

Overview for the Commission on Human Security

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1. Introduction

What is human security? Human security is a term that can mean all and nothing; it is as elusive as it is appealing. As a most general observation, human security can be considered as freedom from death, poverty, pain, fear or whatever else makes people feel insecure. In this sense, almost any matter concerning people's lives can fall within the scope of human security, rendering it conceptually vague and of little practical use.

Yet the concept of human security reflects a genuine and widespread concern that insufficient measures have been taken by countries and the international community, from the viewpoint of individuals and communities, against threats that have been exacerbated in recent decades. A number of forces – such as globalization, urbanization, social change, and the rise of identity and ethnic politics – form the background to these concerns. This overview is aimed at stimulating the discussions of the Members of the Commission on Human Security. It introduces the threats faced by people in today's world, outlines the initiatives – and their limitations – taken by states and the international community, and considers the context in which human security has gained importance.

2. Rising threats to individual human beings

Armed Conflict

Perhaps the severest threats to the security of human beings exists in situations of armed conflict. In the contemporary era conflict is typically a phenomena within states; it is often caused by ethnic, religious, socio-economic and a variety of other complex dynamics; and invariably involves a disturbing level of victimization amongst civilians and non-combatants. The Great Lakes Region of Africa, the Balkans and the Middle East are just a few examples of recent or ongoing deadly conflict, where both combatants and non-combatants have faced the most severe abuses of fundamental human rights. Genocide, forced displacement, war crimes, arbitrary execution and torture, and the rape and sexual exploitation of women and children, are all too common in today's conflicts. Those able to escape the direct violence of war are forced to become refugees or internally displaced persons (IDPs), while others are killed or maimed by anti-personnel landmines. Worse still, in some situations today, we see what seems the ultimate perversion of children trained to kill as soldiers, suffering irreparable physical and psychological trauma. Such fear deprives people not only of their individual potential, dignity and hope, but also their society's future.

Poverty and deprivation

As one of the root causes of such armed conflicts, poverty and inequality are as pervasive as they are destructive. As the UN Secretary-General has observed, “Extreme poverty is an affront to our common humanity”. Poverty denies people of their rights to access basic health services and education, thus exposing them to persistent insecurity and lack of opportunity. There are 1.2 billion people living on less than \$1 a day, and an additional 1.6 billion living on less than \$2 a day. And here, too, complicated socio-economic factors hamper people from getting out of misery. For instance, although HIV/AIDS is not only a challenge to the least developed countries, nobody would doubt that lack of access to healthcare and information encourages the disease to spread and makes it more difficult to address. Furthermore, lack of access to education exposes both individuals and their societies to insecurity and instability in the future.

Human security has at its heart a multidisciplinary and comprehensive approach to welfare issues. Challenges and solutions are not seen as phenomena that can be addressed in isolation from each other; they are interconnected, and even sometimes interdependent. For example, AIDS in itself is a severe threat to individuals and communities. But it also has a big impact upon underdevelopment and therefore poverty, which, by undermining effective education and healthcare, in turn contribute to the spread of AIDS. Human Security must be approached in an inclusive and ‘holistic’ manner – not only examining the symptoms or manifestations of human insecurity, but also seeking to produce recommendations that address root causes. To give another example, when power and resources are unequally distributed between groups that are also divided by, for example, race, religion, or language – so called ‘horizontal inequalities’ – we see a breeding ground for conflict. In demonstrating the inter-linkages between different types of human insecurity, we therefore also see the linkage between “freedom from want” and “freedom from fear”. In addressing the root causes of conflict we are therefore seeking to address an agenda that includes social and economic issues.

Globalization

While social and economic globalization offers great opportunities, at present its benefits are very unevenly shared, while its costs are unevenly distributed. It has also resulted in vulnerability. As we witnessed in the Asian currency crisis, when massive financial capital moves instantly and electronically across borders, people can lose the foundation of their lives overnight unless a secure social safety net is in place. In the same vein, the digital divide is also widening the already serious gap between the haves and have-nots, worsening poverty in some developing countries.

