Soldiers: How/why did they become combatants and how could they be reintegrated?
Group 3: Repatriation/resettlement of refugees and displaced persons
- 12.30-1.30 LUNCH
- 1.30-1.45 Warmer, icebreaker, etc.
- 1.45-2.45 Continuation of group sessions:
Group 1: Health issues: restore health to children including children with disabilities.
Group 2: Girls and Boys: specific issues related to girls (i.e. teenage pregnancies, prostitution, abuse, etc.).
Group 3: Reintegration of all war affected children: into families and communities
- 2.45-3.30 Group presentations

- 3.30-4.00 BREAK
- 4.00-5.00 Drafting of Resolution in Plenary
5.00-5.30 Presentation by Liberian Refugee children 'The Liberian Press club'
Impressions of life as a refugee in Ghana.
- 5.30-6.30 Free time
- 6.30-8.00 BUFFET at the pool
- 8.00-10.30 CULTURAL ENTERTAINMENT
Performances by Ghanaian and Liberian children

Day 3: Wednesday, April 26, 2000

- 7.00-7.45 Breakfast
8.00 Departure for Conference Centre
8.30-11.00 Opening Ceremony Civil Society Day
11.00-1.00 Sight seeing tour Accra by bus, shopping in Art's centre
- 1.00-2.00 LUNCH
- 2.15-2.30 Warmer, icebreaker
2.30-3.00 Evaluation of Day 2, writing of logbook
3.00-3.30 Plenary: Presentation of draft resolution
3.30-4.00 Discussion of Resolution in smaller groups
- 4.00-4.15 BREAK
- 4.15-4.45 Continuation of group discussion, finalising the resolution
4.45-5.45 Adoption of Resolution and Plan of Action
- 6.30-7.30 DINNER
- 7.30-8.30 Follow-up Activities and Networking in the Region
- 7.29-8.30 EVALUATION of workshop in plenary

Thursday, April 27, 2000: Selection of participants who are still in Accra will present the youth resolution at the opening ceremony of the ministerial meeting.

- West African Journalists Association (WAJA): From Conakry to Accra-Presentation of Results from Conakry Meeting
 - Discussion with participants: Elaboration of the framework
- 11 :00 Coffee Break
- 11 :30 Continued discussion: Intervention of experts to discuss the recommendations
- 12 :20 Final remarks and closure

Session 6: Presentation of the Conference Programme

Open to all journalists based in Accra

- 14 :00 Presentation of the Conference
- 14 :10 Objectives of the Conference
- 14 :25 Conference Participants
- 14 :40 Presentation of the Documents
- Main papers
 - Draft Declaration
- 15 :00 Detailed Programme of the Conference
- Questions and Answers
- 15 :20 Presentation of the services available to Journalists during the Conference: Press briefings, Press room and transmission facilities
- 15 :30 Questions and Answers
- 20 :00 **Special National Television Programme on Children in War (live)**
International Conference Centre, Accra
The programme will consist of a presentation of video material on the topic and a discussion with and among the panellists.
- 22 :00 Open bar and snacks for participants

CONFERENCE

Thursday, 27 April Ministerial Conference on War-Affected Children
International Conference Centre, Accra

- 09 :00 Plenary Opening Ceremony
- 10 :00 Experts Panel on War-Affected Children in West Africa
- 15 :30-16 :00 Presentations by Journalists on Ministerial Workshop Sessions

16 :10 Session for Journalists: The Declaration and the Plan of Action: Point of
View of the Media: Recommendations to Official Delegates
18 :00-18:30 Presentations by Journalists on Ministerial Workshop Sessions

Friday, 28 April **Ministerial Conference on War-Affected Children**

10 :00 Ethical Framework on the Coverage of War-Affected Children
15 :00 Closing Plenary: Adoption of Declaration and Signing Ceremony
Concluding Remarks by Hon. Victor Gbeho, MFA Ghana
and Hon. Lloyd Axworthy, MFA Canada

WORKSHOP

Saturday, 29 April: Post Conference Review

Session 7: Debriefing

9 :10 Introduction by the Moderator on the events of the previous day
9 :30 Individual assessment (paper board/cards)
11 :00 Summary/Clarifications and discussion

**CONFERENCE ON WAR-AFFECTED CHILDREN IN WEST AFRICA
CIVIL SOCIETY DAY**

**April 26, 2000
Accra, Ghana**

AGENDA

Wednesday, 26 April

08h20

REGISTRATION

Reception Desk, International Conference Centre

PLENARY

Committee Room One, International Conference Centre

9h00

Opening Ceremony

Opening Remarks: Canadian High Commissioner, Janet Graham

Chairman: Dr. Ken Agyemang-Attafuah, Director of Operations and Chief Investigator, Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice

Guest Speaker: Senator Myrtle Gibson, Government of Liberia (TBC)

Guest Speaker: Mr. Napoleon Abdulai, Centre régionale des Nations Unies pour la paix et le désarmement en Afrique

Guest of Honour: First Lady Nana Konadu Agyeman Rawlings

10h30

Coffee Break

11h00

FOUR CONCURRENT WORKSHOPS

1: PREVENTION

Meeting Room Two, International Conference Centre

Facilitator: Dr. Margaret K.Y. Agama
Centre for Conflict Resolution, Ghana

Speaker: Mr. Clement Nwankwo, Director
Constitutional Rights Project, Nigeria

Rapporteur: Mr. Ibrahim Diouf
Secretary-General for Defence for Children International, Senegal

2: REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION

Committee Room One, International Conference Centre

Facilitator: Mr. Sam Doe, Executive Director
West African Network on Peacebuilding (WANEP), Ghana

Speaker: Dr. Sam Nutt, Executive Director
Warchild Canada
"The Road to Peace: What Can Children Do?"

Rapporteur: Mme. Kinda Tene
Save the Children Fund, Burkina Faso

3: ADVOCACY
Meeting Room One, International Conference Centre

Facilitator: Mrs. Lydia Nkansah
Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice, Ghana

Speaker: Mrs. Gladys Boateng
Ghana Fellowship of Former Members of Parliament
"Conventions Relating to the Rights and Protection of Children"

Rapporteur: Mr. Nii Adjei Larbey
Ghana Fellowship of Former Members of Parliament

4: EDUCATION
Meeting Room Three, International Conference Centre

Facilitator: Mr. Amadou Bocoum, Country Coordinator
PLAN International, Sierra Leone

Speaker: Mr. Alan Pearson
International Children's Institute, Canada
"IN THE AFTERMATH OF WAR: Mobilizing the Community to Support Children in their Recovery from Psychological Trauma"

Rapporteur: Mrs. Beatrice Duncan
Gender and Child Consultancy, Ghana

12h00 Lunch

13h00 **CONTINUATION OF FOUR CONCURRENT AFTERNOON WORKSHOPS**

14h30 Coffee Break

15h00-15h45 **PLENARY RE-CONVENES WITH REPORTS OF RAPPORTEURS**
Committee Room One, International Conference Centre

Report of Rapporteur from Prevention Workshop
Report of Rapporteur from Rehabilitation and Reintegration Workshop
Report of Rapporteur from Advocacy Workshop

Report of Rapporteur from Education Workshop

15h45-16h15 **REFLECTIONS FROM MR. OLARA OTUNNU, UN SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE TO THE SECRETARY GENERAL ON CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT**

16h15-16h30 **CLOSING REMARKS FROM CHAIRMAN**

16h30-18h00 Working Session to Prepare Report to Conference Co-Chairs, Minister Axworthy and Minister Gbeho

Thursday, 27 April

09h00 **MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE COMMENCES**
Committee Room One, International Conference Centre

18h00 **CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS REPORT TO CONFERENCE CO-CHAIRS MINISTER GBEHO AND MINISTER AXWORTHY**

Friday, 28 April

08h15 **BRIEFING/BREAKFAST MEETING ON THE RATIFICATION OF THE STATUTE OF THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT**
LaPalm Royal Beach Hotel

10h00 **JOINT SESSION WITH JOURNALIST WORKSHOP:
DISCUSSION OF AN ETHICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE
COVERAGE OF WAR AFFECTED CHILDREN**
Committee Room One, International Conference Centre

**CONFERENCE ON WAR-AFFECTED
CHILDREN IN WEST AFRICA**

April 27 - 28, 2000

**International Conference Centre
Accra, Ghana**

DAY ONE: THURSDAY APRIL 27, 2000

09h00 Registration and Arrival of Guests

10h00-11h00 OPENING CEREMONY
Main Hall

Chair: Hon. James Victor Gbeho, Foreign Minister of Ghana
Hon. Lloyd Axworthy, Foreign Minister of Canada
H.E. Lansana Kouyaté, ECOWAS Executive Secretary
Statement by Youth Representatives
Keynote Address:
H.E. Flt-Lt. Jerry John Rawlings, President of the Republic of Ghana

11h00 Coffee/Cocoa break

**11h30-13h00 PLENARY: WAR-AFFECTED CHILDREN IN
WEST AFRICA: THE SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM**
Committee Hall 1

Co-Chairs: Minister James Victor Gbeho and Minister Lloyd Axworthy

Strategic Overview:

Mr. Olara Otunnu, UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on
Children and Armed Conflict
Children Affected by Armed Conflict

Expert Panel:

Mr. Nigel Fisher, UNICEF Regional Director, South Asia
Leaders and War-Affected Children: Accountability and Commitment
Mme. Ndioro Ndiare, International Organization for Migration, Geneva
Issues of Migration and War-Affected Children
Mr. Amos Sawyer, former President of Liberia and Chairman of the
Centre for Democratic Empowerment
The Case of War-Affected Children in Liberia

Remarks: Mr. Yasuaki Nogawa, Deputy Director General, Middle East and Africa,
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan

13h00-14h30 LUNCH First Floor of Conference Centre

14h30-16h30 THREE CONCURRENT WORKSHOPS

- 1 The Role of the Military in Child Protection**
- 2 Rehabilitation: Restoring Health to War-Affected Children**
- 3 Implementing Norms and Standards for War-Affected Children: at National, Regional and International Levels**

1. THE ROLE OF THE MILITARY IN CHILD PROTECTION

Meeting Room 1

Chair: Honourable Charles Providence Gomis, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Cote d'Ivoire

Rapporteur: Col. F. Aboagye, Ministry of Defence, Ghana

Speaker: General Arnold Quainoo, Centre for Conflict Resolution, Ghana
The Military and Child Rights Training – The Ghanaian Model

Speaker: Ms. Una McCaulcy, Regional Advisor, Children and Armed Conflict,
Radda Barnen, Côte d'Ivoire
Child Rights Training Modules for Militaries in West Africa

Discussant: Ms. Bituin Gonzales, UN Child Protection Advisor in Sierre Leone

Discussion

Rapporteur recounts

2. REHABILITATION: RESTORING HEALTH TO WAR-AFFECTED CHILDREN

Meeting Room 2

Chair: Honourable Dr. Sama Banya, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sierra Leone

Rapporteur: Mr. Sam Doe, West African Network for Peacebuilding, Ghana

Speaker: Mme. Marietou Faye, Coordinatrice Nationale, Handicap international,
Senegal
Physical Rehabilitation and War-Affected Children in Senegal

Speaker: Mr. Omar Abdi, UNICEF Representative, Ghana
The Challenge of Rehabilitating Child Soldiers in West Africa

Discussant: Federation of African Women and Education (FAWE), Sierre Leone
Restoring Health to War-Affected Girls

Discussion

Rapporteur recounts

3. IMPLEMENTING NORMS AND STANDARDS FOR WAR-AFFECTED CHILDREN: AT NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS
Meeting Room 3

- Chair: Honourable Shirley Y. Gbujama, Minister of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, Sierra Leone
- Rapporteur: Ms. Funmi Olonisakin, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Children and Armed Conflict
- Speaker: Mrs. Estelle Appiah, Principal State Attorney, Ministry of Justice, Ghana
Comprehensive National Legislation on the Child: The Ghanaian Model
- Speaker: Mr. Nana K.A. Busia, Human Rights Lawyer with International Alert, The Gambia
War-Affected Children and the African Charter
- Discussant: Mr. Ibrahim Diouf, Defence for Children International, Senegal
International Norms and War-Affected Children
- Discussant: Ms. Erin Mooney, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Internally Displaced Persons
The Guiding Principles on Internally Displaced Persons

Discussion

Rapporteur recounts

16h30 **Coffee/Cocoa Break**

17h00-19h00 **THREE CONCURRENT WORKSHOPS**

- 4 **Disarming and Demobilizing Child Soldiers in West Africa**
- 5 **Reintegration: Paving the way for successful integration of War-Affected Children into Communities**
- 6 **The International Criminal Court and West African Ratification**

4. DISARMING AND DEMOBILIZING CHILD SOLDIERS IN WEST AFRICA
Meeting Room 1

- Chair: H.E. Soumailou Boubeye Maiga, Minister of Defence of Mali
- Rapporteur: Dr. Mariam Djibrilla Maiga, Présidente du Mouvement national des femmes pour la sauvegarde de la paix et de l'unité nationale, Mali
- Speaker: Dr. Mark Malan, Institute for Security Studies, South Africa
The Child Soldier Phenomenon in West Africa
- Speaker: Mr. Kai Kai, national Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration, Sierra Leone
Disarming and Demobilizing Child Soldiers: Developing Appropriate Interventions

Discussant: Major-General (rtd) Ishola Williams, President, African Strategic and Peace Research Group, Nigeria
A view from the field: ECOMOG in Sierra Leone

Discussion

Rapporteur recounts

5. REINTEGRATION: PAVING THE WAY FOR SUCCESSFUL INTEGRATION OF WAR-AFFECTED CHILDREN INTO COMMUNITIES

Meeting Room 2

Chair: Honourable Mr. Francois Massaquoi, Minister of Youth and Sports, Liberia

Rapporteur: Alice Kipre, Action Secour Afrique, Côte d'Ivoire

Speaker: Mrs. Leila Gupta, Ethiopia

Rapid Education for War-Affected Children in Sierre Leone

Speaker: Mr. Bjorn Hagan, Radda Barna, Uganda

Efforts to Free and Reintegrate War-Affected Girls in East Africa

Discussant: Ms. Theo Sowa, Consultant, New York

Discussant: Mr. Anthony Hubbard, Associate Minister for Social Welfare, Liberia

Discussion

Rapporteur recounts

6. THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT AND WEST AFRICAN RATIFICATION

Meeting Room 3

Chair: Honourable Kolawole A. Idji, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Benin

