

HUMAN SECURITY UNIT: OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES

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New York

Background

In March 1999, the Government of Japan and the United Nations Secretariat launched the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security (UNTFHS). The UNTFHS, open to UN agencies, started its activities under the management of the UN Controller. However, with no conceptual framework initially available, the majority of funding was directed towards developmental concerns including key thematic areas such as health, education, agriculture and small scale infrastructure development.

Meanwhile, at the United Nations Millennium Summit, the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan called upon the world community to advance the twin goals of "freedom from want" and "freedom from fear". As a contribution to this effort, an independent Commission on Human Security (CHS) was established. After two years of deliberation, the Commission submitted its final report, entitled *Human Security Now*, to the UN Secretary-General in May 2003.

Based on the recommendations of the CHS, an Advisory Board on Human Security (ABHS) was created to among others promote human security and advise the Secretary-General on the management of the UNTFHS. The ABHS held its first meeting on 16 September 2003 and, based on the final report of the CHS, agreed on new priorities for the UNTFHS.

In addition to revising the Guidelines, the ABHS also raised its concern over the management of the UNTFHS. The Board noted that necessary measures were required to better streamline the application and the approval procedures under the UNTFHS and, in this regard, in May 2004, the Human Security Unit (HSU) was established at the United Nations Secretariat in the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Human Security Unit

The overall objective of the HSU is to place human security in the mainstream of UN activities. By combining the management of the UNTFHS with dissemination and promotion activities on human security, the HSU plays a pivotal role in translating the concept of human security into concrete activities and highlighting the added value of the human security approach.

Definition of Human Security as proposed by the CHS

Human security is defined as 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 strengths and aspirations. It means

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

Human Security Framework

To attain human security, CHS 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 national and international norms, processes and institutions that shield people from critical and pervasive threats and that address insecurities in ways that are systematic not makeshift, comprehensive not compartmentalized, preventive not reactive. It implies a “top-down” approach, with states having the primary responsibility.

Empowerment meanwhile emphasizes people as actors and participants in defining and implementing their vital freedoms. It implies a “bottom-up” approach and it enables people to develop their potential and their resilience to difficult conditions. People empowered can become full participants in decision-making processes and demand respect for their dignity when it is violated. They can create new opportunities for work and address many problems locally. And they can mobilize for the security of others by, for e.g., publicizing food shortages early, preventing famines or protesting human rights violations.

Areas of activities of the UNTFHS

In line with the conclusions and the recommendations of the CHS, projects under the UNTFHS are selected based on the following:

1. Target people and situations

The list below is indicative and not exhaustive. The UNTFHS shall place priority on operational projects that address more than one element among the following situations and shall pay particular attention to the special needs and vulnerabilities of women and children.

- Protecting and empowering people who are exposed to physical violence, discrimination, exclusion and whose situation derives from inequalities in treatment.
- Supporting and empowering refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), economic migrants and others on the move. Particular attention should be given to the socio-economic impact on the displaced and their host communities.
- Protecting and empowering people in conflict situations and in transition from war to peace through the integration of humanitarian and development assistance; disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR); reconciliation and coexistence; and other processes. These activities shall also contribute to preventing recurrence of conflicts.

- Realizing minimum living standards, including assisting community-level efforts to establish mechanisms to protect people exposed to extreme poverty, sudden economic downturns and natural disasters.
- Enhancing health care and service coverage to those whom other initiatives have not reached successfully.
- Improving educational opportunities, especially for girls, emphasizing universal primary education (including the emphasis on safe school environment and respect for diversity).

The UNTFHS may also support projects to promote and disseminate the human security concept and deepen its understanding and acceptance worldwide, while refraining from supporting research-oriented proposals. Such projects should also contribute to the formulation of concrete projects and action-oriented initiatives to address specific human security challenges.

2. Parameters for funding projects

Operational projects shall be selected along the following parameters:

- Providing concrete and sustainable benefits to people and communities threatened in their survival, livelihood and dignity.
- Implementing the “Protection and Empowerment” framework by comprehensively including both top-down protection and bottom-up empowerment measures.
- Promoting partnerships with civil society groups, NGOs, and other local entities and encouraging implementation by these entities.
- Advancing integrated approaches and addressing the broad range of interconnected issues that take into account the multi-sectoral demands of human security, for example, through providing health care support, education and income generating activities, while protecting vulnerable communities from violence and empowering marginalized groups.
- Concentrating on those areas of human security that are currently neglected and avoiding duplication with existing programmes and activities.

3. Geographical areas of activities to be supported

- Projects shall be distributed globally with priority attention given to countries and regions where insecurities of people are most critical and pervasive, such as the Least Developed Countries and countries in conflict.
- Sub-regional projects that include more than one country shall be supported taking advantage of the network of United Nations Funds and Programmes.

Programme of activities for 2009

To be catalytic in its efforts to gain support for human security, the HSU in the 12 month period starting from January 2009 aims to:

1. **Expand the resource base in support of human security.** The Trust Fund to date has benefited from the commitment and the funding support of the Governments of Japan, Thailand and Slovenia. However, it is the intention of the HSU and as advised by the ABHS to expand the donor base of the Trust Fund.
2. **Gain general acceptance for human security as a practical tool in advancing the twin goals of “freedom from fear” and “freedom from want”.** Effective partnerships with UN agencies and other regional and multilateral institutions, UN Member States, as well as, like-minded non-governmental actors and civil society, are critical to gaining general acceptance of human security, and the HSU will continue its activities in this area.
3. **Serve as the focal point on human security and the UNTFHS within the UN.** By linking promotion and dissemination activities with concrete undertakings supported by the UNTFHS, the HSU will serve as the focal point on all matters related to human security in the United Nations.
4. **Deepen the understanding and acceptance of human security among policy makers and practitioners.** Past activities by the CHS and the ABHS, have raised considerable expectations in various quarters in the Americas, Europe, Africa, Central Europe and South-East Asia. The HSU will sustain the momentum gained so far as well as consider novel ways to deepen the understanding and acceptance of human security among policy makers and practitioners.

Information and Contacts

Further information or clarification on the HSU, UNTFHS, CHS and the ABHS can be obtained from the HSU.

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