A Global Movement to Promote Human Security for All

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Abstract

Humanity confronts complex, multidimensional challenges to the security of the people and the planet we live on. These threats continue to defy resolution by means of the existing policies, institutions and actions of nations around the world. In spite of unprecedented and remarkable achievements, our sense of insecurity continues to rise. A fundamental change is needed in our conception of security and the strategies, policies and institutional framework by which we seek to achieve it. The human security approach was first advocated by the United Nations in 1994 and has since been applied in hundreds of programs around the world. This article calls for adoption of the human security approach at the global level as a comprehensive, integrated strategy to meet global challenges by addressing both the objective and subjective factors required for their resolution. It broadens the concept of security by placing the security of each and every individual at the center. It calls for a global campaign to generate awareness and elicit active support and participation from all major sectors and sections of global society in an unprecedented effort to release and mobilize the untapped energies and capacities of humanity in pursuit of human security for all.

1. Meeting Global Threats to Human Security

Today humanity confronts multidimensional challenges of unparalleled reach, magnitude, and complexity. The threats that we face in the Anthropocene impact all dimensions of our lives. The COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, the looming climate crisis, rising inequality, economic insecurity, political instability, a renewed arms race and return to Cold War mentality respect no borders or class divides. They impact human beings everywhere. They are also inextricably interconnected with one another so that each impacts the others in unexpected ways. War in Europe has resulted in rising food scarcity in Africa, energy shortages in Europe and spiralling inflation in America.

These challenges are not new. They have only resurfaced in new forms which defy resolution by existing policies and institutions. The efforts that humanity and countless organizations the world over are taking to address these challenges are not new either. The world has made enormous progress over the last century in promoting peace, stability, human security and welfare when compared to any previous period in history.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted in 1948 by 48 nations. It was the first time in history that a vast majority of the countries of the world united to affirm the universal rights of every human being. The UDHR pronounced high ideals, but it was not

backed by the legal status or means of enforcement to support its good intentions. It was only 67 years later that 193 nations of the world unanimously adopted the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets. Never before have the nations of the world joined together to recognize and affirm both in idea and action the universal right of every human being to human security.

During the last half century humanity has made tremendous progress on many fronts. Nation-states, business and civil society organizations, and individuals around the world have deeply committed themselves to address the multiplicity of threats confronting humanity. The United Nations and other multilateral organizations have played a leading role in building acceptance and commitment to shared universal values and goals. Yet at the same time the sense of disquiet and anxiety seems to be even greater than before. For all our collective progress, the pace of global social evolution is moving faster than humanity and its social institutions have been unable to respond and adapt. The resulting awareness, commitments, strategies, policies and institutional capacities have been insufficient to meet the magnitude of the challenges confronting humanity. Something more is needed. That is why it has become essential to project Human Security for All as an overriding and integrating objective for all people and nations to embrace.

2. Objective and Subjective Dimensions of Global Society

Over the last seven decades, unprecedented progress has been made in extending life expectancy, improving health, reducing violence, enhancing human rights, promoting freedom and greater social equality, and protecting the environment. But these gains have been insufficient to meet the challenges humanity confronts. These efforts have largely been driven by national governments and international organizations. That is not sufficient. The magnitude of the effort involved requires much more. All nations and all sections of society locally, nationally and globally will have to lend their support. We need the involvement of organizations in all sectors, including business, civil society, education, scientific research, the arts and cinema, youth, the media and many others.

The SDGs focus naturally on practical actions to be taken and quantitative goals that need to be achieved. They draw support from science, technology, businesses, financial institutions and public policy makers to achieve concrete, measurable changes in the world—in CO_2 emissions, poverty levels, hunger and malnutrition, unemployment, education, healthcare, infant mortality and life expectancy, and so on. These are among the most prominent and important objectives of global society today. They are tracked and measured in terms of numbers of people saved, goods produced, and the quantum of money spent. They represent the objective dimension of human life and global society.

But we know that human development is not just about statistics, public policies, institutional reform, the discoveries of science and technological innovations. In addition to this objective dimension, there is also a subjective dimension, which is equally or even more important. It is the subjective dimension that reflects human aspirations, values, beliefs and attitudes which motivate human beings to recognize the challenges we face, to understand, commit and invest their energies to address them.