Rapporteur: Mr. William Pace, Convenor, Coalition for an International Criminal Court, New York

Speaker: Valerie Oosterveld, Human Rights and Humanitarian Law Division, Department of Foreign Affairs, Canada

The ICC and War-Affected Children

Speaker: Mr. Mame Ibrahima Tounkara, Organisation nationale des droits de l'homme, Senegal

The ICC and West Africa

Discussant: Mrs. Isabelle Daost, Red Cross, Cote D'Ivoire

Discussion

Rapporteur recounts

18h30 - 20h00

RECEPTION

Main Lobby of Conference Centre

19h30 DRAFTING COMMITTEE MEETING
Meeting Room 3

Co-Chair: Mr. Annan Cato, Chief Director, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Accra
Co-Chair: M. Marc Perron, Special Envoy of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ottawa
Review of Draft Declaration and Draft Plan of Action

DAY TWO: FRIDAY, APRIL 28, 2000

**09h00-11h00 CLOSED SESSION MINISTERIAL WORKSHOP:
TOWARD A REGIONAL APPROACH: BUILDING ON THE
ECOWAS MORATORIUM AND OTHER PREVENTIVE
NEIGHBOURHOOD INITIATIVES**
Meeting Room 1

Chair: Hon. James Victor Gbeho, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ghana
Rapporteur: Ivor Fung, UN Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament, Togo
Speaker: Ambassador Lansana Kouyaté, ECOWAS Executive Secretary
Speaker: Mr. Olara Otunnu, UN Special Representative to the Secretary General on
Children and Armed Conflict
Wrap-up: Rapporteur recounts

11h00-12h00 REPORT OF THE DRAFTING COMMITTEE
Meeting Room 1

Chair: Hon. James Victor Gbeho, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ghana
Report: Mr. Annan Cato, Chief Director, Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
Accra
M. Marc Perron, Special Envoy of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ottawa
Discussion of Report

12h30-14h00 LUNCH FOR HEADS OF DELEGATION
Meeting Room 2

12h30 -14h00 LUNCH FOR OTHER OFFICIAL DELEGATES
Lobby, First Floor of Conference Centre

14h30 PLENARY RE-CONVENES
Meeting Hall 1

Chair: Hon. James Victor Gbeho, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ghana
Presentation of Final Text of Declaration and Plan of Action

15h00

CONCLUDING REMARKS:

Ambassador Lansana Kouyaté, ECOWAS Executive Secretary
Hon. Lloyd Axworthy, Foreign Minister of Canada
Hon. James Victor Gbeho, Foreign Minister of Ghana

**ADOPTION OF DECLARATION AND PLAN OF ACTION
SIGNING CEREMONY**

16h00

PRESS CONFERENCE

Press Room, Second Floor, Conference Centre

Ambassador Lansana Kouyaté, ECOWAS Executive Secretary
Hon. Lloyd Axworthy, Foreign Minister of Canada
Hon. James Victor Gbeho, Foreign Minister of Ghana

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF GHANA
H.E. FLT. LT. JERRY JOHN RAWLINGS

**AT THE OPENING OF THE CONFERENCE ON WAR-AFFECTED CHILDREN IN
WEST AFRICA, AT THE ACCRA INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE CENTRE**

27 April, 2000

**Hon. Chair and Co-Chairs,
Distinguished Ministers of Participating Countries,
Your Excellency, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and
Armed Conflict,
Members of the Council of State,
Honourable Ministers of State and Members of Parliament,
Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Niimeɛ, Naameɛ, Nananom,
Youth Representatives,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I am honoured to welcome this distinguished gathering to Accra to deliberate with Ghanaian representatives of Government, the Armed Forces, non-governmental organisations, civil society and the media on one of the most important topics before all of our nations as we enter the 21st century—the future of our most precious resource, our children.

I wish to extend a particularly warm welcome to the Foreign Minister of Canada, the Honourable Lloyd Axworthy, co-chairman of this Conference, whose personal dedication and commitment have contributed in no small measure to our meeting here today. The Government of Ghana would like to express its deep appreciation for the solidarity which Canada has shown for the cause of war-affected children in our sub-region, and for the support, leadership and resources Canada has provided for the Conference.

We are aware of the extent to which Canada has made the concept of human security a cardinal principle of its foreign policy. It is a principle to which we are also deeply committed, as demonstrated by the ongoing efforts of my Government in the pursuit of peace and security in our sub-region. We therefore welcome Canada's attachment to this ideal and look forward to continuing to work with Canada in achieving our common objectives.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Sadly, we are gathered here today not to congratulate ourselves on what we have achieved thus far to bring about a more secure, healthy and educated future for our children, but rather to bring to national and international attention the plight of our children whose lives have been devastated by war—wars that have been created and perpetrated by some of us for political or material gain.

Sadly, too, it is primarily our innocent women and our children who have borne the brunt of these fratricidal conflicts. Life and limb have been literally torn asunder and futures destroyed by the unnecessary and brutal conflicts that have burned across our continent. Sierra Leone, Liberia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Angola, Congo-Brazzaville, Ethiopia/Eritrea—the list is long and tragic.

The most compelling aspect of these tragedies is that our children, who should ordinarily constitute our pride and hope for a stable and more prosperous future, have been deprived by war of the joys of childhood in a secure and loving environment and of the opportunity to employ their youthful energy and exuberance in positive and creative pursuits which would prepare them for a role as future contributors of our communities and nations.

Our children are not only victims of the atrocities committed during war, but also more horrifically, are actual combatants, conscripted by force into rebel and national armies, drugged, sexually abused and taught to kill with the small arms and light weapons that have flooded our continent. Even worse is the linkage between conflict and the deadly disease, HIV/AIDS, which is known to spread very rapidly in environments such as war in which the entire fabric of society has been destroyed.

This Conference is therefore, a timely and necessary action for we as Government leaders, servants of our people, and members of civil society to mobilize ourselves and send out a strong message to the world community that we are determined as a sub-region to put a stop to this madness.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Not too long ago, our sub-regional organization, ECOWAS, broadened its mandate beyond economic cooperation to address issues of conflict and security through military operations and negotiations to restore peace in some of our member countries. The human and material cost of peacekeeping was high. Even though the situation in West Africa is much improved, the conflicts of the last decade have left deep scars which we cannot ignore.

We have all seen, either first-hand, or on our television screens, the horrors that women and children suffer during conflict. Many of our children have been lost to war whether in the front lines of military action or through the disease and starvation that characterise conflict situations. Many of those who survive are so traumatised and physically and psychologically scarred that they are denied the capacity to become responsible adults who should be preparing to take over from us and lead our people into the next century.

Child combatants are rarely to blame for the crimes they are forced to commit. The cynical and calculated use of drugs, fear and intimidation to turn innocent children into ruthless killing machines is horrible enough, but beyond that, we face the challenge of addressing the traumas they have experienced and finding ways and means of rehabilitating them. To this end, we must look to our traditions as family, religion and community-centred cultures and seek to employ every means at our disposal to see to it that these precious lives can be saved.

We cannot begin to calculate the costs—human and material—which we have incurred as a sub-region from the conflicts that have raged unabated in some of our countries. It is incumbent upon all of us working together—as member states of ECOWAS and as representatives of civil society—to put this sordid chapter in our history behind us. We must take action now to see to it that West Africa and its peoples face a future in which regional cooperation, integration and development are real and attainable goals and where our children are armed with books rather than the weapons of war.

In order to do so, we must first commit ourselves to prevention of conflict. The Conference is providing the forum for us as a sub-regional organization to do so. It is my understanding that this meeting will devote its attention to the scope of the problem of war-affected children, to the implementation of norms and standards already set by the international community for child protection, and to the complexities involved in the process of demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration of these children.

We are tasked with devising a practical plan of action to move forward the agenda to protect and secure the future of the children in this sub-region. I trust that we as leaders will be bold enough to commit ourselves to concrete steps to see to it that we attain this goal. I would like here to suggest a few areas in which we can take action at this meeting.

As representatives of ECOWAS member-states that have seen our share of conflict, we can commit ourselves as a sub-region to being among the first to ratify the Optional Protocol on the Convention of the Rights of the Child, raising the minimum age for recruitment and participation in a justifiable combat from 15 to 18.

By forming a critical mass in favour of ratification, we can indeed set an example for the rest of the world and help to gain global momentum behind this critically important protocol. As a bloc, we can also add our weight to the ratification of the Statute establishing the International Criminal Court, which will have the power to adjudicate on those who perpetrate the crime of utilizing child soldiers.

Secondly, we can incorporate within the ECOWAS Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security a unit that is devoted to the protection of children affected by conflict. We can also commit ourselves to a more effective implementation of the ECOWAS Small Arms Moratorium.

We can provide our strong and determined commitment to do all we can as a region to help the children of Sierra Leone and Liberia recover from the horrors of those wars. In this regard, we can put our collective support behind the idea of calling on all parties in conflict within West Africa to observe a week of truce to enable the international community to provide relief and vaccinations to war-affected children. This initiative, while starting in West Africa, should aim to become a worldwide campaign.

Lastly, we can ensure that child protection is integrated into ECOWAS and UN peacekeeping operations by training peacekeeping personnel, both military and civilian, in field missions on the rights and protection of children and women.

On our part in Ghana, given our wealth of experience in international peacekeeping dating back to the Congo in the early 1960s, we are committed to making the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre a centre of excellence in Africa for training peacekeeping personnel in this critically important area. We ask for the support of the Government of Canada and other interested donors to make this commitment a reality.

We are soon to mark the 25th anniversary of ECOWAS at a summit to be held in Abuja, Nigeria, in May. What more fitting a tribute to our sub-regional organization at this juncture in history than to make West Africa the pace-setter in the protection and rehabilitation of war-affected children. For this, we count on the support of all member states, as well as all sectors of civil society—non-governmental organisations, the media, the religious communities, our traditional authorities and our citizens themselves.

On my part, I pledge to take this agenda up at the Abuja summit. Let us all pledge to make the outcomes of this Conference tangible, meaningful and practical. In so doing, we will be benefiting not only those societies emerging from conflict, but also those of us that enjoy relative peace and stability, for it is only when all our children can live in peace that our countries will move forward with economic integration and prosperity for all.

I wish you God's blessings in your deliberations.

Thank you.

ADDRESS BY FIRST LADY OF GHANA
HER EXCELLENCY NANA KONADU AGYEMAN RAWLINGS

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

26 April, 2000

**Mr. Chairman,
Hon. Members of Council of State,
Hon. Ministers of State and Members of Parliament,
Your Excellencies Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Nananom, Niime, Naamei,
Representatives of Civil Society Organizations in West Africa and
elsewhere,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I am happy to join you at this Conference and to share my thoughts with you on this important subject of "War-affected Children" which has very serious implications for the future of the West Africa Sub-region and indeed the whole continent of Africa.

Mr. Chairman,

I believe that the time has come for us Africans to reflect more seriously on the fundamentals of our time, the fundamentals of the post-cold war period.

During the cold-war period, internal conflicts in Africa were merely suppressed by the logic of the West/East political ideological rivalry.

Following the collapse of the cold-war, the ugly head of the once suppressed internal conflicts began to rise well above the troubled waters of inter-state conflicts.

We are now living at a most frightening moment when virtually everything we do in life, within the realm of development is being undermined by internal conflicts.

We are all vulnerable to this state of affairs.

Mr. Chairman,

We have watched with great sadness, the civil wars in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau, Rwanda, Burundi, Angola, Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Regrettably, these wars have gone on for so long without capturing the international conscience.

We are encouraged by the interest and commitment, being shown by Canada, to help address the situation and I hope other economically powerful nations will join in the search for peace in Africa.

In January this year when the Canadian Foreign Minister called on His Excellency, The President, at the Castle, they pledged to mobilize efforts to protect children.

Mr. Chairman,

Ghana and Canada agree that the plight of war-affected children is one of the most disturbing human security problems the world faces.

The cynical trend of targeting children as fighters and as victims has exacted a devastating toll. Since the mid-1980s, millions of children have been killed, disabled, orphaned, displaced or psychologically scarred by the trauma of abduction, detention, rape and witnessing the brutal murder of family members. We are told that hundreds of thousands of girls and boys world-wide serve in armed forces and rebel gangs.

Mr. Chairman,

West African governments and organizations have played a leadership role in the World to ponder the causes and consequences of conflict and deliberate on possible remedies.

The objective should be to prevent conflict, and as a priority initiative, to prevent the involvement of children in conflict.

A right solution must take into account the characteristics of the region, including pervasive poverty, growing incidence of corruption, obstacles to trade and development, lack of basic resources including schooling and nutritious food, and shelter. Good governance issues and strong leadership are also paramount considerations when debating ways and means to prevent conflict.

The Ministerial Conference on War-Affected Children in West Africa, that will take place tomorrow and Friday, will be one in a series of ECOWAS-focussed initiatives which are contributing to greater regional co-operation on peace and security issues. Clearly, unified ECOWAS co-ordination is vital to ensuring peace and stability and human security.

Despite tremendous progress in all nations in the quality of life, and how long we can expect to live, at the start of the 21 st century, the welfare, rights, and protection of war-affected children are increasingly at risk. There are new risks that citizens did not face ten years ago.

Children in some isolated conflict zones, are more likely to die from machine gun fire, than from longstanding threats to child survival like malaria, tuberculosis and measles.

There are activities worldwide assessing the problem and striving to disarm, rehabilitate and reintegrate war-affected children. Moreover, efforts are ongoing globally to put the legal and institutional infrastructure in place to ensure that the rehabilitation and reintegration process is carried out with great sensitivity and efficiency.

Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We watched as small arms and light weapons proliferated in the region. We heard of atrocities being committed, and we were aware that the lives of innocent civilians were at risk. We disliked it all. But we lacked a mandate to intervene or plan to follow, so we said, the situation will not last. It is heinous, we said, for warlords to enlist 8-year olds as soldiers, but we said it would not happen here. Besides, we said, who but a savage would give drugs to children and would stoop so low as to tell a child that if killed during conflict, he would go straight to heaven.

Yet, as we are all aware, these atrocities do occur and we cannot afford to be complacent anymore about instability, intolerance, and the encroachment of human rights and on the rights of children in particular .

Each and every ECOWAS member state has a role to play to ensure sustainable peace in the region. In order to lift the region out of a perpetual cycle of turmoil and rebuilding, we must willingly achieve political and economic linkages with our neighbors.

