
Outreach for human security

The Commission on Human Security works through collaborative arrangements, consultations and outreach. It has supported and initiated processes for wide-ranging engagement with civil society, governments and regional and international organizations. Commissioners and members of its Secretariat have organized, hosted and attended public hearings, consultations, symposiums, seminars and roundtable meetings that reached hundreds of people across the world.

The following sections summarize the activities of several of these meetings and present an overview of people's views on human security:

- A symposium on Human Rights and Human Security, convened in San José, Costa Rica, on 1 December 2001.
- A roundtable on Transition and Human Security in Central Asia, convened in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, on 22–24 April 2002 and attended by representatives of non-governmental organizations, governments in Central Asia and international organizations.
- A symposium on Economic Insecurity in Africa held in Cotonou, Benin, on 24–25 May 2002 and attended by non-governmental and government representatives from West Africa.
- Public hearings at the Global Civic Society Forum in Johannesburg on 27 August 2002 and a meeting on African Civil Society in Pretoria on 15–16 October 2002.

San José Workshop on Human Rights and Human Security

Sonia Picado S., President of the Inter-American Human Rights Institute and a commissioner of the Commission on Human Security, organized a

workshop on Human Rights and Human Security in San José, Costa Rica, on 1 December 2001. The meeting was attended by leading human rights activists from Latin America. Bertrand Ramcharan, United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, prepared a background paper for the meeting.

Discussion focused on the relationships between human rights and human security and their importance in conflict and post-conflict situations. The situation in Colombia received particular attention. The workshop concluded with the adoption of a declaration. Some of its key elements:

- We applaud the initiative to generate efforts to determine the meaning and scope of human security and we commit our wholehearted support to the work undertaken by the Commission and to its action mechanisms.
- We reaffirm the conviction that human rights and the attributes stemming from human dignity constitute a normative framework and a conceptual reference point which must necessarily be applied to the construction and putting into practice of the notion of human security. In the same manner, without prejudice to considering the norms and principles of international humanitarian law as essential components for the construction of human security, we emphasize that the latter cannot be restricted to situations of current or past armed conflict, but rather is a generally applicable instrument.
- We recall that the 1993 Vienna Declaration, adopted at the Second World Conference on Human Rights, laid out an unavoidable course when it stipulated the universal and



comprehensive nature of an interdependence among human rights, and when it underlined that the effective exercise of all such rights—civil, political, economic, social and cultural, individually or collectively considered—is a condition for the development of people and for legitimacy of systems of government. This universal, comprehensive nature and interdependence must enrich the concept and practice of human security.

- We call for necessary progress towards ways to promote the enforceability of all human rights, through actions by national institutions, the system of justice, and international protection mechanisms, both universal and regional.
- We maintain that human rights and the effective application of mechanisms for their exercise and protection play a key role in preventing and resolving conflicts.
- We renew our certainty that democracy is an indispensable condition for the effective exercise of human rights and to establish the foundations for harmonious social relations which foster human security. In this regard, we salute, in the Americas, the recent approval of the Inter-American Democratic Charter.
- We affirm that protection of individual and collective security in the face of crime and violence is an essential component of the concept of human security, and it stems from the responsibilities of the state as guarantor of the rights of those who are in its territory. In this same way, we affirm that human security demands public policies that tend to eliminate all forms of exclusion.
- We recall the existence of the right to development stated in the international instruments of the universal system, and we highlight the links among development, effective exercise of human rights, and human security. We underline the importance of globalization taking place under conditions that facilitate the growth of international trade but that also ensure that there is a balance between the interests of producers and those of consumers, between workers and employers, between large and small economies, between investment and job creation, between growth and income distribution. The search for fair terms of trade and the existence of real opportunities for countries' development are significant components of human security at an international level.
- We express our concern over the current scale of growth of poverty and of the phenomenon of migration throughout the world and in the Americas, and especially over the scope of forced internal displacement, and we recognize the importance of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement that have resulted from the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations.
- We affirm that non-discrimination and respect for diversity are an essential and first-order condition for the effective exercise of human rights and for the achievement of human security. Therefore, overcoming de facto inequalities based on, shielded by, or derived from gender, ethnic identity, religion, language or any other social condition, must be a high priority.

Roundtable on Transition and Human Security in Central Asia

Ten years of independence and the transition to market economies and democratic political systems, against a backdrop of intense geopolitical change, have had deep impacts on the political, economic, social and cultural aspects of people's lives in the five new countries of Central Asia—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Participants deliberated on these impacts during a roundtable meeting organized by the Commission on Human Security in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, 22–24 April 2002.