These subjective factors are the principal domain of other social organizations and activities which are also critically important, because they embody and give expression to humanity's aspirations, values, beliefs and commitments to action. They remind us that getting the facts right on paper, adopting practical policies and laws, and allocating huge sums of money for investment in the SDGs are not enough. We also need to reach out with a message that will win the minds and hearts of countless individuals around the world, fully release and mobilize their energies and generate commitment at all levels and in all fields in a concerted effort to achieve these goals. Nothing less will be sufficient. Religious and inter-faith groups, cultural organizations, the arts, cinema, and all forms of media represent sections of global society which can play an essential role in global progress. Their organizations span humanity from the local and national to the global level. They can reach out to and mobilize vast numbers of people.

3. Integrated Approach to Human Security

The SDGs define 17 important goals for the collective survival and progress of humanity. But taken together, these goals add up to something far greater than the sum of their parts. When taken together and viewed as aspects of a greater whole they constitute the central pillars of the intrinsic concept that we call human security. For the fulfilment of human life, it is not enough that we make progress on some of these goals. In order to be truly secure, it is essential that we achieve them all. It does not matter whether a person lacks food, water, employment, clean air, freedom and equality, peace and dignity, safety or good health. All are essential for the security and wellbeing of each and every one of us. Some people may lack only food, or freedom or access to healthcare. But regardless of which one is missing, they cannot feel fully secure.

The concept of human security communicates the comprehensive nature of all these dimensions—food, health, economic, political, environmental, community and individual. It also embodies the sense of the integrality of all these dimensions. For all are interconnected and interdependent with one another. The absence of food or clean air and water undermines health security which in turn affects our capacity for productive work. Without freedom from fear and want we cannot live in dignity.

We all know that the challenges humanity faces are interconnected. But our way of studying them is fragmented into innumerable specialized disciplines. The formulation of policy is conducted by experts knowledgeable about specific issues but rarely equipped with the knowledge needed to understand the interdependencies or with the authority to address them comprehensively. Moreover, the implementation of these policies is assigned to specialized agencies with narrow fields of action. As a global community, we have organized our knowledge, thinking and action in that way. We have divided an integral reality we call life into innumerable parts and sectors and address them piecemeal. But human life cannot be so readily divided. Each of us has security needs belonging to each of these sectors and we necessarily strive to meet them all at the same time. Meeting each depends on meeting the other needs as well. All of them depend on the establishment of peace, the protection of human rights, and prevention of environmental destruction.

This fragmentation of knowledge, policies, and actions is no longer sufficient in these challenging times of rapid change on multiple fronts. We need a vision that sees the whole picture, evaluates every step and dimension based on how far it impacts and enhances human security for people everywhere. Regardless of how good our overall statistics are, until we ensure inclusive, sustained human security for everyone, we will continue to have unstable conditions in which we are not able to achieve the peace, democracy, human rights and progress that we need for sustainable development of ourselves and our planet.

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4. Empowering Individuals

Human beings are not merely statistics. We are each an individual. The SDGs rightly focus on the collective needs and goals of the entire human collective. Human security focuses on the aspirations and needs of each and every single individual. It starts with the individual and what it means for each person to be safe and secure. It means security from harmful disruptions and calamities—in our homes, our jobs, our communities, and our environment. It is about our personal needs and hopes and the opportunity to develop our full potential as human beings.

The collective needs of humanity can only be met by the commitment and concerted action of national and multilateral institutions to establish shared objectives, global systems, a level playing field, ground rules, exchange of information, and collective effort. But to reach down to each individual top-down initiatives are not sufficient. We need also to engage, energize and unleash the capacity of individuals in communities around the world.

Development is not a program of government. It is a social process that depends on the awakening, engagement and active participation of people at all levels of society and all fields of activity. Governments alone cannot develop humanity. People must be encouraged and helped to develop themselves. Human security is about empowering individuals and communities of individuals to participate in making choices on how they can be most secure and resilient in face of current and future risks. Freedom of thought and action as well as access to healthcare, technology, reliable information and quality education are catalysts and drivers to awaken aspirations and unleash the energy of people to strive for their own development.

