



Human Security at the United Nations

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United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - Human Security Unit

Human security at the United Nations

This is the fourth issue of "Human Security at the United Nations," a newsletter produced by the Human Security Unit of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

This issue focuses on the increasing attention that human security has drawn at the United Nations and in other multilateral frameworks as well as the recent discussions on human security inside the General Assembly.

Previous issues include: "The human costs of climate change" (Issue 3 – Spring 2008); "Building peace: A challenge that rests on achieving human security" (Issue 2 – Winter 2007/2008); and "Human security: Towards an integrated approach" (Issue 1 – Fall 2007).

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Gathering Pace - Human Security Debate at the General Assembly

On 22 May 2008, the General Assembly held an informal thematic debate on human security, honoring a commitment from the World Summit in 2005 to further discuss and define the notion of human security.

The debate cemented a broad consensus on the need for a new culture of international relations that goes beyond fragmented responses and calls for coherent, integrated, and people-centered solutions. Member States recognized the added value of the human security concept in this regard and emphasized the concept's comprehensive approach in responding to old and new insecurities, ranging from persistent hunger and poverty to armed conflicts, environmental degradation, food insecurity and human trafficking. By focusing on the security of individuals and communities, human security acknowledges the inter-linkages between these threats and uses a multi-sectoral approach that brings together the three pillars of the United Nations system. As such, human security strengthens efforts to improve security, development and human rights and allows for earlier and better coordinated responses among Member States, international organizations, UN agencies, NGOs and civil societies.

Through the course of the debate, common perspectives on the thematic areas where the application of the human security is of most value emerged among Member States. The majority of Member States agreed that human security is most effective in tackling climate change and its disproportionate burden on vulnerable groups. Also high on the list of thematic areas were health and infectious diseases; conflicts and their impact on women and children; the eradication of landmines and small arms; the global food crisis; and the welfare of people in territories prone to natural disasters.



H.R.H. Prince El Hassan Bin Talal of Jordan addressing the General Assembly debate on human security. © UN/2007

Delegates commented on the progress made by the UN and the Member States since the 2005 World Summit. A direct outcome of the 2005 Summit has been the establishment of the Friends of Human Security (FHS), an informal forum comprising of Member States from all regions tasked with exploring collaborative efforts to mainstream human security within UN activities. Meanwhile, the **Human Security Network** (HSN), launched in 1999, has also grown in strength in recent years. The network has a broad thematic spectrum focusing on conflicts, natural disasters, poverty and infectious diseases. Since its inception, the HSN has made progress in promoting increased understanding of and heightened interest in the human security approach. Among these, the 2007/2008 Greek Chair of the HSN contributed to raising public and political awareness on the link between climate change and human security.

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Further to unanimous support for the advancement of and the need to expand dialogue on the human security concept, Member States highlighted the need to continue to separate the human security concept from the responsibly to protect principle. In particular, comments centered on the importance of the principle of state sovereignty and emphasized the positive value of human security in advocating for practical, comprehensive and sustainable responses in confronting insecurities within and among countries.

Subsequently what emerged from the debate was a consensus on the added value of the human security concept and the alternative perspective it provides. Member States shared the view that the human security concept is needed to bridge the impasse that has prevented the international community from solving some of the most stubborn global challenges facing it today.

Transcripts of the debate and the recorded webcast are available on the [General Assembly Website](#).

Human Security and Gender-based Violence - The Irish Chair of the HSN

In presenting its priorities for its term as the Human Security Network (HSN) Chair, the Government of Ireland announced its intention to focus on the theme of human security and gender-based violence. The Irish Chairmanship also coincides with the 10th Anniversary of the Human Security Network and the Chair intends to begin a process of reflection and evaluation on the activities by the HSN over the past decade. In addition, a special event to mark the occasion is to be organized by the Government of Ireland before the end of its tenure in May 2009.

To date, two conferences have been organized in Ireland. The first was held in Cork on 27 June 2008 on the topic of "Reforming the Law on Sexual Violence." The second, held in Dublin on 17 November 2008 and attended by Mary Robinson, the former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, focused on the [UN Security Council Resolution 1325](#) and aimed to introduce a human security perspective to the ongoing debate on women, peace and security. Under the Irish Chairmanship, the HSN intends to develop further guidelines on the implementation of the UNSC Resolution 1325 at the national level.

Regional Developments on Human Security

Since the UN Millennium Summit in 2000 where the former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan called upon the international community to advance "freedom from fear" and "freedom from want" as the twin goals of the new millennium, human security has become a key feature of numerous government policies and various inter-governmental initiatives.

Today, the global political and security landscape is far more transnational than ever before. Threats to security and sovereignty emanate beyond national borders and transcend the influence of national policies. Consequently, the human security concept has drawn the attention of governments faced with multi-dimensional threats to their populations' security and welfare. Concurrently, increased advocacy efforts by various organizations and academic institutions, in addition to the work of the [Advisory Board on Human Security](#) and the [Human Security Unit](#), have played a significant role in this increased uptake on the human security concept.