The region has experienced some of the most dramatic increases in human insecurities: sudden impoverishment; falling wages; rising inequality, unemployment and under-employment; declining health care and education opportunities; and worsening environmental degradation. The challenge for countries in Central Asia is to regain their former relatively high human development indicators, overcome emerging poverty and maintain social cohesion. This calls for a renewed role for the state and a revision in the responsibilities of civil society and the international aid community. Otherwise, a failed transition in Central Asia will have produced greater human insecurity, rather than security.

Roundtable participants identified a variety of internal and external human insecurities stemming from three sources: chronic threats inherited from the past, new insecurities that appeared during the transition, and threats from geopolitical changes in the region and in the world.

The countries of Central Asia inherited chronic human security threats arising from their

history, geography and spatial distribution; the nature of rural and traditional societies and the transformation processes that the countries underwent as part of the Soviet Union. Inherited problems included their landlocked position, isolation and lack of access to global markets, economic dependency, lagging technologies and ecological problems resulting from natural causes and from poor policy choices.

The past decade of transition in Central Asia created multi-dimensional structural changes in society, the economy and the political system. Social and economic policies were exacerbated by the shrinking role of the state in economic activities and social welfare responsibilities. Emerging markets lacked institutional capacity, and civil society organizations failed to effectively fill the vacuum.

Economic insecurity increased, with rising unemployment and under-employment, wage gaps and arrears, high inflation and catastrophic loss of savings. At the state level, economic insecurity was reflected in economic crimes, gray and black economy and corruption. Sudden poverty, inequality and polarization of income appeared, and social safety nets were weakened during a time of massive unemployment and shrinking output. Human resource development declined dramatically, due to declines in the quality of education and health care, infrastructure breakdown, shrinking budgets, poor and outdated technologies and personnel flight. An increase in drug abuse and crime fostered violence in households, mafia structures, criminality in business and politics, and trafficking in goods and people.

In addition, incomplete political changes and democratization led to other problems as countries



sought the right balance among democratic pluralism, the sharing of power across political parties and regions, stability, and rights and freedoms for the population. Political reforms suffer from corruption, lack of transparency and lack of capacity to implement the rule of law. Extremism seems to be growing as a reaction to the vacuum left in the wake of the collapse of socialist ideology and in response to repression and violations of human rights in the name of stability.

The changing dynamics within Central Asia and the impacts of conflicts in Afghanistan have further aggravated traditional insecurities, raising fears of an escalation in instability. Uncontrolled borders permit the proliferation of arms, threats of terrorism and extremism, the creation of networks of mafia structures and organized trafficking in arms and drugs, destabilizing states and markets and reducing economic security for people. Patterns of migration in the region and large-scale displacements of populations within the region are manifestations of both traditional and new insecurities.

Addressing human insecurities in Central Asia requires an integrated approach to the identification of the causes and consequences of insecurity—including the threat to national and regional security. Participants called for awareness building through dialogue, for political commitment on behalf of states in conjunction with civil society and for the monitoring of changes through the collection and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data. Ultimately, policy choices must balance short-term needs and long-term preventive policies to avoid negative consequences. Proper financing is needed through prioritization and budgeting and efficient revenue

collection. As one participant noted, human security in the region would be greatly improved if expenditures on the military and weapons were redirected to human development. Finally, there is a need for coordination of extra-regional and global efforts to create environments that guarantee security and stability. This point is especially relevant to the situation in Afghanistan and the coordination of efforts on both sides of the border in order to stop the smuggling of weapons, drugs and people. Ultimately, the coordination of the humanitarian, development and political mandates of the United Nations and multilaterals in the region would support an integrated human security approach.

Cotonou symposium on Economic Insecurity in Africa

The onslaught of communicable diseases, economic hardship, and the negative effects of globalization, combined with legacies of past mistakes, make it difficult for a vast majority of people in Africa to feel secure.

Economic insecurity alone, even in the absence of other threats, significantly undermines human security. Precarious economic conditions, fluctuating markets over which producers have no control, chronic unemployment or underemployment and the impact of HIV/AIDS are manifestations of this insecurity. Together they disrupt fragile social services and often threaten efforts at democratization. Some 80% of countries with low human development indexes are in Africa, and 45% of the population subsists on less than \$1 a day. In many parts of Africa, open or simmering conflicts place further hardship on people.

