

ECONOMIC COMMUNITY OF WEST AFRICAN STATES

**TWENTY-FIFTH SESSION OF THE AUTHORITY OF HEADS OF
STATE AND GOVERNMENT**

Dakar, 20 – 21 December 2001

**DECLARATION A/DCL.1/12/01 ON THE DECADE OF A
CULTURE OF THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD IN WEST
AFRICA (2001 – 2010)**

WE, THE HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT OF THE ECONOMIC COMMUNITY OF WEST AFRICAN STATES (ECOWAS),

Meeting in our twenty-first session at Dakar on 20 and 21 December 2001;

Considering that twelve years ago, during the World Summit for the Child, the leaders of the entire world gave a common undertaking and launched a pressing appeal to the international community to prepare a better future for every child.

Since then, considerable progress has been achieved in the countries of the ECOWAS sub-region. Thousands of children have been rescued from certain death, the number of children registered in school has greatly increased, numerous and important treaties have been agreed and signed for the protection of the child from exploitation and abuse without, however, achieving the aim of securing a better future for the child. On the whole, the results achieved have fallen below national targets and the commitments made to the international community.

REAFFIRM, INDIVIDUALLY AND COLLECTIVELY, our commitment to abide by the terms of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Declaration and Plan of Action of the World Summit.

REMAIN CONVINCED that every child has the inalienable right to a better future.

ARE PARTICULARLY CONCERNED by the ever-increasing gravity of the situation of children in zones of conflict, of children who stand in need of special protection, and by the suffering of handicapped children.

UNDERScore, in our capacity as leaders of countries of the ECOWAS zone, and as such, signatories to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the fact that it is incumbent upon us to protect the rights of every child through actions at national level and through sub-regional, regional and international cooperation.

ACKNOWLEDGE AND REAFFIRM ALSO, in our capacity as ECOWAS Heads of State and Government, that it is our responsibility and that of the citizens and families of the civil society, and the regional and sub-regional organizations, to ensure the enforcement of the body of the rights of the child within the ECOWAS sub-region.

ALSO REAFFIRM, more than ten years after the adoption and subsequent entry into force of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and more than two years after the entry into force of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, our total adherence to the obligations set forth in these instruments.

CONVINCED THAT the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of Child and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child constitute the basis for an action in favour of the child and that all the rights contained therein are indivisible and must be respected and enforced as such.

UNDERTAKE to support and promote the production by our media organizations, using new technologies, of high quality programmes reflecting our realities, culture and vision of the world.

The challenge is to actualise the solemn obligation imposed upon the State by the collective act of adherence to these instruments and by the enforcement of the rights of the African child within the ECOWAS region in particular.

ACKNOWLEDGE that the future of our region lies in the welfare of its children and its youth. Investing in the children today is to ensure peace, stability, security, democracy and sustainable development tomorrow. The voice of the youth must be heard. Our children are the actors without whom neither the present nor the future can be. They need our total support and commitment today.

RECALLING:

- The drain on the vital resources for the funding of essential social services caused by indebtedness and structural adjustment programmes, and the weight of poverty on the development of the child, in conjunction with the delay in the implementation of the 20/20 and HIPC initiatives;
- The emergence of fresh challenges, in the form of AIDS, the increased enrolment of children into the armed forces, illegal labour, child trafficking and sexual exploitation of children;
- The constraints created among children of school age by the population explosion, the persistence of gender inequality in schooling and in qualification, the failure to achieve universal nursery and primary school education, and the soaring rate of drop-outs and youths who do not receive the education required;
- The relevance of the objectives of the 1992 Dakar Summit, especially as it relates to maternal mortality rate, malnutrition in the child, access to potable water, adult education, especially for women, prenatal care, consumption of iodine in salt, and vaccination;

INDIVIDUALLY AND COLLECTIVELY PROCLAIM:

- Our inalienable attachment to the principles embodied in the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- Our profound conviction that poverty alleviation begins when we invest in the child;
- That the period from 2001 to 2010 is “**the decade of a culture of the rights of the child**” in the ECOWAS region.