The Protocol Relating to the Mechanism of Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping, Peacemaking and Security, was signed by all ECOWAS Member States at the Lome Summit on 10 December, 1999. It is a giant leap in the right direction. The agreement by Heads of States of ECOWAS nations to support an early warning mechanism shows that there is sufficient political will to carry commitments through to active engagement.

But there are many degrees of separation between this type of worthy state-level initiative and the plight of a child who is commanded to murder his own people and plunder homes in familiar territory.

Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In order to ensure respect for the rights of children, we must first raise awareness of these rights. Secondly, we must heighten the respect for these rights. Also important is the creation of a legislative framework, as Ghana and others have done, for enforcement of all legal entitlements. Once again, we see, the level of activity shifts from the local non-governmental level to the national and governmental level.

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Guests,

Conflicts by their nature are multi-layered and as such they call for multi-layered solutions. The notion that conflicts must be solved solely through government-to-government efforts is simply false.

Solutions to our conflicts will have to come not only from our governments and international organizations, but also from the grass-roots level and/or local NGO's and Associations.

Those local priests, those cattle keepers and all those old men and women and children right in the remotest villages do also have a story, if not the best story, about conflicts which affect their daily lives.

Quite apart from the Governments and the people at the grassroots, people at the middle level of these two extreme ends: primary and secondary school teachers, shopkeepers, butchers, motor mechanics and carpenters do also matter when it comes to seeking solutions to our conflicts.

Many of these three categories of people representing the broad spectrum of the civil society may not be diplomats or high-profile personalities, but they are usually keen observers of all sort of events relating to conflict formation and conflict prevention or conflict resolution. We should always try to involve them in our efforts to resolve conflicts in Africa.

I have no doubt that many well-meaning and caring people will show their commitment to the contents of the Declaration and Plan of Action for this Conference on War-Affected Children in West Africa. The plight of war-affected children is a grim problem. We need to find a right and sustainable solution for civil society to implement.

I sincerely hope we can achieve this sooner rather than later.

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I hope that we can all appreciate the fact that no matter how well conceived our strategies and Plan of Action for dealing with these issues of conflict resolution and the plight of the war-affected children, we will not go very far with its implementation if we do not provide the necessary financial resources.

We are grateful to our external friends who have shown some commitment to help us address these issues.

But we Africans, at all levels, must be seen to raise funds to help ourselves in the first instance.

That is why we the First Ladies of the West African sub- region, at our meeting in Accra on Peace and Humanitarian Issues, in July 1998, resolved among other things to organise, in conjunction with relevant authorities of government, fund-raising activities in support of humanitarian activities in the sub-region.

If school children in America can help to raise funds for the afflicted in Africa, I do not understand why we Africans cannot sacrifice or organize activities throughout the continent that can generate funds for our own mechanism for conflict prevention, management and resolution.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you for your attention.

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,
Niimeï, Naameï, 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 reintegrate 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.

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;

- (4) A Plan of Action highlighting emerging themes and recommendations that could be used as a guide for future initiatives in the areas of demobilizing, rehabilitating and re-integrating war-affected children in West Africa;
- (5) Measures to strengthen the mechanism for halting the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the sub-region.

We have two days to accomplish our task but I am confident that we can achieve the goals we seek because the objective is urgent and noble and must be accomplished in the quickest time possible.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, I cannot conclude my remarks without expressing once again, appreciation to all ECOWAS States for honouring our invitation to dialogue on the issues of this Conference. I would also like to say a big thank you to the Government of Canada for the solidarity it has shown to West Africa and for supporting Ghana to host this all-important Conference. It is a measure of this solidarity that in addition to Canada meeting most of the costs of this Conference, we are privileged to have among us my good friend and colleague, Hon. Lloyd Axworthy, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada who will be co-chairing this Conference with me. We are confident that as a member of the exclusive Club of Developed Countries, Canada will use her influence to encourage Donor Countries to appreciate the enormity of the task which we have assumed and extend to us the much needed assistance which will make it possible for us to achieve positive results.

I wish the Conference every success.



NOTES FOR AN ADDRESS BY THE HONOURABLE LLOYD AXWORTHY
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

**TO THE CONFERENCE IN WEST AFRICA ON
WAR-AFFECTED CHILDREN**

Accra, Ghana
April 27, 2000

Human development and human security are the central global concerns of this new century.

These basic human needs start with the promotion of children's needs. Nowhere is their safety and well-being more at risk than in conflict situations.

This concern inspired our meeting here in Accra -- a demonstration of Ghanaian leadership in this area. It was just over a year ago, during my discussions with President Rawlings and Foreign Minister Gbeho, that we agreed a regional conference might make a difference in the lives of children victimized by armed conflict in West Africa.

This conference is about changing the fate of war-affected children and preventing future atrocities committed against children in situations of armed conflict.

Four years ago, Graça Machel presented the UN General Assembly with her landmark study on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children.

Her report graphically conveyed the fate of millions upon millions of war-affected children. She also gave us a substantive set of recommendations--a road map of how to protect our children from this suffering.

Her message is now our motto: children have no part in war. It is the reason we are here in Ghana.

The protection of children affected by war and the promotion of their well-being is a moral, political, social and economic imperative.

Moral, because children are our creation and in their early years depend on adult members of society for their survival and development.

Political, because children who have been abused develop into adults who may be willing to turn their resentment into political violence, while their families may act out their own outrage in a destructive manner.

Social, because the anger and psychological scars of these abused children and their families threaten social cohesion and place a heavy burden on social services.

And economic, because all these problems have economic costs, whether it be the need for medical and social support or the loss of productive citizens.

Abuse of children, therefore, has both immediate costs and can lead to future divisiveness and deterioration of their communities.

For these reasons, children are at the heart of human security, as they are all too often among the most deeply affected by an increase in insecurity.

The African Charter on the Rights of the Child has set out a comprehensive agenda for action: on armed conflicts, on refugee children, on orphaned and separated children, and on various aspects of protection. This has provided leadership for the international community.

Last January in Geneva, the international community agreed to an Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child relating to the involvement of children in armed conflict—in particular the recruitment and deployment of children as soldiers. The Protocol will be open for signature this September.

It is time to move from standard-setting to implementation, compliance and concrete action.

That is the goal of this conference.

Its focus is on the needs of individual children, their families and communities, and ensuring that West African governments and regional organizations like ECOWAS [Economic Community of West African States] have the capacity to support new initiatives.

Its themes address a variety of the root causes and symptoms which lead to the involvement of children in war: poverty, lack of alternatives, access to small arms, impunity, conflict prevention, the role of non-state actors and the special gender dimensions of conflict.

Its participation includes youth themselves who have met over the past few days to set their own agenda based on their own needs, rights and goals. They are, after all, the ones most directly involved. Their views are essential. Their voices need to be heard. That is why war-affected youth have been invited and why we need to listen to their concerns.

Civil society is also represented. As with the campaign to ban landmines and the creation of the International Criminal Court, they are leading international efforts to address the needs of war-affected children. Their presence allows us to continue to forge strong partnerships in

dealing with human security challenges. They also have recommendations for action. I look forward to hearing them.

The results of this conference—hopefully—will catalyze practical, sustainable action to address the enormous impact that war has had on the children of West Africa and serve as a model for future conferences in other regions.

There are many challenges. One of them is the pre-meditated abduction of children from their families, homes and communities. I hope that one of the specific actions to come out of this conference is a release program for children. To those armies or rebel groups responsible, the message should be clear: if you have taken children—let them go; if you have children in your ranks—set them free.

It is now up to governments gathered here to decide what they are ready to do and what they are ready to commit.

For our part, Canada has already been active in promoting human security in the region. We have devoted over \$10 million to peace and humanitarian efforts in Sierra Leone—much of it aimed at helping war-affected children lead normal, secure lives.

Working with Sweden, we have supported efforts to include child rights and protection issues in training curriculums for military staff of West African armed forces. Similarly, we have assisted the UN Centre for Crime Prevention in its efforts to curb trafficking of women and children in the region. And our Peacebuilding and Human Security Program provided financial support for the journalists and youth workshops associated with this conference.

We are prepared to do more—in the region and in the world. That is why Canada is pleased to co-sponsor this conference with our Ghanaian hosts and why we will build on the experience here to prepare for the global conference on war-affected children, which will take place this September in the city of Winnipeg in Canada. It will bring together like-minded governments, international institutions, NGOs and youth to develop an international plan of action.

Canada also continues to be a strong supporter of the work of Olara Otunnu, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict. We have made a substantial financial contribution to his office, and will collaborate with him to assist in fulfilling his mandate. He has done much to raise the profile of this subject around the world and we welcome his presence here in Accra.

Recognizing the important work of civil society, Canada has over the past two years provided financial support for the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, an international organization that played a key role in the successful negotiation of the Optional Protocol on Children in Armed Conflict.

As with efforts to deal with the abuse of small arms and to ban landmines, Africans are leading the world in developing practical means and action to advance the protection of civilians in war and to promote human security. To that end, this conference will be an important contribution to global action in dealing with war-affected children. I will ensure that decisions made here will be fully integrated into efforts in Winnipeg.

One of the most basic human instincts is to protect one's child from harm and suffering. Children represent our global future and the desire to guard them from the many forces that can destroy their hope and innocence is universal.

Doing so is an essential part of our broader aspiration to promote human security and to create stable, peaceful societies.

In considering our responsibilities to our children, I am often reminded of a saying by the Opaskwayak Elders of the Cree Nation in Canada to the effect that "a child is a gift or loan from the Great Spirit; and one is given the responsibility to raise and care for that child. Since a child is a gift from the Great Spirit, the child is sacred and must be treated with respect and dignity."

This is truly a sentiment with universal meaning. Here in Ghana this week, I look forward to working with you in living up to that sacred trust, in seeking ways to make a real difference in helping war-affected children in West Africa.

Thank you.

SPEECH OF ECOWAS EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

MR. LANSANA KOUYATE

Executive Secretariat of ECOWAS

Accra, April, 2000

**Mr. President of the Republic,
Honourable Ministers,
Members of the Diplomatic corps
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I wish, first of all, to express my appreciation to His Excellency, Jerry John Rawlings, for having graced with his presence this opening session of the Conference on War-Affected Children.

By accepting to host this conference in this beautiful and prestigious city of Accra and providing excellent facilities to ensure its success, President Rawling's Government has reaffirmed its firm commitment to continue working tirelessly for the welfare of children and protection of those children in our sub-region who are affected by war. I wish, therefore, to express my deep gratitude to him and to thank the people of Ghana for having demonstrated their commitment to the objectives of the conference by extending their brotherly and warm hospitality to the participants. The commitment of the Government of Ghana and the personal devotion of President Rawlings are not limited to the hospitality extended to us.

In the sub-region, Ghana has always been at the forefront of efforts to resolve conflicts wherever they break out, reconcile parties wherever hatred divides them, save women and children, wherever they are in danger. Without Ghana's participation and above all, without her devotion to the cause of peace, the strength of ECOMOG, ECOWAS peacekeeping group, would have reduced drastically.

I am also, well aware that this meeting has been made possible through the resolve of His Excellency, Lloyd Axworthy, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada, the competence of his collaborators and support of his Government.

Canada spearheaded a group of countries which, through the Bergen initiative, ensured the introduction of a new concept of human security defined as a situation or state characterised by an absence of breaches of the fundamental rights of persons, their security or life. Furthermore, it was under Canada's initiative that the campaigns for total elimination of mines culminated in the conclusion of a treaty in Ottawa in 1997.

I am recalling these events because the new definition of human security under the influence of Canada and the treaty relating to the total elimination of mines constitute precious instruments for the protection of war-affected children.

Allow me, therefore, Excellency, to thank the Canadian Government, through the Minister of Foreign Affairs, for having demonstrated, by organising this conference, its firm commitment to work towards the welfare of war-affected children.

Excellency,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are all aware that wars that broke out in the sub-region recently were either as a result of crises which affected relations between Member States, or due to internal political crises.

In every country of the sub-region that went through war, the fringe of the population hardest hit either because they were victims, or because they suffered more than any other group, is undeniably the section composed of children.

For these reasons, the holding of this Conference is commendable. Its timeliness is greatly appreciated by ECOWAS, particularly as our sub-region lost tens of thousands of its children during the Liberian and Sierra Leonean wars and the crisis in Guinea-Bissau. These armed conflicts culminated in the mass exodus of the populations, which compelled Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone to host hundreds of thousands of refugees, the majority of whom were children.

Sixteen thousand Liberian and six thousand Sierra Leonean children were forcibly conscripted. A majority of these child-soldiers were most of the time subjected to alcohol or drug-use by those who recruited them, their instructors or rebel leaders.

And yet children in the sub-region are considered as God's gift and the greatest wealth. Full attention is usually paid to them. They are precious in West Africa and receive protection not only from their family, but also from the family of the entire community in which they belong. One of the primary repercussions of the indiscriminate use of children in wars is that it perverts our customs and morale which consider children and childhood as sacred. However, why does Africa forsake such a noble tradition which could have been imported to other continents as its contribution to world civilisation?

In order to facilitate understanding of the paradox that the serious breaches to the life, physical integrity and freedom of children constitute within the West African context, I have thought it fit to make reference to a United Nations report presented to the General Assembly in November, 1996, and to a UNICEF publication from which the following statements are extracted:

"Where ethnic loyalties prevail", says the UNICEF publication, "a dangerous trend develops. Rising sentiments of ethnic superiority, ethnic cleansing and genocide may be irreversible. Killing of adults may not be enough; generations of enemies and their children must also be exterminated." End of quote.

In pursuing the realisation of its integration objective in order to raise the living standards of the population, ECOWAS is of the view that protection of children and investments in their favour must be at the centre of any new development strategy.

In a declaration on child soldiers, ECOWAS acknowledges that enrollment of children into illegal armed conflicts deprives them of education, training and culture, and prevents them from being useful to their countries.

The use of children in armed conflicts has been facilitated by the proliferation of light weapons and small arms. In their bid to control this proliferation, the Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS on 31 October, 1998, declared a moratorium on the importation, exportation and manufacture of light weapons for a renewable period of three years.

The time has come to condemn the arms traffickers—those who have no fear of God nor man, illegally and readily provide instruments of death in exchange for money to satisfy their base needs. They deprive us of our human resources and at the same time exploit our mineral resources which they swap for instruments of death. Their internal accomplices and those who, for the same shameless craving indulge in this very trade must equally be condemned.

For this reason, on 10 December, 1999, ECOWAS adopted a Protocol on the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security. Its implementation will go a long way in providing children the protection guaranteed by the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We are convinced that the international community will not fail to support ECOWAS in the implementation of this mechanism which has in fact already taken off.

