General Assembly Informal Panel Discussion and Plenary Meeting on Human Security
New York
20-21 May, 2010

1. Background

The General Assembly met to consider the Secretary-General's report on Human Security (document A/64/701), and held a panel discussion on "People-Centred Responses: The Added Value of Human Security" on 20-21 May 2010.

The report was submitted as part of the follow-up to the Assembly's 2005 World Summit, at which the Heads of State and Government committed themselves to discuss and define the notion of human security. It provides an update on developments related to the advancement of that concept over the past five years and takes stock of discussions on human security, its various definitions and its relationship to State sovereignty and the responsibility to protect.

Among other things, the report outlines the principles and the approach for advancing human security and its application to the current priorities of the United Nations. Key human security initiatives undertaken by Governments, regional and sub-regional intergovernmental organizations, as well as the organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, are presented as examples of the reach of this important concept and its growing acceptance.

"Broadly defined, human security encompasses freedom from fear, freedom from want and freedom to live in dignity. Together, these fundamental freedoms are rooted in the core principles of the Charter," the Secretary-General says in the report, and adds that those principles are also reflected in the many human security-related initiatives and activities undertaken by United Nations agencies, funds and programmes and by intergovernmental organizations.

He goes on to say that today's multiple, complex and highly interrelated threats affect the lives of millions of people worldwide. Indeed, natural disasters, violent conflicts and their impact on civilians, as well as food, health, financial and economic crises, tend to acquire transnational dimensions, moving beyond traditional notions of security. While national security remains pivotal to peace and stability, there is growing recognition of the need for an expanded paradigm of security.

"Calls for such a broader concept of security are rooted in the common issues faced by all Governments," the Secretary-General says, stressing that no matter how powerful or seemingly insulated Governments may be, today's global flow of goods, finance and people increase the risks and uncertainties confronting the international community. It is in this interconnected environment that Governments are invited to consider the survival, livelihood and dignity of individuals as the fundamental basis for their security.
With all that in mind, he concludes that the application of human security calls for people-centred, comprehensive, context-specific and preventive responses. Such an approach helps focus attention on current and emerging threats; identifies the root causes; and supports early

warning systems that help mitigate their impact. Moreover, it promotes multi-stakeholder responses that enable the protection and empowerment of people and communities. "Together, these aim to advance freedom from fear, freedom from want and freedom to live in dignity for all," he says.

2. Opening remarks

Welcoming delegates to the formal debate and panel discussion, Sanja Štiglic (Slovenia), Acting General Assembly President, recalled the informal thematic debate on human security in May 2008, where around 40 States had taken the floor to explore ways to follow-up on paragraph 143 of the 2005 World Summit Outcome. Ambassador Štiglic highlighted that since then, the Friends of Human Security and the Human Security Network had contributed greatly to clarifying the conceptual discussions and advancing the operational aspects of human security and reminded delegates of the importance of today's gathering in moving discussions forward, and welcomed the opportunity to be guided by a knowledgeable panel.

Meanwhile, in his opening statement, Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, noted that the interconnected nature of the modern world meant that crises transcended borders and threatened the lives and livelihoods of millions. No region was left untouched and no country was immune. The global financial crisis had disrupted jobs and economic security in both developed and developing countries. Food price spikes had left more that 1 billion people hungry and more than 17,000 children were dying of malnutrition every day. Furthermore, more than 200 million people last year were affected by natural disasters, and violent conflict had displaced more than 42 million. And, the H1N1 flu pandemic had highlighted the human and economic costs of health emergencies.

"Today it is increasingly clear that the health of one community has serious implications for the health of all communities," he continued, stressing: "Our challenges are shared; so too is our commitment to enhance 'freedom from fear, freedom from want and freedom to live in dignity'." That was why his report called for an expanded understanding of security where the protection and empowerment of people formed the basis and purpose of collective actions. As such, those actions must focus on people-centred, comprehensive, context-specific and preventive strategies at every level. "This is the human security approach," he said.

Continuing, he said that human security was fully in line with the provisions of the United Nations Charter. The concept strengthened State sovereignty by providing Governments with effective tools that looked at root causes of persistent and emerging threats. As a result, human security supported early warning systems that diminished the impact of such threats. "The focus is on building Government and local capacities by identifying concrete needs of populations under stress; developing solutions that are rooted in local realities, and building partnerships that are targeted, cost-effective and capitalize on comparative advantage," he said.

