# Human Security in Asia

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by

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H.E. Dr. Sadako Ogata was the first President of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), serving from October 2003 to March 2012. She co-chaired the UN Commission on Human Security from its establishment in 2001 until 2003. During her time at the Commission, she was also appointed the Special Representative of the Prime Minister of Japan on Afghanistan Assistance and co-chaired the International Conference on Reconstruction Assistance to Afghanistan in January 2002 in Tokyo, Japan. Prior to her role at JICA and UN Commission on Human Security, H.E. Dr. Ogata was the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) from 1991 to 2000, and the Independent Expert of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights on the Human Rights Situation in Myanmar, in 1990. She received a Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of California at Berkeley in 1963. She held an M.A. in International Relations from Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. and a B.A. from the University of the Sacred Heart in Tokyo.

Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am honored to have this opportunity to be in Bangkok and to present the second Lecture inaugurated by Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn. Before proceeding to deliver my statement, let me express my deep sympathies for all the victims of the tsunami that wiped out villages and homes. Although you have proven your resilience and effectiveness through the recovery, the pain of losing your loved ones will linger on for a long time.

The title of this lecture series is international humanitarian law. Today, I would like to address the issue of "human security" as an integral approach to reinforce the role of international humanitarian law in meeting the requirements of today's world.

We live in a globalizing world where the sources of insecurity seem to be rapidly expanding. Today, money, goods, information and people move fast across borders. Diseases, such as SARS, bird flu and HIV/AIDS as well as weapons of mass destruction - nuclear or chemical - threaten people within and across borders. A threat in one country quickly affects its neighbors. Not even the strongest states can totally meet the multiple security needs of their people.

Of course, globalization has had positive effects on people's lives. The increasing openness in trade, investments and information flows has contributed to a remarkable rate of economic growth in the world, particularly in Asia. At the same time, however, the rising interdependence has meant that the region has become more vulnerable to adverse developments elsewhere. The financial crisis in 1997 brought this reality painfully home.

The impact of this crisis was particularly harsh on the weakest strata of society, in spite of the fact that many countries in Asia had been experiencing rapid economic growth. Asian societies known for their traditional strong family and communal ties were not able to ride through the difficulties and were devastatingly affected. Confronted with critical situations in neighboring countries, then Prime Minister of Japan Keizo Obuchi looked for ways to protect people from having their survival threatened or dignity impaired.

Initially, he sought ways to establish social safety nets to offset sudden economic downturns. Eventually he began to argue in favor of a longer-term comprehensive strategy to deal with a variety of threats on people's fundamental existence, livelihood and dignity. In his speech in Hanoi on 16 December 1998, Obuchi introduced the idea of "human security," and stated that all governments in Asia must collectively engage in innovative reforms to uphold people's existence against all threats, be they environmental degradation, proliferation of diseases or organized crime. He particularly emphasized the crucial role to be played by civil society and non-governmental organizations in such all out efforts.

Indeed, toward the end of the 20th century, there emerged new forms of conflict and social crises that threatened the lives of the people worldwide. At the time, I was serving as UN High Commissioner for Refugees, grappling with the challenges of providing protection and solutions to refugees, internally displaced people and other victims of conflict. In the decade following the end of the Cold War, the nature of war shifted from inter-state to intra-state conflicts. The sources of insecurity became largely internal, with ethnic, religious and political groups fighting over contested rights and resources with vengeance. There were brutal conflicts in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Chechnya, Sierra Leone and genocide in Rwanda, to name a few. The international community, however, was short on effective tools to deal with the myriads of these claims.

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Traditionally, security threats were assumed to emanate from external sources. States were held responsible to ensure the security of their boundaries, people, institutions and values. States built powerful military structures to defend themselves and people were presumably assured of their security by the shields of the state. Territorial boundaries were considered inviolable, and external interference in internal affairs of sovereign states was not acceptable. But in internal conflict situations, people were victimized by the power of the state or caught in violence between groups within the state. Humanitarian agencies, such as UNHCR, were to provide emergency assistance and protection staying close to the victims. While the challenges fell on humanitarian agencies to protect the civilians caught in conflict, the need for political, military and development measures to protect these people became increasingly evident.

I eventually came to realize that there was a need for a different kind of approach to security, one that focused on the security of human beings. People had to be at the central focus, rather than the state. In fact, threats confronting people and communities in the globalizing world do not only emanate from external sources, but are also varied in nature and could not be defined by borders. The security debate, then, must begin by addressing the comprehensive security needs that reflect the aspirations of people.