Excellency,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before concluding, I wish to thank all the participants to this meeting and particularly all the eminent personalities invited to present papers at the various conference workshops. I hope the outcome of our deliberations will be realistic and pragmatic, to enable us to implement them without delay, for the welfare of the children of our sub-region and in the interest of ECOWAS Member States.

I thank you.

SPEECH DELIVERED BY MR. OLARA OTUNNU
UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL
SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
FOR CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT

CONFERENCE ON WAR-AFFECTED CHILDREN IN WEST AFRICA

27-28 April, 2000

Accra International Conference Centre, Ghana

"For the Sake of our Children"

An Overview and Proposals for the Protection of War-Affected Children in West Africa

A Worldwide Phenomenon

The preamble of the Charter of the United Nations enjoins us "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war." Yet today we are witnessing unspeakable abominations being committed against children in situations of armed conflict. This suffering bears many faces: children being killed; children being made orphans, children being maimed; children being uprooted from their homes; children being raped and sexually abused; children being deprived of education and health care; children being exploited as child soldiers; and children left with deep emotional trauma.

All non-combatants are entitled to protection, but children deserve special attention and require special protection. Children are innocent and especially vulnerable. They are less equipped to adapt or respond to conflict. They bear no responsibility for conflict in the first place, yet suffer disproportionately from its excesses. Moreover, children represent the hopes and future of every society; destroy them and you have destroyed a society.

Over the last decade, 2 million children were killed in conflict situations, over 1 million were made orphans, over 8 million have been seriously injured or permanently disabled and over 10 million have been left with grave psychological trauma.

At present, in approximately 50 countries around the world, children are suffering from the effects of conflicts and its aftermath. Today, there are over 20 million children who have been displaced by war within and outside their countries. Some 300,000 young persons under the age of 18 are currently being exploited as child soldiers. And approximately 800 children are killed or maimed by landmines every month.

The magnitude of what we are witnessing today attests to a new phenomenon. There has been a qualitative shift in the nature of warfare. This is not war, as we have known it in the modern era.

Several developments mark this transformation. Almost all the major armed conflicts in the world today are civil wars; they are being fought among those who know each other well; they pit compatriot against compatriot, neighbour against neighbour. They are often protracted, lasting years if not decades; they are marked by widespread social breakdown and lawlessness, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, and the involvement of multiple and often semi-autonomous armed groups. Most cynically, children have been compelled to become themselves the instruments of war—indeed the weapons of choice—recruited or kidnapped to become child soldiers. A key feature of this struggle is the demonization of the so-called "enemy community" and the orchestration of vicious hate campaigns. The enemy community is often defined in religious, ethnic, racial or regional terms. The traditional limits on the conduct of warfare—international instruments as well as local taboos and injunctions—are being cast aside. In this setting the village has become the battlefield and civilian population the primary target. This is soldier-on-civilian violence on an unprecedented scale.

These excesses are no longer exceptional, they are widespread across the globe; they are going on today in over 30 areas of conflict.

It is against this background that today up to 90% of casualties in ongoing conflicts around the world are civilians—this figure was 5% in World War I—the vast majority of whom are children and women. This is the world turned upside down.

This abomination is due in large measure to a crisis of values—a kind of "ethical vacuum"—a setting in which international standards are ignored with impunity and where traditional value systems have lost their sway.

We can and must reverse this trend of abomination. To do so, we must adopt serious concerted measures at the international, regional and national levels.

In this context, I should like to put forward some proposals for consideration within the framework of ECOWAS and West Africa.

1. International Normative Framework

Since the founding of the United Nations over 50 years ago, the international community has developed a truly impressive body of international humanitarian and human rights instruments; the most pertinent providing for the protection of children affected by armed conflict are: the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the Geneva Conventions and additional Protocols; the African Charter on the Welfare and Rights of the Child; UN Security Council

Resolution 1261 (1999) concerning the protection of war-affected children, and UN Security Council Resolution 1265 (1999) concerning the protection of civilian populations in general in situations of armed conflict.

In addition, it is very much my hope that two other very important international instruments will soon come into force and become part of this list: the recently concluded Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and the Statute of the International Criminal Court (Rome Statute).

- It is important that in the deliberations and in the outcomes of the Conference, these instruments be highlighted as the international normative framework for the protection of war-affected children.
- I call on ECOWAS States to prepare for the early adoption and speedy ratification of the Optional Protocol. And, when ratifying the Optional Protocol, I urge ECOWAS States to consider depositing binding declarations pursuant to article 3, establishing age 18 as the minimum age for voluntary recruitment into their national armed forces; this already exists in most West African countries and is consistent with the African Charter on the Welfare and Rights of the Child.
- I urge all ECOWAS States to ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, which is a powerful tool for the protection of children.
- I believe that the time has come for us to launch a specific campaign focussing on the protection of children in situations of armed conflict, to develop various activities—awareness-building, exerting concerted political pressure, tapping into relevant local norms within societies—to ensure the application of these norms on the ground.

2. Promoting and Strengthening Traditional Values and Norms

The most damaging loss any society can suffer is the collapse of its own value system. Societies in West Africa have deeply rooted traditional values, norms, taboos and injunctions proscribing indiscriminate targeting of civilian populations in times of war, especially women and children. Tragically, under pressure of prolonged conflicts, some societies, such as we have witnessed in Sierra Leone and Liberia, have seen their community values radically undermined, if not shattered altogether. We must not cast aside positive local value systems which have traditionally provided ethical bearings and protection to many of our societies.

We must mobilise all our resources and social networks—community leaders, parents, extended family, elders, teachers, schools and religious institutions to reassert the injunctions and taboos that have traditionally provided for the protection of children within our societies. The focus of that effort will be the local community. This local process should be integrated with and

reinforced by the international norms I have cited earlier. Such a process of ethical renewal is indispensable if a society caught in the throes of a deep moral and political crisis is to recover, rebuild and move forward.

3. Importance of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1261 (1999)

UN Security Council resolution 1261 (1999), was adopted by the Security Council on 25 August last year. This is an important milestone, a landmark, for the cause of children affected by armed conflict.

For the first time, the Security Council has devoted a formal and entire resolution to the protection of children affected by armed conflict. This resolution clearly establishes the protection and well-being of children as a major preoccupation that legitimately belongs on the agenda of the Security Council.

The resolution sets out a number of specific and important measures for protecting and ensuring the well-being of children in the midst of armed conflict and in its aftermath. If applied in specific situations, these measures could have a considerable impact for the benefit of children on the ground.

I call on ECOWAS States to press to the fullest advantage resolution 1261, by utilising and applying its provisions on the ground throughout West Africa.

4. Taking Measures to Protect Children in the Midst of Conflict or Adopting "Children as a Zone of Peace"

We must undertake concrete initiatives to prevent and mitigate the suffering of children who are actually caught up in the midst of ongoing conflicts. In other words, we must explore concrete ways to translate the concept of "children as a zone of peace" into practical arrangements on the ground.

In my visits to several countries, including Sierra Leone and Liberia, I have elicited commitments from parties in conflict on some of the following measures: to allow access to populations in distress in zones within their control; to observe humanitarian cease-fires for the benefit of children; not to attack schools or hospitals; not to use landmines; and not to recruit or use children as combatants.

I urge ECOWAS States to adopt "children as a zone of peace" within this sub-region, and to that end to develop a practice for eliciting and monitoring concrete commitments by parties to conflict.

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.

7. Responding to the Needs of Displaced Children Within West Africa

A major impact of conflicts in West African has been the massive displacement of populations both within and across borders, as internally displaced persons (IDPs) and as refugees.

- **Refugees**

In general, West African countries have set an excellent example of solidarity, hospitality and support for refugees. In recent years, Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire in particular have assumed a major responsibility for refugees. Guinea has been hosting more than a half a million people from Sierra Leone and Liberia who are officially registered with UNHCR, in addition to a significant number of unregistered persons who have also fled from the neighbouring countries. The population of officially registered refugees now constitutes more than 10 percent of the total population of Guinea. And yet during my visit there last year, I was struck by the excellent rapport between the local populations and refugees. The sheer magnitude of refugees in Guinea, however, has begun to cause significant stress on the economy, social services, environment and security.

The Accra Conference should call on the international and donor community to provide more support to host countries (like Guinea and others in the West African region) and UNHCR, in order to reduce the social-economic, environmental and security impact of refugee outflow within the sub-region.

- **Internally Displaced Persons**

During my visits to war-affected countries in the past two years, I have witnessed first hand the deeply distressing and precarious conditions of internally displaced persons, the vast majority of whom are children and women. The nature and scope of this problem has been well described in the important work and reports of Francis Deng, the Representative of the Secretary-General for Internally Displaced Persons.

I urge West African states to commit to providing, with the support of UN agencies and the donor community, fuller protection, relief and access to IDPs, within their countries.

Moreover, I believe that time has come for the international community to develop a more systematic response and framework for providing protection and practical support to internally displaced persons.

8. Taking Measures on the Ground to End Child Soldiering

I am delighted that after several years of negotiations, consensus agreement has finally been reached on raising the minimum age for recruitment and participation in conflict. The raising of the age limit for participation in hostilities from 15 to 18 is a victory for children

exposed to cynical exploitation in situations of armed conflict. While the new consensus does not go as far as I would have liked, it is a most important step towards eliminating the use of children as soldiers and their participation in hostilities. Five elements of the draft optional protocol are especially significant in this context:

- States are to take "all feasible measures" to ensure that members of their armed forces who have not attained the age of 18 years do not take a "direct part" in hostilities;
- States are to ensure that persons who have not attained the age of 18 years are not compulsorily recruited into their armed forces;
- Insurgent armed groups are prohibited, "under any circumstances", from recruiting persons under 18 years or using them in hostilities;
- The new standards apply both to international conflicts and civil wars;
- State parties are called upon to cooperate, through technical cooperation and financial assistance, in the prevention of child recruitment and the use of child soldiers, and in the rehabilitation and social reintegration of ex-child soldiers.

The one aspect in which the agreement falls short of the "straight 18" position that I have advocated is in the area of voluntary enlistment into national armed forces. This is indeed a disappointment. Nevertheless, the raising of the minimum age to at least 16 and the inclusion of specific safeguards, including the provision of reliable proof of age and the informed consent of both volunteer and parents, represents an improvement on existing standards.

With agreement on the optional protocol in place, we must now turn our energies to making a difference on the ground, concentrating on several tasks:

- Exerting concerted international pressure on parties in conflict that abuse children as combatants;
- Addressing the political, social and economic factors that facilitate the exploitation of children as soldiers;
- Building the capacity and mobilizing more resources in order to respond more effectively to the rehabilitation needs of ex-child soldiers; and,
- Broadening our scope of concern to embrace all children affected by conflict.

9. Integrating the Protection and Well-being of Children into ECOWAS Peacekeeping Operations

ECOWAS has been one of the most active regional arrangements in conducting peacekeeping operations, I should like to encourage its member States to consider the incorporation of the following measures. First, the protection and rights of children should be explicitly provided for in the mandates of peacekeeping missions. Second, ECOWAS should consider the idea of attaching child protection advisers explicitly tasked with ensuring coordination of issues related to protection and well-being of children in each of its field

missions. Third, training should be provided for all personnel in the field missions with regard to the rights and protection of children and women. I have proposed similar elements for UN peace operations; these are now being put into practice in newly mandated operations.

10. Developing Neighbourhood Initiatives in West Africa

Although most of today's conflicts are internal, the victimization of children is often exacerbated by cross-border activities, such as the flow of small arms and light weapons, the transfer and use of landmines, the recruitment and abduction of children, the movement of displaced populations and the separation of families. Threats facing children within countries in conflict often cannot be brought under control without addressing these cross-border dimensions.

I have therefore proposed the development of "neighborhood initiatives" to bring together actors in a sub-regional setting where countries are linked by cross-border activities affecting children. The purpose is to engage governments, insurgency groups, civil society organizations and humanitarian agencies in dialogue, which would ultimately lead to specific agreements and concrete measures to protect children from cross-border threats. Among the sub-regions selected as pilot cases is West Africa: I look forward to working closely with ECOWAS on this project.

The Conference should commit to promoting cross-border initiatives for the protection of children. Examples of such initiatives include:

- **ECOWAS Small Arms Moratorium** - It is clear that, in West Africa, as elsewhere, there is a strong correlation between the easy availability of small arms and light weapons and the increased brutalisation of children and women. I strongly urge the participants at this Conference to give impetus to a more effective implementation of the Moratorium.
- **Child Protection Unit within ECOWAS Secretariat** - I would urge the setting up of a Child Protection Unit as part of the ECOWAS Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security. Its main task would be to ensure the protection of children's rights and their well-being throughout the sub-region particularly relating to cross-border concerns.
- **Cross-border recruitment of children soldiers** - The Conference should commit to taking measures to end the cross-border recruitment of children for use as combatants.
- **Illicit exploitation of natural resources** - The Conference should commit to taking measures to curb the illicit exploitation of natural resources, which fuels war machines which brutalise children and deprive them of much needed resources;
- **Displaced Persons** - The Conference should commit to taking measures to facilitate the reunification and return of displaced children and families.

11. Building Local Capacities for Protection and Advocacy

It is critical to build and strengthen local capacities for protection and advocacy for war-affected children, both in the midst of ongoing violence and in its aftermath. Examples of such initiatives in West Africa include: establishment of a National Commission for Children (as proposed in Sierra Leone) to ensure that the protection and well-being of children is a major priority in the aftermath of conflict and that it will be reflected in national priority setting, policy making and resource allocation; formation of an informal group of elders and statesmen to serve as local advocates within a country (as in Liberia), and the formation of a parliamentary caucus for the protection of children (as in Sierra Leone).

I urge the donor community, UN agencies and international NGOs to do more to support and strengthen national institutions, local NGOs and civil society organizations within West Africa.

12. Involving Young People in the Movement for the Protection of War-Affected Children - Children-to-Children Network

I believe that we must involve young people as an active part of a worldwide social and political movement for the protection of war-affected children—as participants, advocates, and provide them with opportunities for self-expression. In this connection I have proposed the development of several initiatives. One such initiative is the Children-to-Children Network.

This involves building links between children in war-affected countries and their counterparts from countries at peace, so that they can learn about each other's vastly different experiences, build solidarity among themselves, and enable children to act as advocates on behalf of other children. Such links could be developed on direct and community-based levels, school-to-school, university-to-university, neighborhood-to-neighborhood, association-to-association. Modern information technology, including the internet, should be employed to facilitate such communication and exchange among young people.