5. Global Campaign on Human Security for All

It is for these reasons that the World Academy of Art and Science has joined in partnership with the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security to launch HS4A, a global campaign

on human security for all. The concept of Human Security advanced here was first projected by UNDP in its landmark 1994 annual development report. It led four years later to establishment of the UN Trust Fund for Human Security, which has since then supported the human security approach in more than 295 programs in 135 countries around the world. In 2012 it was reinforced by a resolution of the UN General Assembly supported by 193 UN Member States, which affirmed their common understanding of human security: "The right of people to live in freedom and dignity, free from poverty and despair. All individuals, in particular vulnerable people, are entitled to freedom from fear and freedom from want, with an equal opportunity to enjoy all their rights and fully develop their human potential."

HS4A is an attempt to provide support and momentum to supplement the efforts so far taken by so many governments and organizations around the world. It seeks to awaken and engage the understanding and active support of the entire global community. NGOs, universities, research institutions, businesses, governments, religious and inter-faith groups, artists, filmmakers, cultural groups, and all forms of media—every section and sector of global society has a vital and unique contribution to make to this endeavour. Every individual strives for human security, and it will require the combined efforts of all humanity to achieve it for all.

We recently witnessed the potential power and impact of this message on business and technology at the Consumer Electronics Show 2023 held in Las Vegas, US on January 5-8, 2023. CES is the world's most important gathering and exhibition of technology and technology companies. This year's event attracted more than 120,000 business leaders and technology experts. For the first time in its 50-year history, CES adopted a theme for the event and that theme was human security for all.

CES projected the theme that technology is a powerful instrument for addressing human security needs. Rightly utilized, it is potent force for good. CES2023 highlighted both the opportunities and responsibility of business to apply this powerful instrument for the good of all humanity. It projected the message to business and technology companies and their leaders to direct their efforts to address the fundamental challenges to human security which the world faces.

The response of participants in CES2023 provided a clear demonstration that the human security approach is already recognized and embraced as mainstream by leading technology companies. It also highlighted the potential role which the private sector can play in addressing these critical challenges if their incredible capacity for technological innovation and deployment can be fully harnessed in support of the SDGs and human security.

Following CES, we also saw evidence of the enormous receptivity of religious and faith-based leaders and their organizations in support of human security. At the 9th International Annual Symposium held in January 2023 on the Role of Religion and Faith-based Organizations in International Affairs, leaders from a wide range of organizations representing people around the world convened in New York in collaboration with UN agencies to discuss the importance of human security and their role in promoting it.

Technology and faith are complementary powers. One objective, the other subjective, both essential for human accomplishment and fulfilment. Technology bases itself on scientific knowledge and human ingenuity. Faith bases itself on the importance of intangible universal values. These values represent the quintessence of knowledge that transcends the range of the senses and the logic of physicality. All accomplishment is based on faith, and achieving human security is no exception. Faith is a reflection of the soul's deepest and highest knowledge as reflected in the mind. It is not merely wishful thinking or blind superstition. It wells up with compelling force from our deepest aspirations and highest intuitions. Human security encompasses both the objective and subjective dimensions of our lives. The business and technology organizations that presented at CES are among those which project the objective measurable dimensions of reality. Faith-based groups affirm the subjective dimension based on culture, values, emotions, ethics, beliefs, aspirations and commitment. It is only a marriage of these two complementary aspects of reality that can provide true human security.

A peaceful and secure world is not only about secure borders. Security must necessarily address people and their personal needs. It is time to unite around a shared vision and program of action to ensure human security for all. Such a vision must encompass all dimensions of human security. It should involve an integrated approach—person-centered, context-specific and prevention-oriented.

The Human Security for All campaign calls upon business and technology leaders with the resourcefulness to evolve better solutions to the problems we face and religious leaders who think beyond national and religious boundaries to awaken the aspiration and instil the values needed to achieve freedom from fear, freedom from want and freedom to live in dignity for all. In a similar fashion, we need to bring representatives from all other sectors of global society and from all over the world to join together in commitment to this overriding objective. The ultimate goal of this initiative must be nothing less than to mobilize global society for rapid social transformation of our values and our actions to achieve human security for all.

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