

United Nations

High Level Event on Human Security

Speech by H.E. Mary E. Flores, Permanent Representative of Honduras

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Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

It was October 1998, when the merciless fury of nature unleashed its rage over my country, and it disfigured the picturesque map of the national territory. For several days of darkness and many horrific nights that seemed endless, this hurricane of biblical consequences, stationed itself unmovable over the Honduran Atlantic coast. Our already fragile geography trembled with the violent winds, vanishing decades of modest progress. The raging waters swiped away the very core of our humble patrimony. We lost thousands of precious human lives, and one third of our population was forced to remain exposed to the elements, deprived of everything they once possessed. The devastating damage fractured an already weak infrastructure, spoiled harvests, and sunk our weak and unstable economy.

But even more disturbing, is that the hurricane abruptly changed life's daily routine and order. It decomposed the rules of coherence, frayed the fragile social fabric, broke habits and safeties, and exacerbated the migratory flows from the rural sector to the cities. We went from owning, to borrowing. From certainty to the unknown. A sudden strike of nature, without a single hint of compassion that would allow us to assimilate it. In the blink of an eye, the plan for life diminished to the immediacy of survival.

This debated concept of "human security" first drew our attention when we read about it for the first time, in the Honduras 1999 Human Development Report, "The human impact of a hurricane" which addressed "Human security at risk," and contained experiences of victims during the hurricane.

The tribulation brought about by that nightmare, can be better summed up in the improvised testimony of a modest native of the Santa Rosa de Aguan village:

"Never in my life had I seen something like this; I believe it hit us. Our trauma is such, that every time it rains, we worry. It wasn't like this before, because we didn't really know what a hurricane was and what it could cause and all the things we saw. In the days of the hurricane, we felt some winds. It was two in the morning and we didn't know how to get out of our homes; on our main street a corpse passed and floated by, and a neighbor kept shouting that people were drowning. Because of the winds, people would jump out of their homes and then drown. It was horrible. (UNDP, NHDI 1999).

Our experience is unique, and hope in God unrepeatable. We are left with an array of individual stories that, even now, more than a decade passed of the unprecedented distress, are remembered with silent tears, aching heartbeats and trembling voices. There are no indicators or statistics capable of measuring the affected person's pain, deep suffering, and irreversible damage. What is the price of dignity? The wounding of intimate pride, when overwhelmed by a feeling helplessness left with nothing to feed a hungry child. Or life's somersault in the loss of one's whole belongings, and for the one who emigrates from a home to the unknown, hoping to find a job to procure sustainment. The absence felt by a mother who lost her loved one, fighting against the raging river as it was taking away her loved one, while she was trying to bring her/him to a safe place. Nothing that the future may grant, can compensate the pain of such an irreparable loss.

In the middle of such a catastrophe, fear, insecurity and despair, the Honduran people found a way out the crisis through an assistance, rescue and reconstruction plan, to later gather efforts in the context of the national strategy for the eradication and reduction of poverty, with a strong focus on Human Security. Despite leading important initiatives to reestablish some resemblance of normality, authorities and the entire governmental machinery would have never been able to face the avalanche of problems without the solidarity at all levels, from community volunteerism, to international assistance.

Human security for us could maybe be better understood as the most comprehensive reflect of solidarity. That which allows us to transcend the traditional patterns of security in the national context, so that we can acknowledge the essence, humanity, and identity of each individual.

For vulnerable countries with similar situations, where scarcity and threats outride their response capacities, while affecting peoples' individual and collective subsistence on a daily basis, the meaning of Human Security takes on a supreme, urgent and indispensable meaning and value.

The many efforts carried out within the United Nations forum to procure the world's peace and security have led us, after the 1994 UNDP Report and the 2005 World Summit, to study and find common ground around a concept, to hold several thematic debates and two reports of the Secretary General, so that we can achieve a common understanding as agreed by consensus in resolution 66/290 of September 2012.

The overflowing forces of nature, organized crime, illegal traffic of persons and goods, and armed conflicts both at domestic and regional levels, are harsh realities that affect thousands of human beings throughout the planet.

We believe human security states solutions to these and enormous problems that transcend domestic frontiers, in this century of extended co-existence, to find them where ever there is a feeling of shared responsibility. For global citizens who have more than one place they call home or more than one nationality, migrants and refugees with the possibility to live in freedom from fear and want, and call for their full human rights, identity, heritage, culture, religion, health, justice, and for building their own future.

A person with human security and access to the necessary information to face adversities, participate in the system, take advantage of opportunities, and build governability, does not have to feel that his/her sovereignty is at risk or his/her self-determination is compromised. The main resource a State possesses does not rest on its economic or military strength, but rather in the human potential.

Human security is also a vital ingredient of the implementation of justice. Justice is attained through its application to a concrete case, the individual and the circumstances in regard to the law. An individual must have the security of his/her human rights and guarantees, in order to defend him/herself, and comply with the responsibilities demanded by the Rule of Law.

Wisława Szymborska in her poem titled, "Hunger Camp in Jasło reflects on us why we must acknowledge a people centered approach in the context of security: "History counts its skeletons in round numbers. A thousand and one remains a thousand, as though the one had never existed: an imaginary embryo, an empty cradle, an ABC never read, air that laughs, cries, grows, emptiness running down steps toward the garden, nobody's place in the line. We stand in the meadow where it became flesh, and the meadow is silent as a false witness. Sunny. Green."

From the moment we are born, our natural instinct drives us to secure the sweet feeling of safety we enjoyed in our mother's womb. It is a necessary element to grow and thrive. The United Nations as a guarantor of the world's peace and security, and relies on the will of nations. Nevertheless, this outcome cannot be achieved without the welfare and security of individuals.

Thank you.