In light of these continuing crises, participants at the symposium articulated a vision for an alternative future. Voicing Africans' concerns, participants indicated that the first step towards an alternative vision that promotes human security and enables people to regain some control over their lives is to confront the humiliation of the past. Africa's history, and the internal and external forces that determine its development, are at the root of the continent's structural handicaps. This fight for dignity seeks to promote individual and collective trust in governance processes, crucial for dealing with economic deprivation and human insecurity. Poverty is not a fatal or immutable fact of life for millions, but the result of bad policy choices and practices. That means that people can take actions to alter the conditions that lead to poverty.

While states bear a heavy responsibility for the current situation, they also hold the key to redressing it. But if governments are to resolutely address persistent poverty and growing inequities, they need more and better civil society participation in the political, economic and social sectors. The continuing alienation and exclusion of people from processes of governance must be replaced by conditions that build the capacity and resilience of both the state and the people to protect people in downturns, conflict and in situations of chronic poverty. The precarious situation of women and children in conflict and in chronic poverty is a matter for urgent attention. Emphasis must be placed on the promotion of responsible governance at all levels, from village to nation. As shared during the meeting, there is no substitute for democracy and participation for freeing the creativity of large sectors of the population. The development of human resources

through better health, education and social infrastructure can build the capabilities of individuals and communities alike.

To ensure that markets promote pro-poor growth and access for poor countries, Africa needs regional cooperation—despite mixed experience with economic integration. Regional and international cooperation is also needed to harness technical and human resources, to prevent or mitigate conflict, and to address cross-border issues such as migration, forced displacement and the spread of communicable diseases. Development aid is essential to complement internal resource mobilization in reducing human and economic insecurity. Innovative institutional arrangements, such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development, provide opportunities for mainstreaming human security and give Africa greater responsibility for determining its own future. Investment and wider access to markets benefit mainly countries that are able to meet international standards. Countries in which human insecurity is most prevalent are not in this position, and thus may miss new opportunities and sink further into poverty.

The challenge of promoting investment and wider access to markets, dealing with debt and the impacts of structural adjustment, and the complex connections between conflict and poverty require renewed political commitment. Transcending the legacy of humiliation, people and states must forge a new vision of human security.

Public hearings at the Global Civic Society Forum in Johannesburg and a meeting on African Civil Society in Pretoria

Concerns about state security and ongoing conflict cannot be separated from development and poverty.¹ The greatest threat to human security is



widespread and endemic poverty and social inequality. Poverty eradication, reconstruction and development, in countries undergoing political and economic transitions as well as in countries experiencing chronic conflict, are long-term processes. They require a multi-faceted and complex range of responses and initiatives to the many and diverse problems that make and keep people insecure. Problems such as poverty, HIV/AIDS, lack of food, unemployment and economic resources are systemic. People often view the inability to respond to such problems as reflecting bad governance, an absence of political will, a lack of democracy and respect for human rights, and fragmented communities fuelled by ethnic hatred, gender discrimination and inequality. Overwhelmingly, the most marginalized of the poor are African women and children living in rural areas without access to basic services.

The problems confronting Africa, such as poverty, ongoing conflict and violence, increasing numbers of displaced people, infectious diseases, lack of water and natural resource management, and environmental destruction are problems that threaten human existence itself.² “The search for human security in a debilitating African reality must also be a struggle for the socio-economic transformation of African states. A struggle that overcomes—within the global village—our basic poverty and underdevelopment, and lays the material basis for enduring and stable multinational commonalities.”³ These were among some of the views of people who participated in the Commission on Human Security’s public hearings at the Global Civil Society Forum of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg and a meeting on African Civil

Society in Pretoria. Both events were led by Commissioners Frene Ginwala and Albert Tevoedjre, with support by the Africa Institute of South Africa.

Participants called attention to the huge income gaps in many countries, noting that the inability to control access to resources is a primary cause of human insecurity. This is true not only for those precariously balanced on the threshold of destitution, but for most people living in a demand-driven, capital-based society. Participants called on the Commission and the world community to make human security a reality by addressing poor people’s rights to land, to decent work, to health care and to other resources for disabled people, women and other excluded members of society. For many of those who shared their views with the Commission, human security was understood in relation to “the basic needs of life—paid work, housing, health, education, food, water— ... that is the primary concern of the security of an average person in the developing world”.⁴ In addition, environmental security and sustainable development were seen as inextricably linked to human survival, and community management of natural resources was understood to be critical.