I very much hope that, from Accra, will begin a process of developing Children-to-Children Networks within West Africa.

13. Developing Media Information for the Benefit of War-Affected Children - Voice of Children Initiative

I have often been struck by the absence of and hunger for information, recreation and entertainment among children in situations of conflict and in its aftermath. To fill this gap I have proposed the systematic development of radio programmes—Voice-of-Children—devoted mainly to the needs and interests of children and young people in those situations. This would serve to

give voice to children's concerns, offer education, training and entertainment, promote tolerance, reconciliation, and raise awareness of the rights and protection of children.

I am encouraging the establishment and development of local radio programmes in conflict affected countries. Such projects, while driven by local professionals and civil society actors, will require strong support from international partners. This initiative is currently being explored in several conflict-affected countries including Sierra Leone and Liberia.

14. A Week of Truce-For the Sake of Our Children

Until now the international community has had some success, on an ad hoc basis, in negotiating temporary cease-fires with warring parties for various humanitarian purposes. UNICEF and WHO have undertaken a number of successful vaccination campaigns during such days of tranquillity, the most recent being the polio vaccination campaign conducted last year in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We must build on this experience and do more. I am proposing that the international community call on all warring factions in all ongoing conflicts to stop fighting, for the sake of our children, at the same time, for a period of one calendar week. This week would be devoted to protection of children and would be more than symbolic. It would enable the international community to provide relief, registration and vaccinations to war-affected children. This should also be a period to undertake various cultural and educational activities in all countries, to promote peace, in particular activities for and by young people.

15. Imperative of Prevention

Clearly, the best way to ultimately protect children is to prevent conflicts before they occur, recur, or to resolve them before they assume destructive proportions. I urge ECOWAS states and civil society leaders to commit to taking political, economic and social measures to address certain fundamental issues within countries that tend to engender conflict. Such issues include:

- Ensuring a more equitable pattern of distribution of resources, to avoid the emergence of a centre-and-periphery relationship within countries;
- Building a fabric of national cohesion within countries, while allowing for expression of local particularities under that umbrella, i.e. building unity within diversity;
- Developing and strengthening genuine democratic practice;
- Addressing more effectively conditions of extreme poverty and despair.

**SPEECH BY NAPOLEON ABDULAI DISARMAMENT EXPERT UN REGIONAL
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CONFERENCE ON WAR-AFFECTED CHILDREN IN WEST AFRICA

Notes on Civil Society and Child Soldiers Making History

Mr Chairman

Excellency Janet Graham

General Arnold Quainoo, Member of the Council of State

Madam Nana Agyeman Rawlings

Distinguished friends

First, let me thank the organisers for this opportunity to speak on general and specific issues on war-affected children in West Africa. This region with a population of some 300 million people is one of the most conflict prone regions of the world.

This region seems to accept the 'unacceptable', that war is a normal process. This opinion needs to be challenged by civil society. And by civil society I mean the rich fabric formed by a multiplicity of territorially and functionally based units. The strength of civil society is measured by the peaceful coexistence of these units and by their collective capacity to simultaneously resist subordination.

Civil society is an important element in the search for a just society, a society that protects children, and a society that sees children as its future. A society with a weak civil society is doomed to disaster; hence the urgent need to strengthen the capacity of West African civil society.

Civil society cannot stand by and watch the over 120,000 African children classified as 'Child Soldiers', which in our opinion is a wrong term. Child combatants may be the appropriate term, as General Ishola Williams will explain in his presentation. Having 120,000 children in various wars on the Continent is not acceptable!

There are 300,000 children worldwide under the age of 18 serving in government and anti-government forces. In Africa, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Congo-Brazzaville, Rwanda, Angola, Burundi, Somalia and nearer home, Liberia and Sierra Leone, are some of the examples of countries where the systematic abuse of children as child combatants is the norm rather than the exception.

According to a recent report published by the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers the 'Ethiopian government forces engaged in armed conflict against Eritrea, and clans in Somalia

have both included an unknown though probably not insubstantial number of under 18s in their ranks.' This is not acceptable!

Child combatants do not fall from heaven. It is our societies that create them. Men, who are mismanaging our economies, our political systems, after creating the necessary conditions for war or violence, turn around to recruit children into irregular and regular forces. Government or rebel leaders do not recruit their own children into the forces. They do not provide their own children with drugs. Rather, they recruit the children of the poor, who could not attend schools for no fault of their own, or who drop out of school due to school fees they cannot pay. This is not acceptable!

The systematic abuse of children in situations of armed conflict demands a collective, well-resourced response if this barbaric and genocidal tendency is to be wiped out. But, first, let us sincerely admit that this phenomenon is new and can be traced to the militarisation of politics and the weakening of the African economies from the early 1970s. As stated earlier, children do not create the conditions for war, it is men in politics and uniform. So, how can civil society help stop this systematic abuse?

Creating the conditions for inclusive politics at national, district and community levels is one method of dealing with the conditions that give rise to child soldiers. Here, civil society can continue to put pressure on governments to broaden the democratic space. Civil society can help create the conditions that make it impossible for tyrants such as Iddi Amin and Sani Abacha to take power again. The heroic resistance of civil society after the May 25 coup in Sierra Leone is a source of courage. Civil society refused to service the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council Junta. In the immediate past, Africans supported military governments.

With the exception of Sierra Leone, Liberia and parts of Guinea (where rebel activity is in action), the phenomenon of child soldiers is not widespread. So speaking about Prevention, let me add the universally acceptable notion of good governance. It is a necessity in the ECOWAS region to prevent the spread of child soldiers.

Governments should and must implement the national, regional and international legislation or conventions on children. Let governments begin to take education seriously and then we will be seeing less child soldiering. The current situation of having fewer children in school is unacceptable. With good governance we should be in positions to provide more funds to education rather than security. This is part of the task of civil society.

Reintegration

Demobilisation and reintegration is a slow process which demands consistent government and donor support and commitment. West Africa needs to learn from the lessons of

demobilisation and reintegration in the Horn of Africa and Uganda, where massive demobilisation and reintegration took place in the late 1980s and mid 1990s with relative success. In the late 1990s, Eritrea and Ethiopia were back to square one. The two countries rebuilt their standing armies and demobilised soldiers were called to duty. The same applies to landlocked Uganda, where military expenditure is threatening the modest gains of the National Resistance Movement government of Yoweri Museveni.

I hope Sierra Leone, Liberia and Nigeria shall not return to rebuilding big armies.

Post Conflict

In conflict and post conflict situations, governments and rebel forces need to be lobbied into accepting and implementing national, regional and international conventions such as the Geneva Protocols, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1992), the UN Convention on the Right of the Child (1989), the Maputo Resolution on Child Soldiers and the ECOWAS Foreign Ministers Declaration on Child Soldiers. This is imperative, if West Africa is to limit and eradicate child soldiering.

Impunity

Rebel leaders and their field commanders and government supported militia leaders, should and must be held accountable for recruiting and deploying child soldiers or combatants. History is a living institution; if this is done, then the future would become brighter.

Africa needs to break the circle of impunity taking leaders to power. Impunity, as a mechanism to power needs to be resisted. Donors should and must stop providing support to undemocratic leaders and their assets abroad should be confiscated and returned, to facilitate the education of children. If we are not prepared to facilitate the implementation of international laws against impunity then we have no business discussing child soldiers. Civil society's duty is to work to end impunity.

Democratic Space

Fourteen ECOWAS States have no child soldiers. This is a positive sign. So, let us have the political will to create and implement the conditions to prevent these States from following the examples of Sierra Leone and Liberia. Political order that is democratic and popular is needed. Let us create the space and civil society has a critical role to play.

Democratic elections are essential to prevent use of children as soldiers. It was the undemocratic 1984 elections in Liberia that finally led to the civil war of 1989. Helping West African States to have open, transparent elections and inclusive governments with a minimum

programme, which includes preventing child soldiers, is needed.

Despite the negative impact of child soldiering in some parts of West Africa, all is not bad. In the civil war in the former Portuguese colony of Guinea-Bissau and the separatist war in the southern Senegal region of Casamance there was no child soldiering.

Experts hold that Guinea-Bissau is probably the West African country with the highest rate of individual citizens holding weapons, with certain estimates hinting that close to 50% of the 1.5 million inhabitants of the country bear firearms. The majority of these weapons, believed to have been procured through illicit means, are concentrated in the capital Bissau, with smaller stockpiles, predominantly leaked or stolen from national weapons arsenals, are perceptible in Bafata, Gabu, Cansunco and the northern parts of the country.

In the Sudan, by 1996, some 20,000 children aged between 6 and 17 years were either forced out of their homes or recruited into Government or into the numerous factions of the Sudan Peoples Liberation Army or militia. Nobody has faced the music so far. This is not acceptable.

In the two Districts of Gulu and Kitgum in Northern Uganda, some 8,000 children including thousands of young girls, were forcefully recruited into the Lords Resistance Army (LRA). This brutal, irregular force, is armed and financed by an African State. Yet, no action is being undertaken against this State for breaking International Conventions and thereby destroying the future of Africa. This is not acceptable.

According to a UN Survey, Angola is the 'worst place in the world to be a child.' It is estimated by UNICEF (1999) that 40 per cent of children die before the age of 5. And yet this country is the richest in Africa in terms of natural resources. This situation is unacceptable.

RENAMO of Mozambique formed by Ian Smith of Rhodesia and supported and financed by apartheid South African governments, had thousands of child soldiers. RENAMO, "consistently and systematically practised forced recruitment, even preferring children to adult combatants". RENAMO is now in Parliament, so why not the RUF, whose brutality is beyond description?

Some form of justice is needed in Africa, if we are to demonstrate that we are serious about protecting children. "Justice, justice and more justice," is our call.

Some Instruments at Our Disposal for Preventing Child Soldering

1. The International Criminal Court will help put those who recruit child soldiers behind bars. Support is needed to make this Court a reality.
2. The 1949 Geneva Protocols and the two 1977 Additional Protocols require publicity in Africa. Educating government and rebel leaders on these important documents should be the goal of African civil society.
3. The African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights

4. UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)
5. The Maputo Resolution on Child Soldiers
6. The Neighbourhood Initiative of Olara Otunnu
7. The Convention on the Rights of the Child
8. National laws

Let us use these instruments to end the abuse of children. Civil society can and must pressure governments and rebels to implement the above. Public awareness is essential. The media have an important role to play.

Let me conclude, Mr. Chairman, by stressing the need for us not to repeat history. The organisers, and we the participants, need to make history and by this statement, I mean we need not pass resolutions that we are not capable of implementing.

Let us think and discuss ways and means of advancing this important agenda of preventing child soldiering in the sub-region. If, a small efficient and resourced structure is needed to build the capacities of the States and civil society in the sub-region to help end the unacceptable situation of children in armed conflict, let us do so by Friday. By this singular act history shall be made.

Africa needs to mobilise local resources to facilitate this structure and we hope our good friends north of the St. Lawrence Seaway shall help us make history.

Thank you

LECTURE ON WAR-AFFECTED CHILDREN IN WEST AFRICA
BY MRS. NDIORO NDIAYE, DEPUTY DIRECTOR GENERAL
INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION

Accra , Ghana

April 27 - 28, 2000



IOM International Organization for Migration
OIM Organisation Internationale pour les Migrations
OIM Organización Internacional para las Migraciones

Among the various activities which it conducts internationally, the International Organization for Migration has always paid special attention to society's most vulnerable groups—those victimized by the activities of organized networks and those suffering the consequences of armed conflicts. Children are a part of the fringe group that benefits from IOM assistance.

While there is a growing concern over children who suffer the consequences of trafficking for purposes of forced labour or sexual exploitation, others are undergoing the effects of war without any protection whatsoever. Millions of children have either been killed or injured and have remained handicapped for life, or have been forced to witness or participate in acts of unspeakable violence.

Africa has been and continues to be a place of suffering for the children caught in these situations. Wherever possible, the IOM has not only provided emergency assistance for these children, but has also done what it could to generate a greater awareness of the seriousness of the problem.

The effects of war and its impact on child development have received special attention from all the institutions and organizations involved in the rehabilitation of those who have incurred physical or mental injuries as a result of fighting. These children are the primary victims of the family disintegration arising from the loss or displacement of those closest to them and from the disruption of health care services and food supplies, not to mention the psychological problems and traumas that require extensive follow-up before they can regain their place in society.

Below-age children are also being forcibly recruited and manipulated by adults. Hence the urgent need to place priority on demobilizing them and to introduce specific reintegration activities centred on education and vocational training in order to give them the best possible chance of rebuilding their future.

The IOM's interventions in demobilization and reintegration programs and in providing assistance for displaced persons and refugees in Mozambique, Angola, Rwanda and more recently, in the context of preparations for similar programs for Guinea-Bissau and the Republic of the Congo have taken, and continue to take, consideration of the effort required to assist minors.

To cite only two examples in Angola, in the context of the demobilization of UNITA's billeted troops and the surplus troops of the Angolan Armed Forces (AAF), the IOM participated in the demobilization of below-age soldiers and provided assistance to help them return to and reintegrate with their communities of origin. Their demobilization started even before the general demobilization process, because these were vulnerable, at-risk groups concerning whom there was no dispute over the eligibility criteria. In all, 360 minors from the Angolan Armed Forces and 4,734 minors from UNITA were assisted with their families, when necessary. A data base was sketched out and handed over to the authorities at the end of the operation.

In Rwanda, a large number of minor children who had been evacuated to Italy during the crisis period were repatriated by the IOM in the family reunification context, with all the research and readjustment follow-up entailed in this.

At the present time, in West Africa, Liberia and Sierra Leone are the big problem areas.

In these countries, thousands of children are victims of civil wars that have dragged on for many years now ; they are living under the difficult conditions of internally displaced persons or as refugees in camps in the border countries ; others are being used as soldiers in a fighting capacity. The difficulties with financing our activities have necessitated a pause in our activities, but we are in the process of negotiating our return. According to the UN's March report on the humanitarian situation in Sierra Leone, 2 300 children are still in captivity there, primarily in the Northern Province. However, UNICEF and various NGOs have already taken charge of 703 children, 80% of whom are former combattants.

By way of the organizations concerned (ECOWAS, international organizations and NGOs) the international community has since the onset of the hostilities constantly been alerting public opinion to the need for international mobilization to end the suffering of civilian populations, especially women and children, who are the main victims of the daily violence being perpetrated in these countries.

