

NHDR Afghanistan *Security With A Human Face: Challenges and Responsibilities*  
UNDP Afghanistan, 2004

“For Afghans, human security is not only the ability to survive, but also the chance to live a life of dignity and have adequate livelihoods. Bringing an end to insecurity should not therefore be sought solely through short-term military solutions, but with a long-term, comprehensive strategy that abides by the promises of development and the promotion of human rights.” Human security is understood in this report as freedom from fear and freedom from want. Human security is attained when the “political, social, environmental, economic military and cultural systems” provide the people the “building blocks of survival, livelihood and dignity”. Quite logically, a renewed understanding of security calls for new responsibilities and new actors.

The traditional role of the state in upholding its sovereignty and own security must be complemented by a responsibility of states to also protect people “from extreme underdevelopment and human rights abuses, and to empower them to participate in their own destiny”. Furthermore the people themselves have a role to play in their own security for human security is indeed focused both on protection *and* empowerment. Finally, the international community must take on new responsibilities in preventing conflict and beyond that preventing underdevelopment and its many consequences. A new set of tools is needed, such as comprehensive humanitarian and development aid combined also with fairer trade regimes, for classic military intervention is often inefficient in averting the outbreak of violent conflict.

Beyond the concepts and on the field, Afghanistan has some of the lowest human development indicators. Only 28.7% of Afghans can read and write, life expectancy is 44.5 years at birth, and 20% of the population consumes less than 2,070 calories a day. Following years of discrimination and exclusion, “Afghan women have some of the worst social indicators in the world today”, while children have suffered extensively from the several conflicts and their consequences. The country is also one of the most heavily mined in the world, and “has the second largest number of refugees and IDPs in the world, after Palestinians”. As a consequence, human insecurities are pervasive and multisectoral. Job security has been severely impacted by “two decades of negative growth”, food insecurity is critical, as is water access and quality, while the education system is entirely disarticulated. Environmental degradation has led to further health and environmental security threats. Hence a threat-based analysis of human development indicators points to grave human insecurities threatening people in their daily lives and threatening the country’s stability.

In this post-conflict phase there is a need to address root causes through comprehensive action in many different areas. The state must be efficiently rebuilt, with strong commitments to the rule of law needing to be embedded in this process, along with governance structures that will guarantee equal distribution of power and sustained participation. The role of civil society must be acknowledged, for an empowered and pacific civil society is also a necessary foundation for a more stable state, able to provide for the human security of its citizens. Afghanistan has thus pledged it would engage all efforts to reach the eight MDGs. In turn therefore the international community must support this commitment by maintaining its assistance, while enhancing accountability and scrutiny so that aid does not in fact induce unintended harm. Particular attention should therefore be concentrated on local ownership and efforts directed at local capacity building.