

Regional Dynamics of Human Security

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I am particularly pleased that the UN Dialogue with the Global South is focusing on Human Security and congratulate the partner universities which have come together to engage in dialogue on ways of cooperating and promoting Human Security initiatives nationally, regionally, and among the countries of the South. The success of this meeting will be measured by its practical outcomes, and not only on its theoretical debate.

To contextualize our discussions, I would like to step back for a moment and try to set out the meaning and evolution of the concept of Human Security as I have understood it. Human Security is still an evolving concept. It is not surprising therefore, that while Human Security has been accepted and even formally adopted as a policy framework by many countries, as well as regional organizations such as the African Union, its full implications are not always understood nor fully implemented. Too often the focus remains on the old notion of “security” and the “human” part is almost an afterthought or add-on, rather than that it should be the focal point of a new concept of security that is people centered.

Old mindsets, perspectives, long standing and deeply entrenched approaches and policies are deeply embedded in the minds of institutions, decision makers and in particular the state security apparatus and its research institutions. Self interest as well as a self perpetuating dynamic always resists change.

This is not surprising given that for more than four centuries, “security” referred to defending the state and its frontiers from external enemies and potential invaders. This usually implied protecting the rulers and elites within society. For them, as well as for the new contenders for power, the population was considered, if at all, as cannon fodder and the producers of future wealth for their accumulation.

Through the first half of the 20th century, this remained the position, notwithstanding US President Wilson’s identifying crucial “freedoms,” the League of Nations, the Atlantic Charter and various other proclamations of freedom and democracy. After World War II a small group of countries came together and drafted and adopted the UN Charter which embedded the traditional concept of security in Chapter 7. In addition to establishing the United Nations, they designed the international financial architecture under which the Breton Woods Institutions were created.

The thinking, values, perspectives and outcome, reflected the economic and political power relations of the time. It should come as no surprise that the institutions established on these bases should be dysfunctional in today’s world with different values and aspirations.

For the power brokers, the proclamations of freedom, non-racism, equality and democracy soon faded into the priorities of the cold war. Under Chapter 7, it was those who continued to struggle for the achievement of these ideals, who were often projected as the threats to international peace and security.

The shifts in thinking about security were initiated by people's experiences of colonialism and neocolonialism and the external and internal forces which combine to continue the domination and subjugation of people. Often the "enemy" lived within the same state and the conditions in which people lived left them in a state of chronic insecurity.

The women's movements – By the way, where are the women participants? Are there no women in the partner institutions which have come to this dialogue. I would ask Dr. Ludwig, that in the future equitable representation should be a precondition for participation. How else can the UN claim to have "a dialogue with the South"?

To return to my subject: the women's movement and the anti-colonial and anti-racist struggles introduced into the debate, from their particular perspectives, notions of the link between peace and security, and justice equality and development. Apparently disparate issues mobilized their own constituencies as well as sectors of the international community, and eventually were integrated and found their way into UN language. And so we began to see the shift as UN Conference titles began to change: to peace and security were added, first justice, then equality and finally development. The question was raised: whose security mattered and needed to be addressed, as well as who needed protection, the powerful or the vulnerable?

These processes initiated the debate that continues to this day on what is the content of democracy; the form of reconstruction and development, and the method of nation building in newly independent and post conflict societies; and what constitutes good governance in countries with a diversity of population.

Thinking about security broadened from an exclusive concern with the security of the state to a concern with security of people. Along with this came the notion that states ought not to be the sole or main referent of security. People's interest, or the interests of humanity as a collective, became the focus.

The Commission on Human Security was charged with the task of trying to define the concept and to advise on an international response. Its report on Human Security now refers to the definition of Human Security; thus (and I quote at length):

“...to protect the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfillment. Human Security means protecting fundamental freedoms – freedoms that are the essence of life. It means protecting people from critical (severe) and pervasive (widespread)

threats and situations. It means using processes that build on people's strength and aspirations.

“It means creating political, environmental, economic, military and cultural systems that together give people the building blocks of survival, livelihood and dignity.

“The vital core of life is a set of elementary rights and freedoms people enjoy. What people consider to be “vital” – what they consider to be: of the essence of” and “crucially important” – varies across individuals and societies. That is why any concept of human security must be dynamic. And that is why we refrain from proposing an itemized list of what makes up human security.”

End of quotation.

However, the Commission did identify some of the components of Human Security, explored a few in depth, and made general policy recommendations. It did not link or enclose them within a particular framework. This remains one of the important challenges as we try and implement the concept.

Human Security does not replace state security. They are not alternatives but complementary. Security between states is necessary, if we want to ensure security of peoples. At the same time a secure state is essential to facilitate the provision of the needs of the population and to give them the protections they require. Human Security will strengthen the security of the state.

The concept of Human Security evolved in the context of globalization, a coming together of nations and peoples, as well as moves towards greater democratization within states and an assertion of equality and the right to participate in international affairs by smaller or less powerful states. Thus we have seen a flurry of meetings, commissions, and world conferences articulating shared ideals and aspirations. Each one of us has large numbers of reports identifying one or more global illness and the prescriptions for the cures.