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.

Conference on War-Affected Children in West Africa

Accra, 27-28 April 2000

Plenary session: War-Affected Children in West Africa

The Scope of the Problem

Leaders and War-Affected Children: Accountability and Commitment

Nigel Fisher

Regional Director, South Asia

United Nations Children's Fund

Leaders and War-Affected Children: Accountability and Commitment

Nigel Fisher

Hon. Chairpersons Axworthy and Gbeho, Foreign Ministers of Canada and Ghana,
Honourable Ministers,
Government delegations,
Young people,
Representatives of civil society and international organisations,
Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of UNICEF, may I first express our appreciation to Governments of Canada and Ghana for their leadership in this initiative which brings us together to address the rights of war-affected children.

May I also transmit greetings from UNICEF Executive Director Carol Bellamy, at this moment around the corner in Dakar, at the World Education Forum: She will be highlighting the educational needs of children affected by armed conflict at the Dakar meeting, and will be with us in spirit today.

Leadership and accountability

There are two words that do not yet appear in the draft Declaration and Plan of Action that this meeting may endorse - leadership and accountability. Certainly in the youth and NGO meetings of the last few days, and in the corridors, many seem to feel that these two words are precisely what this meeting is about - or should be about.

It is the quality and nature of leadership that will determine whether today's deliberations will go beyond rhetorical commitments to concrete action. And the accountability (or lack of accountability) of leaders - national and international leaders, government and corporate leaders, community and civil society leaders - will be a significant determinant of their will to translate one more declaration and plan of action into real action.

We are meeting today in a climate of healthy scepticism. In an interview on Ghana radio two days ago, the interviewer asked some of us: 'How can people believe that this meeting, its deliberations and pronouncements will actually have "bite", will lead to positive action and not just be one more conference like so many others?' The young people from the region, some deeply scarred by their experience of war, in their own meeting, asked whether they could expect clear, concrete, actionable outcomes from the ministerial meeting. They asked whether you will listen to them, will you heed their suffering?

A scene is indelibly imprinted in my brain, from Kibumba, eastern Zaire - now the DRC - July 1994. As far as the eye can see, a vast throng of men, women and children. Rwandans: refugees, displaced, dispossessed, victims. All of these, yes. But there is a huge contradiction, because many of these victims are also killers. Thousands among them adults and children - have killed, again and again, in the previous months, until they in turn have been forced to flee with their families. The great majority of them are poor farmers, with a few years of schooling or no education at all. Yet they killed. Why? Like most people, they probably had simple ambitions - a plot of land, enough money to get by on, good health for their families, a decent education for their children, an occasional drink with their friends. So how did they end up in Kibumba and other camps like it? I believe they were there because of two things above all - poor leadership and the pervasive climate of impunity.

They were there because of destructive and disastrous national and community leadership, that, for decades, chose to divide and blame, manipulate and foster violence, rather than seek constructive and inclusive solutions to Rwanda's complex problems. No rule of law brought them to task.

And they were there because their leaders were totally unaccountable for their actions and acts of violence - they acted with complete impunity. External aid fostered an increasingly dictatorial and exclusive system in the 1980s - donors knew it, but turned a blind eye. Who wanted to shatter Rwanda's anointed role as a model of development? And, as we all know, there were plenty of warning signs of impending disaster in 1993 and 1994, but the world chose to ignore and deny these. So, there was a failure of leadership nationally and internationally, encouraging national leaders to believe that they were accountable to no-one.

Assuring a credible outcome

So how can this ministerial conference convince the rest of the world that it will make history, rather than repeat it? How can we ensure that its outcome will not be forgotten as one in a long litany of declarations and plans which are never acted upon, but that it will be remembered as the ground-breaking conference which actually led to concrete action and implementation of commitments made?

Four suggestions to get the ball rolling:

- Apply existing national and international standards.
- Take steps to ensure accountability and address impunity.
- Concretely commit to actions which will prevent and pre-empt armed conflict.
- Guarantee children as zones of peace.

1. Application of standards

To whom are the proposed Declaration and Plan of Action addressed if not to ourselves? This gathering has the experience and capacity to come up with a very clear and concrete timetable for applying at the national level the solid body of international norms and standards that now exist. In addition to long-established humanitarian and human rights laws and conventions, recent years, with Canada in the lead -

have seen a burst of new standards that require universal ratification and implementation - the Rome Statute for the International Criminal Court; the Anti-Personnel Landmine Treaty; the new Optional Protocol to the CRC on the recruitment and deployment of young combatants; The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (which Liberia has not yet ratified). There are also the ECOWAS Bamako and Lome declarations, the ECOWAS Moratorium in small arms and light weapons, Security Council Resolution 1261, with its specific provisions on conflict-affected children.

Ratify, legislate, train, inform. There is nothing - unless it is the lack of political will - stopping any country present today from ensuring that the full range of norms and standards are in place nationally and soon. Do these standards apply to non-state parties? Yes. There is a growing international acceptance that non-state entities are equally bound by human rights standards; and there are precedents - as with the Sudan People's Liberation Movement's Agreement on Groundrules, in 1995, whereby it bound itself to international norms and commitments to children and civilians in the midst of conflict.

Are these standards the product of alien, externally-imposed values? No. Positive norms and values exist in every culture regarding care and protection of children in times of war and conflict. These can be rediscovered, re-instated, accepted at all levels of society, to reestablish an understanding that surely must be universally applied - that there are no circumstances under which the targeting and exploitation of children is justifiable, ever.

In a sense, this is the easy part - to ratify, legislate, inform, commit. But how to ensure that these norms and standards are actually applied? Clearly, each country has it within its power to establish independent bodies to monitor, document and report on human rights and their abuse. Surely a timetable for setting up such bodies where they do not exist need not be long, and the possibility of setting up ECOWAS capacity to monitor the protection of war-affected children in member states is cited in the draft Plan of Action. But the question remains: what to do when norms and standards are not applied? We come to the twin issues of accountability and impunity.

2. Ensure accountability, address impunity

The most significant limitation to ensuring accountability and countering impunity is inadequate public, private, national and international objection to the abuse of children during conflict, and inadequate efforts to implement constructive ways by which they can be protected and assisted when abused. But times are changing. There is an accelerating trend internationally to place human security, the rights and well-being of citizens, ordinary people, on the international peace and security agenda. And in this context there is an opportunity for ECOWAS members and their international partners to take a lead. Let's look at three particular issues - the debate over sovereignty versus intervention; naming names of those who violate human rights; and what Olara has called the ECOWAS Neighbourhood Initiative.

Sovereignty and intervention. Kofi Annan and his two predecessors as UN Secretaries-General have all argued that the rights of individuals and communities within states are important enough to call into question the traditional inviolability of state sovereignty. The argument is increasingly heard in international circles that serious breaches of human rights within states almost always create threats to international peace and security and thus justify UN intervention.

Such intervention is highly controversial, but does appear to be a strengthening trend as human security and humanitarian issues play an increasingly important role in the UN Security Council's agenda. ECOWAS has its own experience in this regard. Thus is it ready to codify and implement a normative framework, agreed to by all its members, which justifies intervention? Certainly, it is much better for the countries of the region to set their own standards for example, as is now planned through the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Mechanism - rather than to wait to have them applied from the outside once armed conflict has broken out.

Naming names. Invisibility breeds impunity. So what about naming names? A very powerful idea. Let's look at a very recent example. Earlier this month, the UN Security Council investigative panel on Angola, examining violations of the international embargo against UNITA, made its findings known. Chaired by Canada, the report named names -diamond merchants in Belgium, arms brokers in South Africa, weapons suppliers in Bulgaria, African leaders who, in exchange for diamonds, allow their countries to be transshipment points or UNITA refuges. The accusations led to a storm of outrage, but also to immediate actions. Belgium and the diamond industry sought to absolve themselves of blame. Countries sought to defend their records, but also immediately acted to curtail illegal shipment activities. Corporations sought to defend their investment decisions - they become nervous when bad publicity threatens investments. And we find that increasingly, around the world, human rights are finding their way onto corporate agendas.

In this part of the world, similar reports exist on Liberia and Sierra Leone, on the links between the conflicts, the diamond trade, natural resource exploitation and arms flows, on the corporations and countries - both near and distant neighbours - which have benefitted from or contributed to these extended conflicts.

Of course, there is no "internal conflict" which is exclusively internal - parties always have external economic and political supporters, and external sources of arms. External governments and private companies help to support and underwrite conflicts. Should they be rewarded with silence? Surely we will all say no.

An ECOWAS Neighbourhood Initiative. A number of actions could comprise an ECOWAS Neighbourhood Initiative to encourage positive collaborative measures, including the small arms moratorium, measures to end cross-border recruitment of children as combatants, the child protection unit within the ECOWAS secretariat. Would Canada, Ghana and other ECOWAS partners be prepared to lead in also developing some additional measures? For example, the isolation of proven abusers and users of children in war - travel restrictions, denial of participation in regional organisations, their deliberations and summits? And further afield, the freezing of their external assets? If both encouragement to abide by ethical norms, and the threat of punitive action, can be made credible, the climate of impunity is going to change.

3. Preventive actions

This discussion has already started to lead us into the realm of preventive and preemptive action - one of the other clauses in the draft Plan of Action proposes rapid ratification and implementation of the ECOWAS conflict prevention mechanism signed at last December's ECOWAS summit. Will ECOWAS lead in developing mechanisms to address non-violent resolution of conflicts through neighbourly arbitration?

There are many roads to the implementation of equitable development policies which help foster national cohesion. All of them require not only national commitments, but sustained international support too. But as our focus is on young people and children, and with the Dakar World Education Forum taking place this week, may I make a brief pitch for investment in quality education as one of the best investments in a nation's future and in peace?

The case for universal quality education in which children learn to think for themselves, learn how to solve problems, work and cooperate with others - this case has been made and proven again and again. It would be a great example of leadership if this conference would lead to plans for educational recovery in Sierra Leone and Liberia, outlining investment requirements and commitments sought from communities, national governments and the international community - sustained, long-term commitments. Will Canada seek to build and lead the consortium of international partners required for a long-term commitment, to make universal education, vocational skill development, capacity-building and training a real possibility in these two countries? UNICEF would certainly like to be your partner in such an endeavour.

4. Children as Zones of Peace

The draft Plan of Action before this conference proposes the institution of a West African Day of Cease-fire. President Rawlings has suggested not a day, but a Week of Truce for our children, a week which would start in West Africa and which could even become global.

In the shadows behind these proposals is a 20-year old concept that is as relevant today as it was in 1980: the concept of Children as a Zone of Peace. This concept is based on the simple principle that children have a supervening right to protection from the consequences of any armed conflict, that there is never a justification for targeting or involving children in armed conflict.

Thus could not the Plan of Action incorporate the full range of measures that would reinvigorate the Children as Zones of Peace concept in the widest possible sense? Cease-fires yes, days and weeks of peace, and also protected humanitarian corridors, plus the institution of the practice that schools, child centres, health facilities be inviolate zones of peace, and that the needs of children are taken into account in peace accords and demobilisation plans, as in Sierra Leone. Not new ideas, but ones that need to be re-affirmed and implemented. And again, when warring parties fail to respect children in this way, let the actions to counter impunity, to demand accountability, which we have previously mentioned, come into force.

Conclusion

Your excellencies, to conclude.

Thanks especially to countries like Canada, Ghana and their like-minded partners other governments and civil society organisations, to Olara Otunnu and UN agencies like my own - there can be no doubt that children have found their place on the international peace and security agenda.

There is an expectation that this meeting of leaders will exercise leadership - to devise practical measures that can be applied in West Africa to ensure the prevention of armed conflict, and measures to protect children should war actually break out.

There should be an equal expectation in West Africa that the international community - governments, NGOs and international organisations - will stay around long enough, and with sufficient resources, to help you achieve these goals.

There will be a Special Session of the UN General Assembly in September 2001, to review progress for children since the 1990 World Summit for Children and the way ahead in the next decade. Canada, together with Mali from this region and four other countries, is already involved in preparing for that event. The organisation of this conference, and the high level of participation, is one indication of the importance now being given to issues of children and armed conflict by West African governments, Canada, civil society, youth and others.

This meeting, but more importantly, the timely and thorough implementation of its recommendations, offers us the opportunity to show true leadership, to demonstrate, as national, international, political, community and youth leaders, our real commitment and accountability to all our children.

Thank you.

**Children, Governance and Development: A Framework for Protecting the Rights of
West Africa's Children**

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**Presented at the Conference on War-Affected Children in West Africa, Accra, Ghana,
April 27-28, 2000**

His Excellency Victor Gbeho, Foreign Minister of Ghana
His Excellency Lloyd Axworthy, Foreign Minister of Canada
His Excellency Olara Otunu, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General on
Children and Armed Conflict
Distinguished Panelists
Your Excellencies, Foreign Ministers of ECOWAS Countries
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like to congratulate the governments of Ghana and Canada for sponsoring this conference. I am pleased to have been invited and I thank you for the invitation.

INTRODUCTION

For many years since independence, children have been viewed as one of the targets whose lot should have been improved in Africa's quest for development but our development strategies failed to do so. One only has to review Africa's numerous "false starts" to realize that we have been applying the wrong approaches to attain development. You will recall that at different periods of our quest for development since 1960, our strategies have been dominated variously by investment in elaborate physical infrastructure, mechanized agriculture, and light industries development, among others. While we have benefited from all of these somewhat, development has remained elusive, the quality of human life in Africa has not improved substantially. Today we know that with children-centered strategies we can not only improve the lot of children but can attain development in every aspect of human endeavour. UNICEF has played the lead role in guiding us to this discovery through painstaking research, incisive analyses and persistent advocacy on behalf of children world wide. It has taken us long to discover the centrality of children to both the outcome and the process of development.

This presentation draws some conclusions about the failure of West Africa's development strategies to better the lot of West Africa's children in the critical areas of human survival, development and learning, protection and participation, and offers some ideas as to the way forward in ensuring the promotion and protection of the rights of West Africa's children. The basic thesis of this presentation is that the critical factor that has led to the sorry plight of our children is *poor governance policies and practices*.

What is needed is an appropriate governance framework within which children-centered development policies and strategies can be pursued to enhance the lot of children and spawn development generally.

