

**Side Event on Reintegration of children formerly associated with
armed groups and armed forces.**

**Opening Statement and Speaking notes of Ambassador Joanna Wronecka, Moderator
of the meeting**

Excellencies,

Distinguished Panelists,

Ladies and Gentleman,

Colleagues,

Thank you all for coming and participating in today's event. I would like to welcome and thank our honoured speakers who are present with us today: Ms. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict, Mr. Kabba Williams, former child soldier and human rights officer, His Excellency Mr. Adikalie Sumah, Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the UN, UNICEF (name to be included) and Ms. Hiba Qaraman, Senior Advocacy Consultant at Child Soldiers International.

I have an honour today to speak today on behalf of the co-sponsors of the meeting: France, Belgium, Germany Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sweden, Switzerland, UNICEF and the Office of the SRSG.

We gathered here to discuss reintegration of children formerly associated with armed groups and armed forces – the question of fundamental significance for thousands of children and one that desperately needs our help. These children have been deprived of their childhood, their innocence stripped away because of the traumatizing effects of being associated with armed groups and armed forces. These experiences have a truly lasting impact on these children.

Reintegration constitutes our best strategy for turning these victims into survivors and giving them back what was taken- a chance to grow up with their intact liberty. Through a specially designed gender and age sensitive curricula and applied therapy these children are taught the value of their lives and become valuable members of the societies.

This endeavour is not easy. It requires a level of understanding and physiological training that is new. Child Protection Experts will help these children retask their brains to accept the possibility of a brighter future. It is simply not enough to free these boys and girls from bondage - it is our duty to help them recover, heal and move forward with a new sense of purpose and community devoid of stigma and shame.

We must not forget that in order to achieve long-term effects of the programs and to prevent re-recruitment into armed groups and forces, the international community has to upkeep the necessary financial resources. It may seem like an investment at the time but at its core this program ensures that these children will be able to have a successful future not only for themselves but for the global community.

In doing so, reintegration programs succeed where others have failed. It is the road map to a sustainable peace and overall happiness we have been looking for in conflict areas because it not only answers the question of “what do we do now?” but it also takes head on the more difficult question of, “how do we prevent this from happening to innocent children?”.