

Report
Meeting of the Commission on Human Security

Whitney Greentree Estate, New York
8 to 10 June 2001

I. Introduction

Following the announcement of the establishment of the Commission on Human Security in January 2001, its first meeting took place at the Greentree Estate from 8 to 10 June 2001. Generous financial and logistical support from the Rockefeller and the Whitney Greentree Foundations made the meeting possible. The agenda and list of participants are attached (Annex 1 and 2).

The Commission was set up in response to the UN Secretary-General's call at the Millennium Summit in September 2000 to achieve the twin goals of "freedom from fear" and "freedom from want." In preparation for its launch, an informal planning group assisted the Commission to define its objectives, initial research themes, operational modalities and logistical needs.

The Commission's goals have been defined as follows:

- (1) to promote public understanding, engagement and support of human security and its underlying imperatives;
- (2) to develop the concept of human security as an operational tool for policy formulation and implementation; and
- (3) to propose a concrete programme of action to address critical and pervasive threats to human security.

At the opening of the meeting, the Prime Minister of Japan, Mr. Junichiro Koizumi, and the UN Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, sent messages to the Commission. The Prime Minister stressed his hope that the Commission would propose a concrete and practical programme to address critical on-going threats to human security. The UN Secretary-General expressed his support for the Commission and drew attention to the relevance of its work to the UN.

Subsequent to the meeting, a press conference was held by the Co-chairs at the UN Secretariat on 11 June. A copy of the press release is attached (Annex 3). The Permanent Mission of Japan to the UN hosted a reception and a dinner in honour of the Commission.

II. Substantive Discussions

In the introductory remarks, the Co-chairs shared their views on the concept of human security and thinking regarding the work of the Commission. The developments leading to the establishment of the Commission were also discussed.

Mrs. Ogata said that human security was a widely debated issue and there was a need to bear down on policy areas in which specific actions can be foreseen. Attention should also be given to establishing links with other international agencies, governments, civil society, and other actors. Introducing the “Overview” paper that had been produced by the embryonic secretariat and herself as background material, Mrs. Ogata stressed the need to focus not only on individuals, but also on communities and groups. Neither could conflict and development be treated as separate disciplines. Rather, the aim should be on how to integrate these issues to enhance the overall security of human beings.

Prof. Sen stressed that the Commission should aim to focus on the interplay between equity and human security, inequality and poverty, and vulnerability and insecurity. Prof. Sen also emphasised the need for a balanced approach in pursuing the goals of the Commission. The Commission should develop a well-defined concept of human security while formulating concrete action plans.

A. Human Security as a Concept

The Commissioners agreed that human security is an inclusive and comprehensive concept, and that prompt and co-ordinated actions are necessary to ensure the security of human beings. At the same time, they shared the view that human security requires further conceptualisation and clarification. Therefore, the development of a conceptual framework is essential to guide the Commission’s work and to develop a plan of action. In recent years, various initiatives had been launched in this field, making it essential that a preliminary “mapping” of these activities be undertaken. Following this exercise, the Commission would be in a better position to decide on the areas it wishes to focus on.

It was agreed that the Commission’s work would be action-oriented and should go beyond the preparation of a final report. It should result in a set of concrete recommendations (plan of action) on how to enhance human security. Instead of presenting a “negative” message by listing the threats to human security, the focus should be on “positive” steps toward enhancing it. In this context, the

Commission will seek to adopt a “new” language. It was suggested that the Commission consider drafting a “universal declaration on human security”.

Human security was considered to be a universal concept of concern to the world community as a whole regardless of political ideology, state, religion, or nationality (contrary to the “clash of civilisations” perspective). Therefore, the language used should emphasise “inclusion” rather than “exclusion.” All too often, economic and social insecurity is exploited by politicians to further their own political aims.

Although the primary focus of the human security as a concept may be on individuals, it was suggested that the Commission should also concentrate on related needs of groups and communities. In many situations, horizontal inequalities existed among the various groups and communities in a state. These inequalities may be due to discriminatory policies or to limiting the access of certain communities to economic and social services. By focusing on groups and communities, the Commission’s work would also add a new dimension to the concept of human security.

It was likewise felt that the Commission should concentrate on particularly vulnerable individuals and communities facing high levels of insecurity. Reference was made to the World Bank (Voices of the Poor Report) and the South African Women’s Self-identification Project as studies providing information on how individuals perceive their own security. A possibility of undertaking a similar study was proposed.

It was noted that there were significant variations of human security as a concept within regions. The organisation of regional workshops focusing on specific threats in particular areas would allow differences to be incorporated into the recommendations to be contained in the Commission’s final report.

During the discussions, the following additional issues were brought forward requiring special attention:

- Ensuring human security is not limited to meeting material needs. The issues of identity, dignity, tolerance, and access need to be addressed. To do so, evolving “power relationships” which are affecting these issues must be analysed at the international, national, community and individual levels.
- Due attention should be paid to equity, human rights and the process of justice. In many respects, the issues raised by the human security debate are already codified in international human rights instruments. A better understanding of the linkages and complementarity could be pursued.

- Likewise, gender issues should receive close attention, cutting across all areas related to human security.
- The impact of globalisation processes upon human security needs to be assessed. Taking the example of the ongoing debate over the provision of HIV/AIDS medication, it is not simply an issue relating to market forces, but also pertaining to the fundamental question of unequal access.
- Caution was expressed that human security should not be equated with or be used as a pretext for humanitarian intervention. Considerable work is already being conducted by other entities in this field (e.g. Commission on Humanitarian Intervention and State Sovereignty).