This combination not only improved the resilience of Governments and people to insecurities, but it also contributed to greater local, national, regional and international security. Further, such an understanding of human security was also at the core of the work of the United

Nations. And significant progress had been made to integrate human security into the work of the Organization.

"The United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security has provided resources to rebuild war-torn societies; prevent, mitigate and respond to natural disasters; and strengthen food security," he said, adding that it had also invested in improving access to health care and education in times of crises; and mobilizing community leadership. Human security was also an important tool for advancing our efforts to build "One United Nations." Instead of adding layers to the work of the United Nations, human security provided the Organization with a framework to capitalize on its comparative advantages, "to bolster our actions, to galvanize our work, and to revitalize its partnerships".

In conclusion, the Secretary-General noted "Let us continue our combined efforts to strengthen the political, social, environmental, economic and cultural systems that are the building blocks of stability, security, and human dignity."

3. Informal panel discussion

At the informal panel discussion on "Human-Centred Approaches: The Added Value of Human Security", moderated by Ambassador Štiglic, panellists included Sonia Picado of Costa Rica, member of the Advisory Board on Human Security; Vijay Nambiar, the Secretary-General's Chef de Cabinet; Sir Richard Jolly, Honorary Professor and Research Associate at the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex and Co-Director of the United Nations Intellectual History Project; and Sakiko Fukuda Parr, Professor of International Affairs at the New School and Interim Dean for Academic Affairs at the Milano New School for Management and Urban Policy.

3.1 Human security through prevention, protection and empowerment

As the first speaker during the panel discussions, Ms. Picado stressed that promoting the concept of human security would provide an important tool in addressing the challenges faced by Latin America. In this regard, human security meant narrowing the inequality gap and reaching out to the most vulnerable and marginalized groups through prevention, protection and empowerment.

Part of human development was to live without fear or want, but no country could have development without security. In turn, there could be no security without human rights, she continued. Thus, the concept of human security was useful for overcoming social problems facing marginalized people. As a practical tool, human security provided countries in the region with instruments to enable people to become "masters of their own future." It was a way to integrate the principles of human rights, human development and human security. It was the basis upon which countries could strengthen planning strategies to cope with natural disasters and other crises.

Ms. Picado cited several examples of good practices currently being implemented in Latin America, saying that Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Ecuador and Peru had benefited

from funding from the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security to bolster human security in the wake of natural disasters. El Salvador and Honduras supported micro-enterprises run by women, and, in former guerrilla areas, money was invested on youth development. Furthermore, a regional project approved recently by the Trust fund aims to highlight the potential of the human security concept in strengthening the resilience of the region to varied crises.

3.2 Striking a balance between State security and civil liberties

Mr. Nambiar observed that insecurity, by tradition, was seen as threats posed by States to other States. But, in the face of increasing threats from non-State actors, the big challenge became one of balancing the protection of State security with the need to safeguard civil liberties and civic life. In the face of globalization, it is important to recognize that the development process had often adverse impacts for the most vulnerable people. In response, marginalized communities were finding ways to group together through information technology. With the sources of insecurity becoming largely internal – as ethnic, religious and political groups competing for power and resources – the nature of war changed from inter-State to mostly intra-State conflicts.

He said, in the decade following the end of the cold war, Sadako Ogata, former High Commissioner for Refugees, had sought to uncover the political, economic and social factors that promoted or hindered the security of displaced persons. The concept of "human security," which grew out of that context, was later taken up by Japanese Prime Minister Obuchi in 1999, leading to the establishment of the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security, currently supported by Greece, Japan, Thailand and Slovenia.

Meanwhile, the Commission on Human Security which was set up in response to the Millennium Summit and its call for a world free from fear and free from want, understood that the concept of human security addressed not just physical safety, but also the sense of security that comes from having enough to eat, a place to live, employment, access to health care, and education, he said. Seeking to narrow its attention on people facing critical and pervasive threats, the Commission chose to address the problems of socially excluded groups, where the question of inequality was seen as key. A two-pronged approach emerged, centring on protection and empowerment, which the Commission recognized would require a range of interventions from top-down capacity building measures to bottom-up endeavours in community resilience, etc.