The 2000 UN Millennium Summit provided the opportunity to launch a broadened concept of security. The Secretary-General declared that people should be assured of “freedom from want” and “freedom from fear”, thus addressing the challenges of responding to economic and social needs, as well as political and military threats. Responding also to this UN declaration, Japan, under Prime Minister Mori who succeeded late Prime Minister Obuchi, announced its commitment to promote human security. In so doing, Japan came up with two major initiatives: one was the establishment of the UN Trust Fund for Human Security, and the other was the setting up of the Commission on Human Security. The Commission was mandated “to develop the concept of human security as an operational tool for policy formulation and implementation.”

I was invited to co-chair the Commission on Human Security, together with Nobel Prize economist Amartya Sen. The Commission focused on the security of people who are under critical and pervasive threats, victims of conflict, refugees and displaced persons, and people living in abject poverty facing hunger and disease. The question of long-term inequalities among groups was also identified as a key factor that led to violence and eventually to humanitarian and political crises. After two years of research, the report, "Human Security Now!" was published and has been translated into six languages.

I would like to recognize the special contribution made by Thailand. You provided Surin Pitsuwan to take part in the Commission's work. You invited the Commission to meet in Bangkok and hold a session with a large number of NGOs. In fact, Thailand has taken the lead in the promotion of "human security" as it is the only government that has a Ministry of Social Development and Human Security. You will be chairing the Human Security Network the coming year, and I look forward to your leadership of this important inter-governmental set up.

Let me now turn to the actual work of the Commission. After two years of concentrated efforts, the Commission proposed a framework of action that promoted the protection and empowerment of people. Rather than viewing people solely as passive recipients of assistance, support or protection by the state, the Commission regarded people as active contributors who

can determine their own fate and that of their community. By empowering people through education, social mobilization and participation in public life, they can cope better with threats confronting them in daily life. This implies a "bottom-up" approach. Strengthening the security of people refers not only to respecting the civil and political rights of people but also to their economic, social and cultural rights. Without access to basic education, health services or jobs, for example, the ability to participate in public life would remain limited.

This focus on "bottom-up" approach does not lend irrelevant the notion of state security. Rather, the Commission regarded the protective role of the state as vital in ensuring human security. Protection means improving law and order and strengthening judicial institutions so that state systems and authorities can better serve the people. Ensuring access to their basic human needs is a responsibility of a well-functioning state. The strengthening of effective state functions implies a "top-down" approach.

The Commission's approach was therefore two-pronged: top-down and bottom-up. Efficient and effective administrative capacity is vital for human security. Education and training are key to empowerment. Access to water, schools and health facilities is fundamental, but what is important is for the communities to build their capacity to manage these facilities on their own and gain self-reliance. While people protected may exercise choices, only those empowered can make better choices and actively prevent and mitigate the impact of sudden down-turns and insecurities. As Amartya Sen insisted, only when people achieve freedom from want and fear, can they attain human dignity and take hold of our collective future.

To promote human security, Japan has recently incorporated this concept in its official development aid policy. Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), to which I am now serving as president, has begun to strengthen programs from the human security perspective. In a water project in Senegal, for example, I observed that JICA not only deals with the project as pure infrastructure construction but also uses the occasion to train the community to maintain the facilities. In the course of implementation, the villagers themselves gained basic mechanical skills and came up with the idea of having women in charge of financial management to maintain the water system themselves.

Japan traditionally had incorporated aspects of human security promotion in its economic development policies, although it did not consciously place it in a "human security" context. In providing development assistance in Asia, Japan had stressed self-reliance and ownership, building the capacity of people. Here in Thailand, for example, a technical school was started in 1960, with JICA's assistance. With the support of Japanese Official Development Assistance (ODA), the tiny school with 23 students eventually grew into a major technical institute producing thousands of engineers annually. Throughout the decades that followed, many graduates of King Mongkut's Institute of Technology at Ladkrabang (KMITL) have contributed directly to the development of Thailand in the field of telecommunication and electronics. JICA continues to support the Institute, promoting exchange of skills and friendship between Thai and Japanese engineers.

As Japan extended development assistance to Asian countries since the 1950s, many of the Asian countries have experienced remarkable growth. Today, having overcome the financial crisis of the late 1990s, the region for the most part is stable and showing rapid advancement, both economically and socially. With Thailand being in the lead, many of the ODA recipient countries in Asia are growing into partners and, in turn, helping countries in other parts of the world. We must continue to work in partnership on ways to promote stability and prosperity beyond the region.

The concept of human security has had some influence on the planning and implementation of international action. The experience of Afghanistan illustrates how the protection-empowerment framework can be relevant in the post-conflict peacebuilding process. Having suffered more than 20 years of conflict and persistent drought, Afghanistan ranked the lowest in the world by any measure of development. Since the interim government was established in December 2001, the international community made major efforts to rebuild the country through a series of reconstruction conferences that quickly and successfully mobilized resources. While governing capacities were strengthened at the state level, reconstruction of schools, health facilities and water supply advanced at community levels. While the Afghan army and police were being trained, 3.8 million refugees returned home and five million children, including girls, went back to school. The humanitarian and development agencies collaborated to realize a seamless transition, while the Afghan government was keen to exercise ownership.