Uncivil society

Developed and developing countries alike face the threats of the dark side of globalization and ‘uncivil’ society. Transnational illegal activity is a burgeoning threat to governance and the security of individuals, communities and states. The same processes that allow the growth and responsiveness of markets and the free movement of goods, people and capital also allow distinctively negative types of activities. In particular, trafficking in humans and especially women, trafficking in illegal drugs, money laundering, the commercial sexual exploitation of children including child

pornography and child prostitution, hi-tech crimes involving computer technologies, have come under focus in recent years. Terrorism, similarly, is provided with new opportunities to disrupt society and instill fear. These threats continue to spread and flourish through the internet and other electronic communication systems, as well as through international criminal networks.

The Environment

Environmental degradation represents both a short- and long-term threat to human security at a number of levels: local regional and global. Global warming is already having a serious impact upon the entire eco-system of the earth, and rising sea levels are already devastating people's lives on small islands. Desertification and drought are taking away food and land for agriculture. Air pollution is ruining the health of the young in many regions. These phenomena and many others are the result of human activity and it is essential to reassess the institutions and values that we use to manage the delicate eco-system in the interests of sustainability. Individuals and communities have a right to work, live, and raise children, without undermining the ability of future generations to do likewise.

New uncertainties

Issues that we did not consider seriously 15 years ago have become major concerns for our human security agenda. Our ability to develop new scientific and technological solutions has outpaced our ability to regulate such advances. This ability has also outpaced the development of ethical guidelines that can demonstrate the appropriateness of their application. Gene modification, endocrine disruptors and even human cloning are therefore important as non-traditional security issues which promise to become increasingly relevant to our lives.

How should we address the insecurity of our times?

3. International initiatives and their limits

The international community has not been passive in the face of these dangers. Rather, a wide range of countermeasures have been taken at the local, national, regional and global level, some of which have realized great achievements. However, what distinguishes these threats from conventional ones is that they can hardly be tackled effectively within traditional "state security" perspective that is premised upon the defense of national territory and solved within national borders. Ensuring that people are secure today requires broader considerations and wider categories of players and their responsibilities, complementarities, and comparative advantages.

In the interests of international peace and security, the international community has developed procedures for the peaceful settlement of disputes – such as mediation, arbitration and judicial settlement – within the framework of the United Nations. Under international law the Security Council is charged with the responsibility to respond to threats to the peace, breaches of the peace, and acts of aggression. To complement and support these state-level procedures and to protect human rights under armed conflicts and post-conflict situations, the international community has developed a range of

conventions and norms relating to the protection of human rights – such as the Geneva Conventions, the Genocide Convention, and the Refugee Convention. However, experience has taught that there are overwhelming difficulties in ensuring people's security within the framework of inter-state conventions in certain circumstances. In particular, when human rights violations take place in countries that are embroiled in domestic conflict, or in countries whose institutions of government are extremely weak or in circumstances where the state has effectively collapsed, such international conventions have little relevance.

Throughout the 1990s a variety of international measure and responses have been developed or improvised to address civil and international conflicts. However, we have learned that the root causes of conflicts and international responses to them are often mismatched (such as with the NATO air strike in Yugoslavia, where action directed at protecting ethnic Albanians resulted in human rights violations against Serbian people). There has also been a significant gap between emergency humanitarian assistance and long-term development programs (which is being addressed through the "Brookings Process" to find integrated organizational and financial solutions). The co-existence and re-settlement of repatriated refugees and their former foes are sensitive and difficult issues, requiring perception changes among people, land reform and massive international support; capacity building of devastated communities is one of the most critical and difficult tasks we have experienced. To date, in providing people under conflict and post conflict situations with survival options and in trying to harness such options to a more comprehensive political process, we have learned that there is no universal solution, and that integrated and concerted efforts by a variety of actors are essential.