The UNHCR project proposal, focusing on conflict and post-conflict situations, was shared at the meeting and briefly discussed. While considerable work was being undertaken in these areas, insufficient attention was being paid to institutions dealing with conflict prevention. In this context, UNHCR's "ladder of options" proposal emphasised inputs at various levels, including the strengthening of local police and law enforcement mechanisms at national, regional and international levels. At the same time, however, the impact for political power drives in conflict situations had to be recognised and addressed.

Regarding the post-conflict phase, reconciliation among divided communities was emphasised. The issue of rebuilding communities through dialogue was thought important (e.g., "Imagine Co-existence" project in Rwanda and Bosnia-Herzegovina) to make people and communities understand that they have to live together. In this respect, too little attention is being paid to "social reconstruction"—dealing with equity, access, tolerance and social measures in both conflict resolution and prevention.

An update was also given on the project proposal being prepared by UNDP, focusing on building human capabilities through education, health and in dealing with inequality. Questions of mobility and demographic developments were raised.

B. Outreach Activities

For the Commission's report to have a global impact, a sense of ownership of its recommendations and plan of action has to be shared widely among all stakeholders. The Commission must pursue an active outreach strategy. Based on the discussions, the following steps were suggested:

- adopt a new and positive message: rather than emphasising "threats" to human security, the focus should be on how human security can be enhanced;

- establish linkages with the various ongoing initiatives in the area of human security which will allow the Commission to build upon the findings of others and to formulate new proposals;
- design a website for the Commission to promote its activities and disseminate information. This website could include an interactive “opinion board” allowing inputs and comments from a wide range of individuals, groups and organisations;
- focus on activities in the developing world, listen to the voices of people and communities most affected by the absence of human security;
- organise regional workshops/seminars on human security within the framework of the project proposals formulated by the Commission. Discussions are underway to organise a conference in South Africa. Organising a seminar with the assistance of the University of Peace in Costa Rica was also suggested;
- assist commissioners with initiatives in connection with already planned conferences/seminars. Of particular interest was the suggestion to approach the Inter-Parliamentary Union to help organise hearings by national parliaments. A meeting will take place in Bangkok in September during which the suggestion may be raised.
- the Co-chairs to send letters to all UN heads of agencies inviting them to share information about their agency’s activities in the area of human security; and
- hold press briefings and prepare public information materials.

C. Functioning of the Commission and the Secretariat

Considerable attention was given to the functioning of the Commission and its secretariat. The Commission’s working principles can be summarised as follows:

- independence from vested interests, in particular the UN, governments and funding sources;
- inclusiveness by seeking linkages with interested stakeholders; and
- transparency in human and financial resource management to maintain integrity.

A representative from the Government of Japan provided an overview of the funding situation for the work of the Commission and its secretariat. Meetings of the Commission will be funded through separate contributions from various foundations and governments. Regarding the secretariat, the Government of Japan is making an additional contribution through UNHCR to enable the secretariat to service the Commission.

The need for appropriate expertise within the secretariat, particularly relating to development, was emphasised and UNDP was asked to propose a candidate. Likewise, an early identification of the report writer was stressed.

The salient points are briefly summarised as follows:

1. Functioning of the Commission

The Co-chairs will guide the work of the Commission and its secretariat. Specific projects will be overseen by either one or both of the Co-chairs with the participation of interested Commissioners. One of the principal challenges is to ensure that humanitarian and development concerns are fully integrated.

The Commission will meet four times during the course of its mandate. The tentative schedule is as follows:

- Tokyo – 15 to 17 December 2001: The meeting will be hosted by the Japanese Government. Prior to the two-day meeting, a one-day symposium on human security will be organised with the participation of external experts.
- Stockholm – 8 to 10 June 2002: The Swedish Government will host this meeting.
- No decision was made on the location and dates of the final meeting (tentatively January-March 2003). The dates will depend upon the progress made in finalising the report. The Japanese Government expressed interest in hosting the meeting if necessary.

In addition, the Commissioners agreed to participate in workshops/seminars and undertake outreach activities related to human security when feasible.

2. Functioning of the Secretariat

The main objective of the secretariat will be to support the work of the Commission by undertaking and coordinating research and outreach activities,

preparing substantive discussion papers, including the Commission's final report, and assisting Commissioners in their activities to promote human security.

The secretariat is located in New York. At present, three staff members have been identified to serve in the secretariat: an executive director and two liaison officers (seconded from the Japanese Government and UNHCR). A third liaison officer (seconded from UNDP) is being selected.

As the need for the early identification of the report editor was emphasised by the Commission, a candidate will be selected in consultation with the Co-chairs as soon as possible.

The secretariat will start its activities immediately, but will only become fully operational in September 2001, when administrative and financial arrangements are completed. Support staff are being identified.

To ensure easy and regular communications between Commission members and the secretariat, an internet mailing list will be set-up so that all messages are automatically shared (a provisional list of e-mail addresses and contact persons is attached - Annex 4).

In preparation for the next meeting and in consultation with the Co-chairs and others, the secretariat will develop:

- a conceptual framework on human security: This paper should take into account ongoing initiatives and suggest possible directions for the Commission to consider;
- an outline paper on conflict and human security (project implemented by UNHCR): The outline will present an overview of the main issues and highlight specific areas which the Commission may wish to focus on. Particular attention will be given to cross-cutting issues to ensure an integrated approach with development research and initiatives. Mrs. Ogata will oversee this project;
- an outline paper on human security and development (project to be implemented by UNDP): Prof. Sen will oversee this project. In addition to organising various workshops on health, education and inequality, the paper will present a review of the issues at stake and suggest areas of focus. Particular attention will be given to issues which cut across the development and humanitarian spectrum;
- an outreach strategy: The note will suggest ways in which the Commission and its secretariat can reach out to interested groups and institutions to enlarge a sense of ownership of its activities, and

- a detailed workplan of the secretariat for comments.

Secretariat
Commission on Human Security
New York
June 2001