In this regard, Mr. Nambiar noted that the challenge would not be to replace security but to reinforce it; to be sensitive and attentive to the vulnerabilities of specific groups and to generate strong civic responsibility towards them. He said in today's increasingly interlinked world, where threats could potentially spread rapidly within and across countries, human security gave a practical approach to the growing interdependence of vulnerabilities facing peoples and communities.

3.3 Broadening the concept of human security

Sir Richard Jolly, one of the main architects of the 1994 Human Development report on Human Security, noted that the report of the Secretary-General has made a major contribution to the continuing efforts to refine the definition of human security. "In terms of perception and application, the concept of human security is still evolving. We are learning by doing," he said, adding that the Secretary-General's report also demonstrated the value of human security as a broad framework for undertaking analysis of threats affecting people in regions, countries and communities.

Turning to the value added of human security, he said that such an approach bolstered traditional security precepts by making decision-makers aware of "human priorities" beyond traditional security concerns; informing the general public and raising awareness to a wider range of threats, so that domestic resources could be allocated accordingly; opening the way to a more efficient use of resources, both domestic and non-governmental; and shifting attention from traditional security threats, to, among others, strengthening disaster preparedness, lowering regional tensions, and preventing the outbreak of civil conflicts."

He went on to discuss some of the arguments against the concept, including the notion that protection of national sovereignty was the fundamental building block for global security; the fear that human security opened the door to further Western dominance or interference; and that the concept was just too broad or vague. As for the national sovereignty argument, he said that it was clear that major social gains could be achieved by shifting expenditures away from military concerns and towards social development. Regarding Western interference, he acknowledged that, while the human security concept did "list" human-centred threats, it nevertheless stressed the need for countries to take action themselves, largely by scaling up actions to enhance their own development.

As for the "too big, too vague" argument, he said that many theorists who supported the concept had wondered whether there was much added value in the human security concept and whether it was just renaming old problems. Mr. Jolly did not think so, and believed that addressing individual security, rather than simply renaming old issues, could actually prompt discussion on new ways to tackle lingering social and economic challenges. As a result, Governments may more seriously consider the "trade off" between continued spending on traditional security matters and a more balanced understanding of security.

Highlighting some proposals on the way forward, he called for more country analyses of human security applications and implementation results; more regional analysis to inform such national reports on, for example, military spending versus social spending; an international report with a statistical analysis of human security and what countries were doing about it; and the establishment of training courses in application and implementation of the human security concept. Specifically, he said that the Human Security Unit in the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs might develop such courses. Concluding, he said: "I am of the conviction that human security is indeed a concept that has many opportunities for the future for many countries, regions and the United Nations as a whole."

3.4 The added value of human security in policy analysis and priority setting

The final panellist, Sakiko Fukuda Parr, said the concept of human security could be a framework for analysing responses to conflict and endemic poverty. The theme of human-centeredness and freedom from fear and freedom from want were at the core of human security. There was very little disagreement that development and peace went together and must somehow be synergistic. The real added value of the concept was that it examined the relationships between physical security and socio-economic aspects of human well-being.

It also highlighted the fact that threats caused by "unstable environments" deserved the same amount of policy attention as external or more traditional threats. She said that conflict prevention policies could in fact address human security matters. Some theorists supporting this view have said that when economic opportunities and political power are not equally distributed in a society, especially among religious or ethnic groups, tensions may rise and often conflicts can erupt.

"When you have low levels of income in a country it is difficult to set up effective institutions," she continued, adding that, through the human security lens, public policy should target both economic growth; expansion of social opportunities; and conflict prevention. Conflict prevention measures that also targeted such social concerns, especially the equitable distribution of domestic and external resources among all groups, must be the new priority, she said, stressing that the concept of human security could point the way forward. "For me, human security is not just an old concept with a new name, it's a new framework for analysis and setting policies," she said.

3.5 Q&A

In an exchange with panellists, some States said the concept was difficult to grasp, questioning why it was necessary to outline a new concept to capture issues already being dealt with: economic and social development; the promotion of human dignity and rights; and security. Some said the Secretary-General's report and the panellists had defined a concept that was overtly broad. Doubts expressed in 2005 had not been sufficiently addressed, some others said – for example, would the principle of human security encompass intervention by external players who could act without the consent of Government? If yes, who had the power to decide who would intervene and when, if Governments were unwilling? For example, in the case of the economic and financial crisis where the developed countries were the cause of it – who had the right to intervene in that case? How was the principle of human security distinct from the right to protect?