In the area of poverty alleviation and development, a number of international initiatives and programs have attempted to make an impact, alongside the efforts of developing countries themselves. Results have been mixed, and often negative. Bilateral development assistance programs, regional initiatives such as those of ASEAN and the South African Development Community (SADC), UN-related initiatives led by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and Breton-Woods initiatives led by International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, have applied a great deal of human and economic resources to this huge challenge. Moreover, active debates have been underway not only on the quantitative but also the qualitative aspects of development and international aid. Increasingly, development is understood as a broad and integrated process – it means the enhancement of the welfare of humans, materially, culturally and intellectually. The Comprehensive Development Framework of the World Bank is an example of such a broad, integrative approach to poverty reduction and development. The Sector Program Approach (SPA) is one of the focuses in a series of recent and forthcoming conferences on development, such as the LDC Conference in May 2001 and the Event on Development Finance in 2002. With regard to the worsening external debt, besides the original HIPC's initiative, the G8 agreed upon the on so-called Enhanced HIPC's Initiative at the Cologne Summit in 1999, to cancel up to 100% of their ODA credits. Some countries have now satisfied the conditions necessary to benefit from the Enhanced HIPC's Initiative.

On the other hand, even if a competent government is carrying out policies and even if the international community extends support, that does not mean that resources will be used to empower individuals or enhance their livelihood and dignity. To give one example, at the World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen in 1995, it was agreed that countries would allocate 20% of their national budgets and external assistance, respectively, to education, medical care, and other areas of social development. This is the so-called 20/20 initiative. But do commitments or outlays of 20% really mean that a country will meet this target? If 20% of the budget is earmarked for education but is used largely to pay for heating school buildings, from an individual viewpoint the target has not yet been met and there is a need for further specific actions to promote education. Thus there are important questions to be asked regarding the impact of development assistance and welfare expenditure, and the gap between commitments and genuine improvements.

Of course, the international community has been well aware of this issue, and through a series of global UN conferences in the 1990s has held up numerical targets to achieve more human-centered development. They are:

- Reduction of the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by half between 1990 and 2015;
- Enrollment of all children in primary school by 2015;
- Progress towards gender equality and empowering women, by eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005;
- Reduction of infant and child mortality rates by two-thirds between 1990 and 2015;
- Reduction of maternal mortality ratios by three-quarters between 1990 and 2015;
- Provision of access for all who need reproductive health services by 2015;
- Implementation of national strategies for sustainable development by 2005 so as to reverse the loss of environmental resources by 2015.

A key factor in achieving these targets relates to healthcare. In this area, conventional efforts for improving basic healthcare, reproductive health services and reducing improving malnutrition continue. However, tackling infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis has gained particular urgency. The G8 Kyushu-Okinawa Summit, the UN Millennium Summit and Assembly, the Okinawa International Infectious Disease Conference and a variety of other forums have addressed the urgent need of tackling infectious diseases, and have made some progress. An example of such progress is seen in recent developments relating to drug prices issues. However, we have to overcome multi-layered hurdles before delivering our achievements to the people suffering from these diseases in Africa and other regions.

Another key issue to development is education. Education is the “best buy” for future development. In particular, the education of girls not only improves their own lives, but also brings income to her families and can eventually rescue entire countries from poverty. One of the priorities of the United Nations is education, under the leadership of Kofi Annan and Carol Bellamy, Executive Director of UNICEF. The UN General Assembly Special Session for Children in September this year will be a very important opportunity for the international community to proceed in this field.

To combat illegal drug use, transnational organized crime, corruption, terrorism and other illegal cross-border activities, the international community has established a number of legal and law enforcement frameworks. The G8 Lyon Group on Transnational Organized Crime, the United Nations Crime Prevention Commission, the United Nations Drug Control Programme (UNDCP), and the efforts of OECD, amongst others, are examples of this. The adoption of the UN Transnational Organized Crime Convention in November 2000, as well as the two optional protocols on illegal migration and trafficking in persons, are concrete steps that have resulted from these international initiatives. In the field of preventing terrorism and corruption, in addition, we have seen quite encouraging progress. However, individual countries hold primary responsibility to translate these international agreements into the real enhancement of the security of individual human beings and communities. And most often, criminals and terrorists escape to countries and regions where they evade control and the obstruction of their activities. Our challenge is how to overcome the differences in legal systems and law enforcement practices between countries, how to build institutional capacity to tackle these challenges in vulnerable countries, and how to protect the most vulnerable people victimized by these crimes.