Japan, too, is playing an important role in helping Afghanistan. It is taking the lead in DDR (disarmament, demobilization and reintegration). Facilitating former combatants to lay down arms and to be reintegrated into civilian society is a difficult, but important step in peacebuilding. Japan is also contributing to reconstructing main highways, as well as building schools and providing other development assistance at the community level. Japan's assistance to Afghanistan is an experience of how a civilian power, such as Japan, can contribute to the peace and development of a post-conflict country largely through non-military means. Working closely with the Afghans and

other donors, reconstruction of Afghanistan is an experience of how international efforts can be mobilized to protect the people and communities through state-building. It can also guide the process in Iraq, Sudan and many others to come.

But how do we promote human security when there is a sudden economic, social or environmental down-turn? How do we begin to address a rapidly deteriorating security situation and prevent it from developing into a full-fledged conflict? How can we protect civilians in the midst of an on-going conflict, such as in the Darfur region of the Sudan? These are questions yet to be answered. The question of intervention is a highly debated issue, but what is most urgently required is to plan and strengthen national and international capacity to prevent the aggravation of the situation through combined means of humanitarian aid, human rights observations, and police and peacekeeping presence. Humanitarian aid is a vital tool for protecting civilian victims and for minimizing their suffering and saving their lives, but it cannot be left to carry on the responsibility alone. It has to be followed up by a rapid extension of development assistance.

In Africa, I am happy to note some positive signs of regional and international initiatives. Last year, I had the opportunity to visit the African Union as a member of the group chaired by Khun Anand, who was entrusted by the Secretary-General to seek ways to assess and strengthen UN capacity in dealing with peace and security. The report of this High-level Panel on Threats, Approaches and Change will form the core of the forthcoming Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly in September.

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Following the meeting with the African Union (AU) leaders, I made a three-week trip to four countries in Africa. I was quite impressed with their determination to take on Darfur and other crises. For example, the AU is sending protection troops to Sudan to monitor the cease-fire in Darfur. African countries are also discussing how to set up regional rapid reaction forces that can quickly be deployed in crisis situations, without having to wait for the slow deployment of international peacekeepers. Of course, their resources are limited and the challenges are insurmountable. But I believe it is time that the international community supports these initiatives in Africa, whose peace and stability are not unrelated to us all.

The AU Charter, in fact, clearly refers to human security in its chapter on Peace and Security. In Europe, too, a human security doctrine is being proposed before the European Union, which attempts to organize a civil and military combined force that would not threaten but complement the state to protect its people from severe physical insecurity. These are encouraging developments in regional initiatives which must be supported by the international community and possibly emulated in other regions of the world. Although regionally diverse, I hope that creative and practical initiatives would also arise from Asia to collectively promote human security in the region and beyond.

Asia has experienced sudden down-turns in economic and social areas in the past. The region was also hit recently by a devastating tsunami - a tragedy caused by a natural, environmental threat that could strike again anytime. How can we shield people or make people more resilient in the face of such a sudden and unexpected threat? What human security ultimately aims to achieve is to empower people to better their lives in general, but also to minimize the impact of inevitable threats.

When the tsunami hit the Asian coasts in December last year, within two days, JICA deployed emergency medical teams to the affected countries. As the emergency teams worked in shifts, JICA sent survey teams to establish reconstruction programs to begin longer-term work on rehabilitation and reconstruction of communities. To support the empowerment of people and communities, JICA held workshops to exchange disaster relief and reconstruction experiences and is currently working also with Thailand and other countries in the region to set up an early warning system. We may not be able to prevent earthquakes, but there is so much we can do to prepare and minimize the impact of future disasters. The key is to enlighten and empower the communities, while setting up systems to effectively minimize the risks and their impact.

Another way to begin promoting human security in Asia may be to participate in the Human Security Trust Fund, established at the United Nations. Its aim is to promote multi-sector aid projects in line with human security. The Trust Fund was initially set up by Japan, as mentioned earlier, and has funded community development projects in Afghanistan and refugee integration projects in Zambia, among others. I hope that other donors, especially countries from Asia, can join in the efforts to promote concrete activities.

Lastly, promoting human security is not only the concern of governments. Private businesses and civil society play a major role in strengthening the power of people and communities. Investments and trade not only enhance the global economy, but also strengthen and empower people, as proven in many Asian countries. Above all, human security is an action-oriented concept. It leads the way to build a secure world, by mobilizing the broadest participation of people and communities. Helping people in remote countries toward self-sufficiency can nurture indispensable trust and partnerships in this globalizing world. In fact, it opens the door to the advancement of humanitarian law and order.

Thank you ❖