

# **Empowering People for Human Security**

*Presentation by Sadako Ogata  
56th Annual DPI/NGO Conference*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honor and a pleasure to be with you today.

The theme proposed for your reflection is both timely and appropriate: “Human Security and Dignity: Fulfilling the Promise of the United Nations”. To this title, I would just like to add : “... and the Aspirations of the People”, for this is the ultimate goal of our work and the final accomplishment of our commitment.

The hopes that were raised after the end of the cold war quickly have been dampened by the resurgence of widespread and pervasive insecurities. The need to address these appalling situations affecting the daily life of so many people is more urgent than ever. For this, a new understanding and consensus on security thinking is urgently required. In the past, security threats were assumed to emanate from external sources. State security focused mainly on protecting the state --- its boundaries, people, institutions and values ---from external attacks.

Over the last decade, our understanding of state security and the many types of threats has broadened. In addition to securing borders and people from external attacks, we have come to understand the dangers of environmental pollution, spread of infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS and more recently SARS, massive population movements and particularly the threat of transnational crime and terrorism. The globalization process has deeply transformed relationships between and within states. Money, goods, information and people move fast across and within borders. No state can fully cope with these realities through strengthening traditional state control mechanisms alone.

All states and societies depend much more on the acts or omissions of others for the security of their people, even for their survival. The terrorist attacks on the United States, Saudi Arabia among others, the war on Iraq and its tragic consequences, the nuclear threat by North Korea, have challenged our traditional approach to security, and forced us to seek for a new understanding and consensus on security for the coming century.

I had the pleasure and honor to co-chair with Professor Amartya Sen, Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, and Nobel Laureate in Economics, the Commission on Human Security, which has recently published its final report. I would like to share with you today, my own experience and perception on security questions, as well as some salient points presented by the Report.

Several years ago while I was serving as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, I was invited by a network of states which began to focus on the question of “human security”. They asked me to present my views. At the time I was confronted on a daily basis with the impact and consequences of insecurities. Looking for ways to protect people displaced by war, violence and human rights abuses was a daunting task. Moreover, I realized that security threats to people emanated more often from the very states which should be protecting those people who were

forced to flee. Threats to national and international security came much more from internal sources than external aggression. The post-Cold War world of 1990s was marked by internal communal conflicts with heavy ethnic undertones. I felt the importance of shifting attention to the security of people, not necessarily to replace state security, but definitely to complement it.

The idea of an independent Commission on Human Security was launched at the 2000 UN Millennium Summit. Secretary-General Kofi Annan advocated the building of a world which embodied the twin ideals of “freedom from fear,” and “freedom from want” dating back to President’s Roosevelt’s four freedoms as goals for the new millennium. The Japanese government had also taken interest in the concept of “human security.” The Asian financial crisis in the late 1990’s attested to the realities of other than state based security threats that undermined the lives of the people, and the inadequacies of existing development models.

People and countries appear much less secure now than at the start of this new millennium.

The Commission views human security in terms of protecting people’s vital freedoms from critical and pervasive threats, in ways that empowers them so that they fulfill their potentials and aspirations. As such, the Commission does not distinguish between the freedom from want and freedom from fear.

The Commission focuses on people as the main stake holders of ensuring security. By people, we refer particularly to communities that bind individuals along ethnic, religious, social links and values. Public opinion and civil society organizations play an increasingly important role in the prevention of violent conflicts as well as the eradication of poverty.

To attain the goals of human security, the Commission proposes a framework based upon the protection and empowerment of people. Neither of these can be dealt with in isolation as they are mutually reinforcing. Protection refers to the norms, processes and institutions required to shield people from critical and pervasive threats. It implies a “top-down” approach, such as establishing the rule of law, accountable and transparent institutions, and democratic governance structures. States have the primary responsibility to implement such a protective infrastructure. Empowerment emphasizes people as actors and participants in defining and implementing their vital freedoms. This implies a “bottom-up” approach. People protected can exercise choices. And people empowered can make better choices, and actively prevent and mitigate the impact of insecurities.