Regarding the movement of information across borders through the Internet and other electronic communication systems, the international community has not yet found any effective means of governance. Although it seems obvious that such a rapid movement and disclose of information could constitute threats to individuals and their societies, the international community has been lagging behind the more rapid development of information and communication technologies. Not only differences in legal systems, but also differences in value systems and even political and religious backgrounds of each country hinder the formation of international norms in this area.

In the area of the natural environment the situation is both positive and negative. An array of international regimes and conventions exists to halt or reverse the degradation of the natural environment. Yet the 10-year-old Kyoto Process governing global climate change is now at jeopardy. With the withdrawal by the new American leadership of United States support for the Kyoto Protocol, the international community is being asked whether to discard our ten-year achievements, or proceed without the participation by the US, a country that emits 25% of world CO₂, or indeed make efforts to re-involve the US. And climate change is not our only agenda. We face desertification, devastation of forests, difficulties to get clean water, air pollution, proliferation of radioactive materials, and so on. Environmental security is the foundation for the happiness and well-being of our future generations. We are asked to make decisions now, balancing the interests of today and the interests of our children tomorrow. Yet political decision-making at almost every level is inherently reactive and short-term.

Newly emerged science and technologies, such as nanotechnology, organic chemistry, biomedicine and biotechnology including gene modification and cloning, will bring great benefit to our lives and to society. Yet we must confront the potential negative aspects that such technologies may have, by considering the social impact and ethical quandaries that are inherent in many such technological advances. It will be an

overwhelming task to correctly define the benefits and establish universal rules and guidelines that let these technologies enhance the security of human beings. But it is an essential task.

Finally, in addressing a variety of complex challenges, the international community has learned that states are not the only player. As the fight against anti-personnel landmines and HIV/AIDS has demonstrated, where states are slow or reluctant to act, NGOs, volunteers, businesses and other entities of civil society have demonstrated strong commitment at an early stage. We are seeing a whole new range of alliances, actors, and agendas at work that has taken us beyond the traditional scope of international politics and diplomacy. In the ‘field’ – in assisting refugees and IDPs, for example – the important work of NGOs is well understood and acknowledged, on the basis of their local support and expertise, their flexibility, and quick response time. Working alongside international and regional organizations on the basis of partnership, complementarity and comparative advantage clearly seems to be logical and efficient. In some cases, NGOs have taken the lead, as seen in the fight against commercial sexual exploitation of children. Following the 1997 Congress in Stockholm, the General Assembly Special Session on Children in September and the Second Congress in Yokohama in December will discuss this issue. The fundamentally important processes of agenda setting, mobilization of political interest, and raising awareness have often been initiated by NGOs and then followed by sovereign countries. We must now consider how this ethos of partnership involving a variety of actors can work better together on the basis of complementarity and comparative advantage.

4. Human Security: Current Status of Play

The 1994 UNDP Human Development Report (HDR) contributed greatly to raising awareness of endangered state of human security. It made progress in deepening understanding of the different bases of human security, in demonstrating how the concept has policy implications, and in indicating how international initiatives might translate these implications into practical programs of action. The 1994 HDR proposed a new paradigm of development based upon the security of human beings, with reference to issues such as employment, income, health, environment, personal safety and others – issues that have a significant impact upon individual livelihood worldwide. This is a model of security quite distinct from – although not necessarily in tension with – the traditional model of state security. The HDR also pointed out that satisfying both “freedom from fear” and “freedom from want” is essential for ensuring human security, and suggested the necessity of new development indicators based on human security measurements.