SELECTED ASPECTS OF THE STATE OF WEST AFRICA'S CHILDREN

The first order of business, however, is the question of what is called "war-affected children." Who are war affected children? How do they differ from other children? I have tried to provide empirical answers to these questions using the views of Liberian children who are undoubtedly

war-affected and data from the UN system, particularly from UNICEF. Early this month, we of the Center for Democratic Empowerment (CEDE) with the support of UNICEF, Liberia organized a National Youth Workshop on War-Affected Children. At the workshop, children were asked the question, "who are war-affected children?" Here are some of their responses: "War affected children are:

children who go without food because of war; children whose parents have been killed; children whose properties have been looted; children who witnessed horrible killings; children who disrespect older people; children whose minds are disturbed and cannot do their school work well; children who are too old for their grades; children who became parents before their time; children who took part in war as fighters; children who engage in prostitution; children who do not receive proper education; girls who have been raped.

Examining the children's responses against data on the state of the Africa's children as provided by UNICEF in the State of the World's Children report, one finds a general pattern of enormous deprivation, tragic neglect and systematic denial of rights affecting all the children of Africa, in some cases, blurring the distinction between countries that have suffered violent conflicts and those that have not. Here are some examples from the data with respect to the state of West African children.

Mortality and Health

Under 5 Mortality

A brief examination of the record for West Africa shows that in the area of human survival, the under 5 mortality rate among ECOWAS countries is among the highest in the world. Five of the 10 countries with the highest under 5 mortality rates in the world are members of ECOWAS and all ECOWAS countries are among the 30 per cent of the countries of the world with the highest under 5 mortality rates. The stunning revelation is that this situation is not new; it is not the result of current wave of conflicts or the economic down-swing of the decade of the 1980s. According to UNICEF, from 1960 to 1980 the under 5 mortality rate in West African countries averaged 186 per 1000 with an annual average rate of reduction of a measly 1.3 per cent over those two decades. Since 1980, the average rate of reduction has also been negligible except in a very few cases. In half of the ECOWAS countries the annual rate of reduction has remained stagnant or declined. Similarly maternal mortality rate has remained unacceptably high. Estimates of 1990 in some ECOWAS countries put it as high as 1,800 and 1,600 per 100,000 births. Liberia's pre-war estimate of 560 has almost doubled since the civil war, standing today at 901 in Monrovia alone.

Water, Sanitarian and Nutritional Deficiencies

Associated with high mortality rates are unsafe drinking water, poor sanitation and other conditions which affect prospects of survival. Today, we continue to have countries in West Africa in which 60 per cent of the population is without access to safe drinking water or 85 per cent without access to adequate sanitation.

Another statistic which I have also found alarming is the high percentage of stunted growth among our children. In Liberia, for example, we have found out that 18 percent of our children suffer severe stunting. UNICEF report on "The State of the World's Children" has shown similar statistics for other African countries, some as high as 29 percent. As we all know, stunting is a result of prolonged health and nutritional deficiencies. Severe or congenital stunting takes place over generations and has the effect of limiting the development of physical and mental potentials. It indicates that our health delivery system has not only failed recently but for some time past.

Immediate, Underlying and Structural Causes

There are immediate, underlying and structural causes of the high level of child and mother mortality and other health problems that afflict our children. Some of the immediate causes are infections contracted during pregnancy and at birth, poor nutritional health of mothers during pregnancies and poor environmental and personal hygiene. Underlying causes include demotivation of health workers due to poor salaries and working and living conditions, lack of access to health facilities and chronic poverty. Structural factors have to do with inappropriate policies and poor governance.

HIV/AIDS

The growing epidemic of HIV/AIDS poses a major threat to the health of all African peoples but especially to women and children. Given knowledge of the havoc HIV/AIDS is wreaking elsewhere in Africa, there is not much evidence that in West Africa, the increasing prevalence of HIV/AIDS is claiming as much national and sub-regional attention as it should. In Liberia, for example, 326 cases of AIDS-related deaths have been documented since the establishment of a government AIDS surveillance mechanism in 1987. National average of incidence of HIV is 4.5 percent at current population level. But as is the case in other parts of Africa, the full extent of the problem is not known. Suspicions are that with the reported rise in tuberculosis, pelvic inflammatory diseases and other opportunistic diseases in Liberia and a number of other West African countries, the sub-region may well be in the throes of a HIV/AIDS epidemic. Lack of education and adequate testing facilities, and the stigma associated with the disease are posing obstacles in addressing it fully. "

Human Development and Learning

Literacy and Access to School

With respect to human development and learning, the situation confronting our children stands in need of enormous improvement. To begin with, it is well known that literacy rates in Africa are low. Statistics show that by 1995, there was, perhaps, only one West African country with adult

literacy rate of 50 percent. Literacy rates among women are shamefully low, as low as 7, 9 and 18 percent in some ECOWAS countries. In some ECOWAS countries female adult literacy is as low as 30 percent that of male adults. Considering the fact that women are the teachers in our homes, and the all-important discovery that the education of females is a strategic imperative for development, this situation poses the most critical obstacle to human development and learning. Figures for primary school enrolment are also very low for many ECOWAS countries as they are for African countries generally. While there are some success stories, the general case is disappointing. We are told that in some West African countries less than 30 percent of school aged children are attending school. In Liberia, for example, 42 per cent of school aged children are estimated to be in school. These rates fall even lower when disaggregated for girls. Dropout rates are also high so that secondary school enrolment is a small fraction of primary school enrolment. Then there is the question of the educational content and the pedagogic methods utilized. All of these need overhauling to make them relevant and capable of unlocking the potential of learners for creativity and innovation, two important pre-requisites for personal and national regeneration.

Special Educational Needs

In addition to these sub-regional and regional problems about human development and learning, there are additional problems experienced by war-torn societies like Liberia and Sierra Leone that are trying to cope with a population of young people who have missed many years of schooling due to war. The need for accelerated educational and training programs, trauma counselling, and other special services are urgent and imperative. In Liberia, for example, a stunning statistic to come out the West African Examinations Council showed that over 75 percent of Liberian secondary school candidates failed the examinations for 1998-1999. The fact is that long before the civil war, the quality of the Liberian educational system had been on the decline. Qualified teachers were leaving the system for greener pastures while unqualified teachers were used as replacements. About 65 percent of primary and secondary school pupils are today being taught by unqualified teachers.

Some Immediate, Underlying and Structural Causes

Among the causes of low enrolment and lack of access are the unavailability of schools, high cost of sending children to school and the lack of desirable opportunities for vocational training. Cultural and religious practices and conditions of poverty are also impediments to full utilization of educational opportunities in some cases. While some of these problems such as the paucity of schools exists throughout West Africa, they have been exacerbated by war in countries like

Liberia and Sierra Leone. In many other part of Africa systematic or sustained social and economic marginalization and poor educational policy prescriptions have constituted structural causes retarding progress in human development and learning.

Protection of Children

Definition and Identity of Child

Basic to the question of protection is the establishment and recognition of unambiguous legal status of children so as to ensure that each child's rights and entitlements can be respected and protected. To begin with, in most African countries, the legal definition of a child varies from one circumstance to another. In many cases working age, voting age, age of majority, and age of criminal responsibility are often different with obvious implications for the protection of children against an array of abuses.

Abuse and Exploitation

In situations of armed conflict, such abuse and exploitation have become more pronounced. Liberia, for example, today has one of the highest rate of teen pregnancy in the world. During the civil war, about 20 percent of combatants were children of 15 years old or lower. These and thousands others were both the objects as well as the perpetrators of heinous crimes and other abuses including sexual abuse and exploitation, drug and alcohol abuse and labor exploitation, displacement and disability. The case of Sierra Leone is legendary. Accusation of engaging in slavery has occasionally been levelled against one ECOWAS country. In both Sierra Leone and Liberia and many other West African countries, the armies' street children came be found in urban areas as juvenile delinquency and criminality among youth and children rise. Armed robbery by children and youth is a newly emerging development not only in post-conflict countries but also in other West African countries.

Remedial Measures

The protection of children requires a combination of appropriate laws, strengthened enforcement and rehabilitation institutions, relevant and effective educational systems, and above all, empowered families and local communities, among other things.

Participation of Children

Learning the Art of Participation

Often misunderstood to mean the relinquishing of parental guidance, child participation is essential in ensuring the development of children into efficacious, resourceful citizens rather than passive subjects. It entails enabling children to begin to develop a sense of responsible participation in decision-making, a deep appreciation of the humanity and worth of themselves and others, tolerance and respect for opposing views, importance of and how to take initiatives, strike compromises and lead wholesome, productive lives as members of families, communities and nations. In addition to developing technical, vocational and other skills related to ensuring economic empowerment, children must be assisted in developing the requisite skills and gaining access to information that will help to make them decent human beings, good citizens, productive and responsible workers and contributing members of their families and communities. While efforts are increasing to achieve these, the paucity of institutional and individual role models as well as cultural practices pose obstacles that need to be surmounted. Child participation must be enhanced as part of a general culture of empowered participation. Too often, concepts of discipline as practiced in our schools and homes tend to support authoritarian values much more than values of efficacy and inquiry.

Debt Overhang

The link between Africa's debt burden and poverty is obvious. Debt burden increases fiscal obligations in the public sector, undermines prospects of economic growth and contributes to sustaining poverty. Women and children constitute the largest percentage of Africa's population that is below absolute poverty levels. Debt stocks in West Africa are huge. Liberia's, for example, is currently estimated at US\$3 billion with nearly half being owed to multilateral creditors, 37 percent to bilateral national partners and 13 percent to private or commercial creditors. Debt servicing in 1998 required 70 percent of the export earnings of an under-performing economy. Clearly, for Liberia and other African countries as well as other highly indebted poor countries (HIPC) debt relief that releases resource for poverty reduction is imperative.

CONCLUSIONS FROM CURRENT STATE OF WEST AFRICA'S CHILDREN

What conclusions can we draw from the current state of children in West Africa? First, that the state of our children offers the clearest expression of our state of underdevelopment; that far from being a consequence of underdevelopment, failure to successfully address children's issues is a principal cause of underdevelopment and continued failure is the best way to assure West Africa's consignment to a prolong state of poverty, conflict and underdevelopment.

Second, put in proper perspective, abuse of children and failure to successfully address issues concerning West Africa's children must be seen as a problem exacerbated in some countries by violent conflict but overall, a problem rooted deeply in misguided policies and practices at the national and sub-regional levels and-for a long time also at the international level. Failure to address children's issues is part of poor governance strategies and practices that cause conflicts and conflicts, in turn, exacerbate the plight of children. Therefore the question of "war-affected children" can be properly addressed when considered within the framework of wider concerns about systems of governance that have historically victimized all children. The question, therefore, has to do not only with how war has affected some children that are classified as "war-affected children" but also how the prolonged marginalization and victimization of children through bad governance and other factors have produced violent conflicts, poverty and underdevelopment.

Third, that considerations of children's issues are inseparable from considerations of issues of gender equality and equity; and as such, issues of women empowerment and the protection and promotion of the rights of children should be treated in a manner that recognizes their co-terminality .

Fourth, the various dimensions of the problem of children as posited in the Convention on the Rights of the Child-problems of survival, development and learning, protection and participation-are inter-linked and inseparable and as such, require integrated multidimensional

strategies and approaches that should be galvanized in national plans of action formulated and implemented within an appropriate governance framework. The Convention to Eliminate All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform of Action must also constitute companion inputs of such national plans of action.

Fifth, in view of the acknowledgment and acceptance of the principle of inseparability of the security, stability and development of all ECOWAS countries, children's issues must be addressed in a manner compatible with this principle; as such, operating within the framework of the Convention of the Rights of the Child, and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, ECOWAS must develop a coordinated approach and appropriate mechanisms to the formulation and implementation of its own plan of action for the promotion and protection of the rights of children and women.

CREATING GOVERNANCE INSTITUTIONS PROMOTIVE OF CHILD-CENTERED DEVELOPMENT

This conference will do well to signal West Africa's "First Call" for children. West Africa needs a new beginning for children. That new beginning requires new thinking of governance and new structures and processes of governance that will respond to the needs and interests of children and ensure development. The new thinking about governance must advance governance as a new partnership between government and civil society; new structures and processes must ensure new or strengthened mechanisms for policy dialogue, new policy strategies and renewed efforts to enhance accountability, transparency and participation in governance.

Structuring A New Governance Partnership

Creating and Strengthening Mechanisms for Policy Dialogue and Consultations at Local and National Levels

As a critical problem of underdevelopment, children's issues can best be addressed when couched within an appropriate governance framework. A good governance framework is not only the best option for formulating and implementing a national plan of action in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child but also for fulfilling the reporting process required under the Convention. A framework for good governance emerges from a partnership between government and civil society operating under the leadership of government and with the support of the international community. In this respect, a framework for good governance must be characterized by an atmosphere conducive to dialogue and consultations between government and civil society organizations. Such dialogue and consultations must take place through structures and processes of governance at the local, provincial, national and sub-regional levels of governance and even at local levels must be rooted in the family and localities within communities. Such dialogues and consultations must be led by political and civic leaderships of demonstrated commitment to democratic values and the advancement of the well-being of

children.

West Africa's centralized institutions of governance which are characterized by strong executives and parliaments that are struggling to perform policy oversight functions are inadequate as a governance framework for the nature of dialogue and policy consultations required. At their best, parliaments are organized on the basis of geographic-spatial constituency representation or representation determined by numbers and strengths of political parties. Children as a group are the least able to represent themselves; moreover, none of these forms of representation has been known to provide adequate representation of children's interests. This is why for governance institutions to adequately reflect ; children's interest, they must include in representatives of children advocacy organizations and related groups that operate in civil society and in some cases, children themselves. Experience has shown that quite often, it has not been good enough for these groups to only be involved with articulating children's interests, they must have access to and be allowed to make direct inputs into the policy-making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation processes. This is also why policy dialogue and consultations about children's issues must be all-inclusive and take place in a coordinated manner at all levels of governance-from the local to the sub-regional.

A New Children-Centered Policy Strategy

With respect to the content of the dialogue and consultations, development policies and programs must be centered around the issues and concerns that affect children. They must seek to strengthen and empower the family. Strategic analysis backed by experience has shown that children-centered development approaches are by their very nature inclusive of all other concerns and bring forth the best for all other interests. Planning and implementing development programs become more effective when the needs of children are made the center-piece. For example, programs and projects for the delivery of health care, housing and shelter, agriculture and food security, education, urban and rural reconstruction, road and transport networks, for the promotion of justice, human rights and economic empowerment or any other type of development undertaking, tend to provide clearer and more effective focus and the prospects of attaining more productive and enduring results when implemented if children's issues are made their center-pieces. This is why children's issues must be central to both the institutional processes as well as the substantive content of a governance framework that is capable of attaining development.