The protection-empowerment framework is embodied in the functioning of any well governed state. It is the framework for nation-building, and provides crucial insights into the reconstruction endeavors of war-torn societies. In developing the protection-empowerment framework, the Commission examined the situations in Afghanistan, held outreach consultation session with the five Central Asian Republics, and public hearings in South Africa and Benin.

The Commission’s work on human security seeks to build upon and combine insights from various other perspectives. In addition to examining the state security perspective, we were able to gain from two other human centered concepts, namely human rights and human development. Both are widely known, and championed with records of achievements. The concept of human security does not replace but complements them in significant ways.

Respecting human rights is at the core of protecting and empowering people. Human rights identifies the rights and obligations to be upheld as legally binding responsibilities as well as

moral imperatives. Human security, through the protection-empowerment framework gives better means to realize human rights. It gives equal importance to civil and political as well as to economic, cultural and social rights, and thereby addresses violations in integrated and comprehensive ways.

The human development approach has enriched the development concept in the last decade by shifting development thinking away from inanimate economic growth to human lives and well being. In the words of Amartya Sen, human development carries a positive quality, of progress toward “growth with equity”. Human security also adds to the human implications of development thinking. Its focus on protecting people against downward risks, reminds the important policy dimension of assuring security in sudden and unforeseen downturns. These may be situations that may give rise to political instability even leading to violent conflicts.

In its report, the Commission examines six broad areas from a human security perspective and formulates several policy recommendations. I shall just highlight the main issues addressed by the Commission.

First, the situation of people in conflict. The importance of firmer application of human rights and humanitarian law, the focus on the protection of civilians --- women, children, the elderly and disabled, was emphasized, with reminder to explore more fully the question of citizenship as from both protection and empowerment view points.

A second area dealt with people on the move, refugees, internally displaced and migrants. With regard migration, as the massive movement of the least protected people, the Commission recommended the development of a normative framework as well as practical measures to adjust state interests with protection of migrants.

A third area addressed the transition between war and peace, with greater institutional and financial concentration on the transition phase, with the belief that a better management will lead to better peace that assures security of people and communities.

The fourth area concerned economic security. While recognizing the important role of markets and fair trade, a perspective on balancing growth with ensuring minimum living standards and social safety nets was presented as essential requirements.

Fifth related to health as essential and instrumental to attain human security. Means to establish universal access to health care were explored. Intellectual property rights over pharmaceutical products should be practiced with built-in incentive for human security.

Sixth dealt with the broad range of issues covering education. Universal basic education, especially for girls, was emphasized as policy priority in fulfilling the empowerment agenda of the Commission. Furthermore, curricula in all schools should be set so as to cultivate mutual respect and diversity leading to foster global identities, and overcoming divisive messages and policies.

There were many other areas in which the Commission examined the further advancement of “human security”. But we had to restrain our exercise for reasons of time and expertise, and presented the Report with the hope that the thrust of our message will stimulate interest and gain support to be followed with further exploration.

In closing, I wish to reiterate that the broadening of the concept of security from state security to human security is in response to the realities of the changing world. State security that emphasizes the integrity and robustness of state cannot fully meet the multiple security needs of the people who live in these states. People have to be brought into the process through empowerment ---- access to education, health, and wealth. States and international organizations have the important role to provide protection as required, while leading the way towards greater partaking of people in their own security. A globalizing world is an interdependent world. States and people depend on each other within borders as well as across.

But above all, no progress can be achieved without the participation, commitment and determined action of those engaged with their community. This is the fundamental responsibility of the civil society, so well represented here. You are the people who care about people. You are the driving force that will improve the ways today's challenges are dealt with. We can only show the way. It is incumbent on you to organize your communities, to lobby your governments and the international establishment to re-order the priorities, and the policies and resources. It is through you and your organizations that concepts can translate into policies and policies can develop into action.

I wish you success in your endeavours

Thank you very much.