The crisis of poverty and unemployment was considered to be one of the most significant sources of insecurity, especially in Africa. Compelling views on the many types of poverty and strategies to deal with them were presented. Many participants illustrated how poverty, through a lack of access to essential services such as health and education, can create untold misery for people. “Insecurity is rooted in a denial of a person’s control over access to resources, and in particular, to fundamental

necessities including food and basic services. Lack of such control means that people's immediate daily existence is at best precarious."⁵ Poverty was also seen as the lack of income generating assets, resulting in an absence of economic and political power. Special emphasis was placed on income poverty and its multiple impacts on poor people, trapping them in a vicious cycle of deprivation and eroding their dignity. Poverty locks people out of the economy, making them vulnerable and placing them at risk of disability, ill health, violence and a range of problems that affect their life and their opportunities to advance.

Weak national economies also contribute to human insecurity. In a weak economy, individuals have low wages, meagre job opportunities, and little access to credit. With few life choices, they must calculate the opportunity cost of meeting basic needs such as nutrition, education and health for themselves and their families.⁶ Strategies for responding to these problems, linked to regional and global economic processes, and to the social dimensions of globalization are being debated. Central to the debate is the need to respond to ongoing mass unemployment with some form of universal non-means tested income grant in the absence of other forms of earnings replacement. Called a basic income grant in South Africa and a guaranteed income by the international labour movement, it reflects the need for minimal living standards to be promoted everywhere.⁷

Having grappled with insecurity for many years, people are now coming together to create political space and design ways to resolve their problems.⁸ Coalitions of poor people, human rights activists, workers and policy advocates, among others, are promoting the adoption of a

tax-funded basic income grant in South Africa and internationally. They view such a grant as a means of assisting people to engage in economic activity, raising the standards of communities and eradicating the most severe forms of poverty. Set at a minimal amount and designed as an incentive for work and household survival, it would not create dependency but be a "leg up" out of poverty. Being universal, such grants would prevent people from falling through the social security net and mitigate the worst effects of economic and political crises, especially during downturns.

Social activism by women, human rights advocates, workers and environmentalists have succeeded in placing some of the most critical and pervasive human problems on the global agenda. But such efforts have yet to lead to concrete change in the lives of the most vulnerable and at risk. For example, despite international human rights instruments, women's rights are violated daily. Without effective protection of women, human security will remain unattainable.

All these aspects highlight the many dimensions to human security and the need for a comprehensive and integrated approach with many actors at all levels. Voicing the sentiments of many, another participant stated: "Human security cannot be achieved unless democratic governments or systems abide by rules and regulations set out in international agreements, conventions and domestic laws observe human rights ... to secure health, to secure education, to secure people's lives and to secure the necessities of life ... It is our duty as civil society ... to protect these rights to see that there is adequate legislation which complies with human rights conventions and agreements".⁹



Notes

1. David Malcolmson, statement made on behalf of the Secretariat of the New Partnership for Africa's Development at the Commission on Human Security public hearings on human security held at the Global Civil Society Forum of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, 27 August 2002.
2. These views were reinforced at the Commission on Human Security Africa-wide civil society consultative meeting on human security held in Pretoria, 15–16 October 2002.
3. K. David Mafabi, Pan African Movement, October 2002, Pretoria.
4. Nigerian participant, name unknown at the Commission on Human Security public hearings on human security held at the Global Civil Society Forum of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, 27 August 2002.
5. Isobel Frye, statement made on behalf of the Black Sash, at the Commission on Human Security public hearings on human security held at the Global Civil Society Forum of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, 27 August 2002.
6. Mansah Prah, Dept. of Sociology, University of Cape Town, statement made at the Commission on Human Security Africa-wide civil society consultative meeting on human security held in Pretoria, 15–16 October 2002.
7. Detailed oral and written statements on economic insecurity and the Basic Income Grant were made by a number of people including Neil Coleman from Congress of South African Trade Union and Ravi Naidoo from the National Labour and Economic Development Institute of South Africa.
8. Reverend Edward Limo, statement made at the Commission on Human Security Africa-wide civil society consultative meeting on human security held in Pretoria, 15–16 October 2002.
9. Halisman, Sudanese Consumer Protection Society at the Commission on Human Security public hearings on human security held at the Global Civil Society Forum of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, 27 August 2002.