A number of examples indicate the importance of this. The Asian financial crisis in 1997 and 1998 brought sudden political and economic turmoil to countries that had previously been enjoying steady economic growth. The social dislocation that resulted demonstrated what happens when a society lacks the mechanism to ensure its people employment, income and other social safety in times of crisis. Sudden economic downturns represent a huge challenge to human security at a number of levels, as well as to governance and social stability.

At times, and especially in light of armed conflict and threats to human survival in the 1990s --- the Balkans, the Great Lakes region in Africa and Timor --- and the discussion on human security has moved towards addressing the issues of “freedom from fear.” A number of countries have argued that in cases of serious human rights violations, human security concerns permit not only bringing corrective pressure to bear upon the government of the country concerned but also, if necessary, undertaking so-called “humanitarian intervention,” including the use of force. This issue came to the fore when the North Atlantic Treaty Organization forcibly intervened in Kosovo without clear-cut authorization from the UN Security Council. Through these developments and the discussions that have resulted, the concept of “human security” has become politically sensitive, inevitably inviting debates on state sovereignty. With such a history, there is no consensus to date over using “human security” in UN forums.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan’s report to the Millennium Summit and Assembly is entitled “We the Peoples”. In his report, he argued that it is our mission to form a sustainable future by ensuring “freedom from fear” and “freedom from want,” emphasizing the importance of a human-centered perspective. Based upon this report, in the Millennium Declaration, leaders recognized that, “in addition to our separate responsibilities to our individual societies, we have a collective responsibility to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality and equity at the global level. As leaders we have a duty, therefore, to all the world’s peoples, especially the most vulnerable and, in particular, the children of the world, to whom the future belongs.”

In this context Japan is amongst the countries that have endorsed the concept of human security at an early stage, embracing a broad agenda that encompasses both “freedom from fear” and “freedom from want”. It has attempted to translate these goals and principles policy terms. In his speech in December 1998, Japan’s late Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi expressed his government’s intention to promote human security and realize a human centered 21st century, taking the lead in an intellectual dialogue among Asian countries. Following his personal commitment, Japan established the “Trust Fund for Human Security” in the United Nations in March 1998 and has committed to contribute more than US\$150 million (18.8 billion yen) to support UN projects to enhance human security. At the UN Millennium Summit Former Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori expressed his intention to encourage the establishment of an international Commission to deepen understanding of the concept of human security and translate its meanings to practical and effective programs for action.

The Co-chairs of this Commission, Dr. Sadako Ogata, former UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and Professor Amartya Sen, Master of Trinity College, Cambridge University, have responded to the call of the former Prime Minister. The Co-chairs decided to establish this Commission as an initiative that is independent of the United Nations or any government, and one that is aimed at action-oriented and practical results. The primary goals of the Commission are:

1. to promote public understanding, engagement, and support of human security and its underlying imperatives;

2. to develop the concept of human security as an operational tool for policy formulation and implementation; and
3. to propose a concrete program of action to address critical and pervasive threats to human security.

There are already a variety of international initiatives and programs that are directed at promoting human security and its realization. The challenge for the Commission is to target specific policy areas that will lead to concrete program actions. But the Commission on Human Security will be endowed with special qualities that will ensure that it brings much added value to this movement. It consists of globally prominent and experienced individuals who have dedicated themselves to the achievement of human security for all. Moreover, the United Nations, the sole universal organization and the original proponent of human security, is in full support of the Commission.

At the first meeting of the Commission on 8 to 10 of June 2001 in New York, the Commissioners will meet and decide upon future activities. At the outset, the Co-chairs have suggested that two areas should receive special focus, namely, “Human Security and Conflicts” and “Human Security: Health, Education, and Inequality”. Separate concept papers will elaborate upon these themes and be available to the Commission. However, the co-chairs expect that the two areas of activities will converge and lead to interrelated action program. Other thematic needs for examination are also foreseen. Themes as well as working methods of the Commission are open to the Commissioners themselves. The Co-chairs encourage and expect an active discussion among all Commission members on all aspects of the Commission’s mission: the enhancement of the human security, in *all* its dimensions, of *all* people.