HEREBY UNDERTAKE:

- To ensure, in the performance of our duties, that we fully discharge our responsibility to give priority to the child in the allocation of resources;
- To support the formulation and effective implementation of plans of action in favour of poverty alleviation in the ECOWAS region, by the application of initiative 20/20, and to support economic and social policies in favour of the child;
- To adopt political, legislative and budgetary measures in favour of social progress as measured by the supply of fundamental needs such as basic education, primary health care, food, water, sanitary conditions, special protection and participation;
- To envisage poverty alleviation from the specific viewpoint of the fight against HIV/AIDS and the supply of the needs of children, and especially orphans, street children, child beggars, child slaves, handicapped children, and child victims of armed conflict;
- To support devolution of power from the centre to local government areas and communities, whilst ensuring their direct involvement in the provision of basic social services such as primary health care, access to basic education, access to potable water and sanitary conditions, transportation, reception and reinsertion of children in difficulty.

UNDERTAKE to promote within our States the emergence of an information ethic, to facilitate the promotion of a code of ethics by representative professional organizations, and to eliminate corruption as well as political, religious and financial pressure on information and communications professionals;

UNDERTAKE ALSO to work towards the liberalization of the airwaves in order to ensure maximum utilisation of the potentials offered by public and private radio and television broadcasting;

REAFFIRM our determination to assist the media establishments to acquire new technologies and contribute to the formulation of coherent media training policies, adapted to the new regional media environment, in order to enable them to be better equipped to assume their responsibilities in the promotion and achievement of the ideals and objectives of ECOWAS;

URGE the West African media and communications practitioners to participate actively in the efforts to establish a culture of peace, ensure respect for individual differences, promote the spirit of tolerance, rejection of terrorism and all other forms of violence;

REAFFIRM our desire to establish independent communications regulatory bodies in the Member States of the sub-region;

REITERATE AND REAFFIRM our resolve to take all necessary measures to accelerate and ensure effective realization of the aims and objectives of ECOWAS, especially those relating to the news media, social communication and protection of media practitioners;

DIRECT the Executive Secretariat to monitor the implementation of this Declaration and present reports thereof on a regular basis to the Ministers of Information.

DONE AT DAKAR THIS 21ST DAY OF DECEMBER 2001 IN A SINGLE ORIGINAL, IN THE ENGLISH, FRENCH AND PORTUGUESE LANGUAGES ALL TEXTS BEING EQUALLY AUTHENTIC

.....
H.E. Mathieu KEREKOU
President of the Republic of BENIN

.....
H.E. Blaise COMPAORE
President of FASO
Chairman of the Council of Ministers

.....
H.E. Jose Maria Pereira NEVES
Prime Minister and Head of Government of
The Republic of CAPE VERDE

.....
H.E. Abou Drahamane SANGARE
Minister of Foreign Affairs, For and on behalf
of the President of the Republic of COTE
D'IVOIRE

.....
H.E Yahya A.J.J. JAMMEH
President of the Republic of GAMBIA

.....
H.E. John Agyekum KUFUOR
President of the Republic of GHANA

.....
H.E Lamine SIDIME
Prime Minister of the Republic of
GUINEA

.....
H.E. Koumba Yala Kobde NHANCA
President of the Republic of GUINEA BISSAU

.....
H.E. Monie R. CAPTAN
Minister of Foreign Affairs,
For and on behalf of the President
Of the Republic of LIBERIA

.....
H.E. Alpha Oumar KONARE
President of the Republic of MALI

.....
H.E. MINDAOUDOU Aichatou (Mme)
Minister of Foreign Affairs
For and on behalf of the President of
The Republic of NIGER

.....
H.E. Olusegun OBASANJO
President and Commander-in-chief of
The Armed Forces of the Federal
Republic of NIGERIA

.....
H.E. Abdoulaye WADE
President of the Republic of SENEGAL

.....
H.E. Alhaji Dr Ahmad Tejan KABBAH
President of the Republic of SIERRA LEONE

.....
H.E. Gnassingbe EYDEMA
President of the TOGOLESE Republic