Similarly, regional organizations such as the African Union (AU), the European Union (EU), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Organization of American States (OAS), and the League of Arab States (LAS) have acknowledged the added value of the human security approach in shaping their regional policies. Furthermore, the context specific nature of human security has allowed for each institution to focus on those human security needs particular to their region.

[Recent Human Security Publications](#)

[Human Security in Theory and Practice](#), United Nations, 2008

[Human Security: A European Strategic Narrative](#), Many Kaldor et al, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2008

[MiniAtlas of Human Security](#), Human Security Report Project, 2008

General Assembly Debate on Human Security, [Background Paper](#) and [Summary Document](#), United Nations, 2008

An extensive list of human security related publications can be found in the [Human Security Unit Digital Library](#)

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Subsequently, the AU in its commitment to peace and security has adopted the human security approach in its broadest sense, focusing simultaneously on human rights, development and peacebuilding. Meanwhile, the EU, in its effort to broaden the scope of the European Security and Defense Policy has found human security to be an effective strategy to comprehensively respond to the needs of peoples in conflict, post-conflict and recovery situations.

On the other hand, faced with the Asian financial crisis in 1997, ASEAN has been drawn to the human security concept from a more socio-economic perspective. Likewise, the link between social development and human security has also been highlighted and incorporated by the OAS in its Declaration on Security in the Americas (2003) which states that the conditions for human security are improved through the full respect for human rights, human dignity, and fundamental freedoms, as well as, the promotion of social and economic development and the eradication of poverty, disease, and hunger.

Human Security in Action - A UNTFHS Funded Project - - Rebuilding and Empowering Communities in Post-Conflict Liberia



One of seven FAO blacksmith training centers where over 200 young men have been trained in producing agricultural tools. © UN/2007

Two decades of violent conflict have left rural communities in Liberia socially dislocated and economically depressed. While the return of the displaced and the demobilized ex-combatants signals the restoration of peace, however, severe shortages of food production and employment opportunities present a real and pertinent threat to peace and stability between the returnees and those who, for one reason or another, opted not to migrate and remained during the conflicts.

Adopting a human security framework, the project takes a community-based multi-sectoral approach that addresses not only the economic, social and institutional needs of the affected communities but also strengthens and rebuilds relations

between the host communities, the ex-combatants, and the returnees.

Through technical contributions from UNDP, FAO and the WFP and in collaboration with non-governmental organizations as well as local and national authorities, including District Development Committees (DDC), Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Rural Development and the Results Focused Transitional Framework (RFTF), the project enhances the capacities of post-conflict rural communities to protect themselves from the risks of relapsing into conflict and empowers them to consolidate and sustain their recovery towards peace and development. For further information on this and other UNTFHS funded projects, please visit the [HSU website](#).



Women producing cassava products as part of a UNDP micro-credit scheme. The women use tools produced at the FAO blacksmith training centre. © UN/2007

Latest News and Events

Seventh Meeting of the Advisory Board on Human Security was held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York on 12-13 November 2008. Documents in support of the meeting are being finalized and will be made available on the [HSU website](#) shortly.

Briefing on Human Security and the Financial Crisis was released by The Executive Office of the Secretary-General on 13 November 2008. Secretary-General Ban-Ki Moon highlighted the need to prevent the financial crisis from becoming a human crisis. Click [here](#) for a full version of the briefing.

Fifth Meeting of the Friends of Human Security was held on 20 November 2008 at United Nations Headquarters in New York. Chaired by Ambassador Claude Heller of Mexico and Ambassador Yukio

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Takasu of Japan, Member States reviewed progress made to date on advancing a common understanding of human security and discussed current challenges including the financial and economic crisis, rising food prices, the impact of climate change on vulnerable communities, post-conflict recovery and peacebuilding and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Documents from the meeting will be made available on the [HSU website](#) shortly.

A High-Level Conference on Human Security in the Arab Region took place on 16-17 December 2008 in Cairo, Egypt. Hosted by the League of Arab States, together with HSU/OCHA and UNESCO, policy-makers, academics and civil society actors discussed specific threats to human security in the Arab region, including: conflict prevention, environmental insecurity, persistent poverty, human rights, and democracy. Further information is available on the [HSU website](#).

Human Security in the 21st Century Conference will be held in Belfast on 15-17 April 2009, hosted by the British International Studies Association and the Human Security Working Group. Organized around the theme of advancing the understanding and application of the human security concept, the goal of the conference is to realize greater inclusion of human security concerns in policy making and decisions. The conference will be launched at Stormont and attended by Dr. Surin Pitsuwan, Secretary-General of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and member of the Advisory Board on Human Security, as well as, Professor Ramesh Thakur, former Senior Vice-Rector of the United Nations University. The conference hopes to initiate in-depth conversation and dialogue between non-state policy makers (International Organisations, NGOs, and local community representatives), state representatives (foreign affairs and military personnel), and academics on human security. For further information on the conference and paper/panel suggestions please refer to the [Human Security in the 21st Century](#) website.

Seminar on Human Security and Business: Focusing on Conflicts, Human Mobility and Governance will to be held in London on 27-28 April 2009. The seminar will be organized by Tokyo University in cooperation with British academic institutions including the University of Oxford and the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). Further details of this and other events will be posted on the [HSU Website Calendar of Events](#).

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