Hence arises the challenge of determining what to address in which order, and also which particular prescription to follow.

Too often the debates on security start with the assumption of an existence of “threats” that need to be identified and countered. The reality is that the majority of the population of the world does not enjoy security and lives in various states of insecurity. The question to be answered is not what threatens people's security, but what do they want or need to make them feel secure.

A significant aspect of the approach of the Commission was the programme of consultation with civil society initiated by the African Commissioners, that supplemented the research. Working within limitations of resources and time, the question of what would make you feel secure and how should this be addressed was posed during various continental and international conferences and meetings, as well as at public hearings at the NGO Forum during the World Conference on Sustainable Development. From the responses, and acknowledging that the sample was not a scientific one, it was clear that ending conflict was not the major preoccupation of African people, but rather the need for jobs, education, and an end to poverty and long term economic security, etc. This ran contrary to the dominant theory in academic institutions. Work is about to begin on preparing a report on Human Security in Africa.

I would urge participants here to be wary of prioritizing problems and issues that are identified in academic isolation. The engagement of civil society, and the need to engage it in dialogue is crucial in discussions such as these. I was shocked to learn that the UN programme of dialogue with the South does not specifically draw in the range of civil society organs in our regions. It will be incumbent on the institutions here to ensure that they acknowledge that they are part of civil society and to devise programs that draw in other sectors. I have already referred to the failure to ensure participation of women from your institutions.

Even as we have been developing the concept of Human Security, there appears to be an apparent reversal towards the earlier and narrower concept of purely state security. The response to 9/11 from the United States and some other countries reflects this reversal in its most dramatic form. Instead of mobilizing the necessary global and collective response, which was and remains necessary, we witnessed a flouting and thereby undermining of multilateral systems and institutions, to the extent of calling into question the legitimacy, integrity and credibility of the United Nations and the Secretary General, as well as committing aggression against the Iraqi people. At the same time the human rights of US citizens and others continue to be violated.

To enhance human security, the international community needs to reverse these setbacks and move forward. From a Human Security perspective there remains a need for a global response to terrorism including early completion of conventions against all forms of terrorism including nuclear. Often terrorists exploit genuine grievances for their own ends. Therefore, we are challenged and required to examine the causes of conflict and the resort to terrorism and find ways of eliminating them. It is heartening that the High Level Panel identified some of these including the denial of self determination, the persistence of poverty, dispossession, and illegal occupation.

In the various papers and reports there are an incredible number of proposals. Fortunately the organizers of this meeting have managed to group them together in the three panels that follow. I hope, however, that we will not endeavor to produce a new list, but will limit ourselves to reaching agreement prioritizing those that would feature on each of the regions represented here. We cannot hope to provide all the solutions, but we can identify areas where work is required and commit ourselves to cooperating to provide solutions.

I have already indicated why the Commission refrained from preparing a list or a rigid framework. I would like to share with you some of our concerns:

1. One of the problems was how to identify the issues. I have already referred to the consultations with civil society.
2. It remains to work out how the various components of Human Security relate to each other and to other issues. The Secretary General refers to the themes before us: Development, Security and Human Rights, and argues that they are related and reinforce each other. Amartya Sen has explored the differences and linkages between Human Rights, Development and Human Security, and argues that though they are distinct they are complementary.

While agreeing with the Secretary General, I would go further and argue that the issues are not just interconnected, but are interdependent. If you are in a state of conflict, you need to bring an end to the violence, but peace and stability do not follow automatically. Simultaneously with ending violence, one needs to address the issues that caused the conflict, such as possible marginalization of one or more groups in that society, a distribution of resources, denial of human rights, corruption, non-inclusive political systems and decision making processes, absence of democracy and good governance, and so on.

If these are not speedily addressed, or at least seen to be addressed, the society will slip back into instability and eventually into renewed conflict. There are many such examples. Perhaps we can best visualize this as a horizontal spiral (please don't advise me that this is technically not a spiral!). At whichever point on the spiral a society is located, it must continue to move upwards and forwards towards greater security for its people or slip back to growing instability and back into conflict.

I hope that the Panel looking at the Peace Building Commission will examine whether one can separate conflict resolution from peace building, or whether we do not require a seamless process if we are to attain sustainable security.

In conclusion, there are some principles or guidelines which I hope will assist our deliberations:

1. The concept of security will vary from society to society and within each society. There is no universal formula as to what constitutes security. People will identify their security as coming from their particular needs. Let us respect them, and allow them to prescribe what is needed.
2. Let us agree on whose security concerns us. Is it that of the powerful or that of the vulnerable? Let us bear in mind that the overwhelming

majority of the global population fall into this latter group and live in the South.

3. Consideration of institutional reform of the UN and the international financial institutions should be informed by a Human Security perspective.
4. It is necessary to meet needs as well as protect people from sudden downturns.
5. Processes and means are important, and should empower people. Paternalistic solutions are never sustainable.
6. The environment and systems should be conducive to enable people to survive, and earn a livelihood in dignity.

At this early point in the 21st century we have the opportunity and possibility to achieve this last: to enable people to survive, and earn a livelihood of dignity.

To create that environment and provide that security is our greatest challenge.

Thank you for your attention.