The Need for Accountable, Transparent and Participatory Governance

Children-centered development requires the highest order of governance probity and accountability because unlike other groups in society, children do not constitute an influential political, social or economic" constituency; therefore, de-prioritizing children' s programs, misuse of allocated resources and other malpractices may easily obtain in program management. One way of attaining a high level of accountability is to ensure clarity of goals, objectives, processes, benchmarks and expected outcomes in the formulation and implementation of policies, programs and projects. It is also essential that the appropriate role and responsibility analyses are undertaken for all actors. Monitoring and evaluation processes must take place at

agreed periods, be transparent and involve all actors. Sanctions and benefits must be assigned for performance. Civil society organizations, especially the mass media, child advocacy groups and women's organizations have a responsibility to insist on such accountable, transparent and participatory processes and the building of capacity both within government and civil society entities to achieve them. This is how civil society organizations can go beyond their traditional roles of educating and advocating and become effective participating partners in governance.

A careful reading of the reporting process of the Convention on the Rights of the Child will show that an accountable, transparent and participatory governance process is expected if national reports submitted in accordance with the reporting process are to be compatible with the spirit, intent and objectives of the Convention.

In summary, at the level of states parties, we should create and strengthen governance structures and processes that build and sustain partnerships in governance between government and civil society and use these institutions to formulate and implement children-centered development policies, programs and projects compatible with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, CEDAW, the Beijing Platform of Action and related agreements and conventions. Accountable, transparent and participatory governance will allow the CRC reporting process and other reporting processes to make more dynamic the governance partnership between government and civil society and provide a basis for greater support of the international community.

Mainstreaming Children's and Women's Issues at the Sub-Regional Level

Mr. Chairman, it is propitious that the state of West African children should come up at this time when our leaders are making significant efforts to put our cooperation agenda on a fast track. West African leaders operating in ECOWAS must be called upon to put children's and women's issues on the fast track as follows:

- Implement the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, CEDAW and other conventions and agreements about the protection of the rights of children and gender equality and equity; ECOWAS leaders must ensure that appropriate legislation is enacted at the state level to give force and effect to these rights. They must also adopt plans of action through governance processes of partnership with civil society and the international community.
- As an economic cooperation organization, ECOWAS must adopt children-centered and gender mainstreaming development approaches as the strategy to guide cooperation among ECOWAS states; in so doing, it must:
 - strengthen mechanisms to ensure coordination of its children-centered development strategy with the OAU, the UN system, especially UNICEF and other regional and international entities;

set leadership standards through codes of ethics and conduct and be prepared to name violators of such codes; in this way ECOWAS can strive to improve leadership performance in West Africa;

undertake an audit of current cooperation activities to assess their impact on the rights of children; develop indices and other measures for ensuring policy and program sensitivity to the protection of the rights of children and women;

appoint a Panel of Eminent West Africans to spearhead advocacy in the protection of the rights of children and women, ensure the visibility of children's and women's issues, their constant presence on the "front burner," the mobilization of resources to address them, and assist in monitoring performance at national levels; and in so doing, work in close cooperation with the UN Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict and relevant others.

- As the CRC reporting process calls for a national report every 5 years, ECOWAS , must convene an extraordinary summit every 3 years to review progress in the implementation of national plans of action on the implementation of conventions and agreements on the protection of the rights of children and women.
- Create and strengthen a framework for increased civil society partnership in sub- regional governance;

Actions Required at the International Level:

The international community is called upon to assist the process of promoting and protecting the rights of children and women by supporting governance initiatives at all levels as follows:

- Offer debt relief under an arrangement that links it to demonstrated domestic commitment to poverty reduction plans that strategically target women and children, reduce military budgets, stem cross-border flows of small arms, improve human rights and build governance partnerships with civil society, among other measures;
- Support capacity building for improved governance at all levels, especially with respect to the protecting the rights of women and children;
- Intensify international campaigns to stem the flow of small arms and light weapons, encourage disarmament and create and sustain an international climate conducive to development;
- Impose sanctions and take other measures to address impunity;

- Support ECOWAS efforts to strengthen its capacity to perform its mission effectively and in turn demand high standards of performance from it.

CONCLUSION

The protection of the rights of West Africa's children is the most important responsibility of the people of West Africa and should be the over-riding preoccupation of their governance institutions. Institutional arrangements of governance and their policy and program outputs have for 40 years failed to successfully address the plight of children and improve the quality of life of African peoples in appreciably substantive ways. Clearly, current governance orthodoxies should not suffice. West African governments and peoples should therefore be prepared to mobilize their creative resources and artisanship to fashion the type of institutional arrangements that best suit their needs and do so in a manner that recognizes and preserves aspects of their institutional heritage that are helpful and build upon them. Good governance requires a judicious mix of the tried and tested, and the new and innovative. Attaining these is not possible without collaboration of government and civil society and the support of the sub-region and the larger international community.

West African governments must accept the fact that a growing and empowered civil society will henceforth be a major player in national processes. Civil society organizations must also accept that as repositories of state power, government's leadership role is critical for creating and sustaining a conducive environment for enduring peace and development, among others. Demonstration of responsible leadership by leaders of government and leaders of civil society is a national imperative. Unless leaders develop a leadership culture characterized by a shared vision and willingness to strive together to pursue a common national agenda, they would have forfeited the right to expect international support.

ECOWAS as a sub-regional organization has the responsibility to provide a 'higher order of coordination and resource mobilization, set and police standards and ensure linkages with the region and larger international community; this too, requires a mix of orthodoxies and innovations including the healthy involvement of non-governmental actors at the sub-regional level. The international community needs to engage Africa more specifically on a well considered African agenda and be supportive of its implementation. At all levels of governance, there cannot be a more important item on the African agenda than the promotion and protection of the rights of Africa's children.

**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.

But more than that, I also wish to stress the need for each one of us to carry to our countries and societies the good message of the need to work together to create an atmosphere that makes conflicts unnecessary. The burden of creating this atmosphere lies on us as Governments. As Governments, we need to provide responsible leadership, through, among others, good governance and the equitable distribution of the wealth of our societies with a view to removing the underlying causes of conflicts.

Good governance and responsible leadership includes collaboration with all members of society in the pursuit of our goals. It is in this regard that we welcome the valuable contribution of civil society, the media, the youth and the international community to our effort to deal with the problem at hand. We encourage them as they contribute to our collective effort, to create a better world for the children in our sub-region and urge them to co-ordinate their efforts for an effective contribution to this noble objective.

I cannot end my remarks without extending our appreciation to all of you who have participated in this Conference. Therefore, on behalf of His Excellency the President and the Government of Ghana, and on my own behalf, I wish to extend profound gratitude to my friend and Co-Chairman, Minister Lloyd Axworthy of Canada and to my distinguished Colleague Ministers and other high officials of ECOWAS Governments, to the representatives of the donor community and international organizations represented here, to the representatives of civil society, the media and youth and all others who have tirelessly worked in the last few days to bring our deliberations to a successful end.

The support of the Government of Canada - which has proved to be a true friend of this sub-region - as well as other donor countries in our collective effort to transform our sub-region into a region of peace, prosperity and justice, devoid of wars and suffering, has been crucial to our success. In this connection I wish to say a special thank you to the Government of Canada whose vision and support for the peacemaking effort of our sub-region has galvanized our commitment to action.

We look forward to further co-operation with all representatives here and wish you all a safe journey back home.

I thank you.

NOTES FOR AN ADDRESS BY
THE HONOURABLE LLOYD AXWORTHY, MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

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

Accra, Ghana
April 28, 2000

This has been a landmark conference. It proves that when people come together and work toward defined goals, much can be accomplished.

This conference was born from our partnership with Ghana and your commitment to security in the sub-region. Together we had one overarching goal: to put an end to the suffering that war has brought to the children of West Africa.

Let me take a moment to pay tribute.

West Africa has been a leader and model for all of us.

You did not wait to take action when you saw acute suffering in Liberia and Sierra Leone. ECOMOG [Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group] has taken great risks to make the sub-region safe. Your commitment to peace and security has been great and deserves support.

During the past two days, we have discussed a wide range of issues and adopted a holistic agenda — one that deals with the root causes of conflict and one that will help us better understand and prevent the future exploitation and suffering of children.

You have put forward some very concrete recommendations, recommendations that Canada will help where it can to implement.

- First and foremost, Canada will support the call for the immediate release of all children abducted and held against their will by armed groups.
- Canada supports establishing programs to rehabilitate and reintegrate these children. It is important that in doing so local traditions and values are employed. This will not only heal wounds and close breaches, but will also help to unite societies and prevent a repeat of the violence of the past.
- Incorporating child rights and protection of civilians in military training programs will also have a positive impact.
- Prevention is key. Implementing early warning and response systems will undoubtedly help protect all members of society, especially the most vulnerable.

- Agreement to have an annual “West African Week of Truce for War-Affected Children” so that humanitarian assistance can be moved in and children’s immunization programs can be conducted is vital. This week should also serve another important function: registering births. All those who have not been registered should be, for two reasons. First, this gives individual children identities and access to rights and services. Second, it serves a useful data collection function, whereby we can finally begin to know the numbers and extent of the impact of conflict on West African children.
- I also believe that we cannot talk about protecting the rights of children without including young people in the discussion. I am encouraged that you have decided to ensure that young people are included as participants and advocates, and that ECOWAS [Economic Community of West African States] will develop a children-to-children network within West Africa.

Here in Accra, the 21 West African youth delegates held their own conference. Yesterday, Foreign Minister Gbeho and I participated in the first-ever live Internet broadcast between Africa and Canada with them. Conducted by the Canadian non-governmental organization [NGO] “War Child,” it linked students in schools across Canada with these war-affected children.

The calibre of the dialogue among these young people was inspiring. They inherently understand the problems — they live with them daily.

I believe that if we gave them the power and resources, they could sit in this room and within hours resolve the problems. The warlords of this world would not stand a chance against the power of their energy and ideas.

To enact this agenda, however, more than declarations and speeches are needed; leadership and accountability are necessary.

Without strong leadership that is answerable to the public will, children will remain vulnerable.

Our challenge now is to ensure that what has been adopted in the Declaration and Plan of Action indeed becomes that: action.

Canada is committed to immediate and longer-term follow-up of this Plan of Action.

In the short term, Canada will commit to funding the following:

- *an ECOWAS mechanism for child protection*: Canada will help fund an assessment of existing capacity and a needs assessment for a child protection unit within ECOWAS, identifying areas for donor involvement in the region (\$300 000);

- *a sub-regional initiative for military training in child rights and protection:* Save the Children Sweden, with Canadian financial support, will be training instructors in national armed forces on a country-by-country basis within West Africa (\$52 000);
- *youth engagement:* on the ground, we will help Talking Drum Studios, an NGO with a great deal of experience in Liberia, to launch a radio training and capacity-building media project with young people and adults in Sierra Leone (\$100 000).

At the political level, I will ensure that Canada takes elements of this agenda to the Security Council, the G-8, and the Human Security Network.

Canada will continue to convene meetings with the international community to discuss follow-up and implementation, both locally and in capitals.

It is my hope that this conference has set a standard for future conferences on war-affected children.

As many of you know, Canada will be hosting an international conference on war-affected children in September. It will feed recommendations made here and in Canada to the Special Session on Children in 2001.

We must all collaborate to carry this agenda forward, so that we do not fail the children of West Africa again. We must restore a sense of hope to them and their families and ensure that each of them has a long, productive and secure life.

Thank you.

THE FOLLY OF MANKIND

On one side, weapons they call "offensive";
On the other, weapons they call "defensive";
Between the two, deterrence!
On one side, Passion they call blind;
On the other, Reason they call genuine;
Between the two, mediation!

Tension mounts...
The straw that breaks the camel's back...
Suddenly...FIRE!!!
Innocent or not...a Massacre...
Indiscriminate Genocide!

Those who survive,
Mourn the loss of those who are gone:
Mothers mourn their children...
Children mourn their Fathers...
Fathers mourn their Wives...
Tides of blood...
Drown floods of tears.

Horror, wretchedness,
Misery and Crime go hand in hand;
All for the infamous Good of the People...
Or in the name of "God" or a People!
You be the judge:
In the name of what God do men kill one another?
Oh...Ethno-tribalism!...Carnage in the name of what ideal?

Thus are Wars begun...
Thus does Violence reign...
Thus does evolve...THE FOLLY OF MANKIND...Enough is enough...
THE FOLLY OF MANKIND...Enough is enough...
THE FOLLY OF MANKIND...Enough is enough...

ALPHONSE SEDOLO GBAGUIDI

A GLOBAL EFFORT

The Conference on War-Affected Children in West Africa assembled government delegations, civil society representatives, and academics in Accra from 27-28 April. This cross section of interested groups set out a series of practical, concrete actions to protect and rehabilitate war-affected children.

Shortly after the delegates packed their bags and left the peace and security of Accra, the tenuous peace in Sierra Leone was shattered. The state descended once again into chaos. How then can the resolutions and commitments made in Accra be put to work immediately to protect children in Sierra Leone? Time is running out. In Sierra Leone, children are once again being recruited into rebel forces. Their childhood is being stripped from them.

West African leaders must demonstrate leadership. They must stand up and declare that violence and civil war are no longer acceptable in West Africa. The declarations and protocols, conventions and treaties must be implemented. Strong, decisive action must be taken to correct the injustice of innocent civilians, including women and children, being affected by war.

ECOWAS leaders recently endorsed the Accra Declaration and Plan of Action, at the 25th Anniversary summit of ECOWAS held in Abuja. After 25 years of operation, ECOWAS could do no better than to move swiftly and decisively in Sierra Leone and halt the slaughter of civilians.

ECOWAS Heads of State should take steps immediately to implement the week of truce recommended in the Accra Plan of Action. With concerted international pressure, the week of truce will become a reality. If the war must go on, let it go on without the involvement of children. We must also move forward, as decided in Accra, to set up an ECOWAS desk for children's issues. Every day that we delay, more children are recruited in rebel forces.

In September, Canada will host an International Conference on War-Affected Children. This will be a chance to measure what has been accomplished since the Accra Conference, and to continue building momentum for child protection. No single government, or NGO, or international group can resolve this problem alone. A committed stance by ECOWAS, however, would set an example for other regional organisations to follow in what should become a truly global effort.

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