

## **ONE DAY SEMINAR FOR SUPERIOR COURT JUDGES ON CHILD LABOUR AND CHILD TRAFFICKING**

SPEECH DELIVERED BY JUSTICE AKAMBA.

That children have rights is axiomatic. Act. 28 of the constitution safeguards the rights and interests of the child. The children's Act and other Acts that deal with issues affecting children were fashioned out of our desire to bring out child laws that fall in line with interactional best practices.

One very important provision in the children's Act (Act 560) is the child's right to his/her opinion under section 11. It provides that "no person shall deprive a child capable of forming views the right to participate in decisions which affect his well being, the opinion of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child".

In a country such as ours in which culture assumes infallibility, a child's right to his opinion, in most rural communities is observed more by its denial than adherence. This raises a serious wedge between what is actually done and what is expected to be done and should therefore be a matter of concern to all of us.

Closely related to the child's right to his opinion is his right to his identity. This right recognizes the uniqueness of a person under God. Unfortunately for many African societies, not much distinction is drawn in dealing with our children so as to recognize individual qualities. It's the story about all monkeys being bad without any distinctions.

I have chosen these two rights of the child which are observed by their infringement than by their compliance, to demonstrate what good legislative provisions we have on our statute books and which if complied with, would give every child lover cause to rejoice than the present state of affairs.

The children who are subjected to work under those harsh conditions such as breaking rocks, cattle grazing or galamsying, would rather prefer being in school and enjoying sessions on the football fields during their breaks. Their opinions are not sought by the parents or guardians because they (parents) think they have

no obligation to consult them. The parents also fail to realize that children have an identity of their own – they are also persons just as we adults are – and ought to be treated with dignity.

Today's workshop will treat us to some terrible forms of treatment meted out to our children in open defiance of the laudable provisions in our Child Protection Laws. As Judges it is important for us to be sensitized on the state of affairs of children vis-à-vis our child laws in order that we may play our rightful roles in nibbling impunity and knowing where they draw the line.

On behalf of the Board of Directors of JTI and on behalf of FURDEV, I welcome all of you to today's workshop hoping that you will come out fully apprised not only of the child laws but areas of concern that require our common efforts to realize the goals of the child laws – to safeguard the rights of the child. Remember the child of today is the President, the Judge, the Governor of the Bank of Ghana, the what have you, of tomorrow. If we sow bad seeds today we will reap bad plants and fruits tomorrow.

Finally, it is said that you cannot teach an old dog new tricks. That saying cannot be true because there is no age bar to learning if only you are willing and available or else you will remain a bad dog by not learning new ideas. The challenge to be on top is for all of us to embrace.

Thank you