

Introductory Remarks

*Sadako Ogata, Co-chair of the Commission on Human Security
At Ashgabat Round Table
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a privilege to be with you today in Ashgabat and I am grateful to the government of Turkmenistan for making this Round Table meeting possible. I would like to thank all the participants gathered here, especially those coming from other parts of Central Asia. I am also happy to acknowledge the important role played by UNDP who is co-hosting this meeting with the Institute for Human Rights and Democracy of Turkmenistan.

It was in June 2001 that the Commission on Human Security assembled for the first time in New York. Its purpose is to develop the concept of human security in such a way that it could become a tool for policy formulation and implementation, with a view to address the most acute threats affecting people. To achieve this ambitious goal, the Commission is developing an outreach programme, aiming at benefiting from first hand information while, at the same time, seeking to develop long term partnerships with committed entities in various parts of the world. It is in this context that Central Asia has been identified as an area of importance for the work of the Commission. We are here, Commissioners Surin, Brahimi and myself, to listen to you about the problems the people in the region are facing and what you consider would be the solution for some of the problems. Moreover, how you might be able to prevent these problems from turning worse.

But let me first share with you what we understand by the human security perspective. The Commission has not concluded its work, but few elements have emerged providing for a better understanding of a concept which is attractive, but admittedly still general and somewhat vague. Security has been traditionally associated with the role of the state protecting its boundaries, people, institutions and values. It has become clear, however, that developments following the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, that the state centric concept had to be complemented by a new approach that would look at the human dimension of the security paradigm. I wish to emphasize that the task of the Commission is to focus on the security of people, and through the people to reinforce the security of the state. It is not to replace state security by security of the people. Both are needed and they complement each other.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me now elaborate on a few salient points.

First of all, the Commission focuses on the security of the people. It is "people-centered". In so doing, it is fully aware that it cannot examine human security issues relating to all peoples or all communities. The Commission is increasingly narrowing its attention on people who face critical and pervasive threats --- victims of conflict, refugees and displaced persons, people living in absolute poverty and facing hunger and disease. While not excluding the security of individual human beings, the Commission addresses the problems of the socially excluded groups be they by ethnicity, belief, tradition etc. The question of inequality among groups in a society over a

long period of time has been identified as a key factor that leads to violence and eventually to humanitarian and political crises.

Second, in approaching the threats to human security, the Commission is considering a two-pronged approach: one of protection and one of empowerment. Protection requires a range of intervening actions from early warning to tackling judicial and institutional set ups as well as access to basic human needs. It is generally assumed that early action is less costly on the part of the victims as well as the community as a whole. However, from my personal observation of crises that have erupted in recent years, it is not the lack of warning but the inertia to act that have led tensions to turn into conflicts and civil strifes. After all, who wishes to change advantageous, if not comfortable, political, economic or social orders unless the threat is so imminent that you have to totally reorient your standing? Whether in the Congo, or Kosovo or Afghanistan the warnings were ample, but the responses were meek. Although it is encouraging that prevention is becoming more and more the battle cry of the day, it will be a long way before it becomes the prevailing mode of policy implementation.

Empowerment measures have more potential. They involve bottom-up endeavors of the kind that development assistance programs have long aspired. The current attempt to emphasize community-building in the Afghan reconstruction program might lead the way towards greater emphasis on empowerment endeavors. In Afghanistan where the people suffered over twenty years of killing, violence and human displacement, as well as extreme deprivation in health, education and a whole range of social services, empowerment of people is the priority action point for the rebuilding of the nation. A conscious linkage of the policy of empowering the people in order to achieve security and stability of the nation may help strengthen the cause of the human security approach.

The biggest challenge for the Commission is to present a fully integrated approach to address the wide range of human security issues. Broadly speaking, the approaches adopted by the international community fall into several operational categories notably humanitarian or development assistance. The Commission must provide a conceptual link that covers the domains of poverty and conflict. How do these problems compound each other? The humanitarian-focused vs. the development-focused measures to human suffering have too often been kept apart. They have involved different disciplines, specialists and institutions. The "freedom from want" and "freedom from fear" must be addressed as a whole by the international community to actually respond to the alleviation of human suffering and insecurity. Human development is a pre-condition as well as a by-product of human security. These two concepts are so closely interconnected that they must be addressed in an integrated manner for the benefit of people, especially the most vulnerable ones.

I am looking forward to our discussions which I expect to be open, frank and far reaching. We are here, as representatives of a number of international institutions to bear witness of the interest of the international community for your region. Lets hope that this Round Table will help understand each other better for developing improved activities which will profit your countries and your people.

Thank you.