One speaker from the Near East noted that while the nature of wars had changed, the motivations for going to war were the same. In his region, insecurity arose from the intervention of powerful States into their affairs. Another speaker noted that none of the panellists had addressed the root cause of human insecurity that were at the heart of climate change, persistent poverty, and other such problems.

Others asked for clarity on the role of the United Nations in operationalizing the concept, with some suggesting that the Peacebuilding Commission might be able to play a part. But a larger question, for some, was how human security could advance intergovernmental processes, if at all, saying that the present discussion was academic and different from normal intergovernmental discussions. If the concept had entered into international use much earlier, would the United Nations have approached certain issues differently – for example, the issues surrounding the energy, financial and food crises? They also asked how human security could be applied to the Millennium Development Goals, and other social problems such as human trafficking, arms proliferation, and the issue of migrants.

Responding, Ms. Fukuda Parr pointed out that the Millennium Development Goals covered only one chapter of the Millennium Declaration. She observed that there were no "Millennium Security Goals," such as ensuring that each person be free from threats of violence. Through a study she conducted, she found that 61 countries were particularly challenged and deserving of support in that respect. Aside from being conflict-ridden, they also had the highest levels of poverty and were farthest from reaching the Millennium Goals.

Ms. Picado called for a distinction to be made between human development and national development. From the viewpoint of national development, security was seen as a military concept. Yet, insecurity for groups at highest risk of violence, such as migrants, trafficking victims, and so on, called into mind the protection and promotion of human rights. Human security did not seek to perpetuate a regime of repression, but to promote "unity to work together on the development of the human being." She cited post-earthquake Haiti as an example of international cooperation to ensure human security, in a way that was different from providing assistance after a war or invasion.

Mr. Nambiar said that, for the concept to evolve from an academic notion to one that could be operationalized, all States needed to reach a certain comfort level. Obtaining freedom from want, fear, indignity and the principle of inclusiveness were important issues that merited consideration at the international level, he argued. Communities no longer lived in isolation, because of advances in technology. Unless those issues were addressed, they would continue to pose obstacles to human development. The concept was applicable to all countries, even though each experienced human security problems in different ways. Nations needed to help each other to tackle common problems, and to ensure that countries exercised their sovereignty in a transparent way. Sovereignty, in this sense, implied not only a monopoly on authority, but also a sense of responsibility "of doing what one had to do." The issue of consent was a valid one, but the goal was not to reach consent through ultimatums.

Mr. Jolly added that human security was a useful concept to stimulate thinking amongst Governments concerning fears people had within their countries. But it was Governments that had the obligation to determine priorities and the trade-offs involved. He, too, believed that the United Nations could support human security by conducting national surveys and providing assistance to implement actions arising from the insecurities identified.

4.0 Inputs by Member States

At the plenary meeting, statements were made by representatives from Spain (on behalf of the European Union), Nauru (on behalf of the Small Island Developing States), Australia (on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum), Costa Rica (as Chair of the Human Security Network), Mexico, Egypt, Bangladesh, Slovenia, Philippines, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Cuba, Japan, South Africa, El Salvador, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, United States of America, Indonesia, Vietnam, The Russian Federation, Brazil, Hungary, Thailand, India, Pakistan, Republic of Korea, Slovakia, Azerbaijan, Jamaica, Libyan Arab Jamhiriya, Nepal, Gabon, Chile, Austria, Ecuador, Norway, Nicaragua, Monaco, Colombia, Comoros, Guinea, Solomon Islands, China, Islamic Republic of Iran, Sudan, Algeria, Qatar, Lebanon, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Georgia, Mongolia, Armenia and Bolivia.

Member States highlighted the multidimensional aspects of threats facing humanity today. Furthermore, it was noted that the application of human security strengthens national sovereignty by providing Governments with effective tools to examine the root causes of current and emerging challenges and by promoting responses that build on the capacities of local and national institutions. In addition, a number of Member States supported the view that the application of human security does not bring additional layers to the work of the United Nations, but complements and further focuses the activities of the Organization in a more effective, efficient and prevention-oriented manner.

Member States also emphasized the need to ensure that the understanding of human security is based on the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, in particular respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in the internal affairs of States. Lastly, the complementary relationship between human security and national sovereignty and the distinction between human security and the responsibility to protect were reiterated by a number of Member States.