Human Security and Challenges for the 21st Century

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1. Introduction

There is no gainsaying in denying that we inhabit a world affected by devastating human challenges and catastrophes. One the hand the peoples of the world are severely affected by human and natural disasters such as floods and drought which, if it does not destroy the physical infrastructure of their immediate surroundings it emaciate their capacities to provide for themselves.

On the other hand, there is still a section of the world's population that endures suffering as a result of wars and civil strife. At times, such wars seem to fail to positively discriminate between a civilian and a combatant. From Darfur (in the Sudan) to Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq, we have, and still are, witnessing the suffering of great many innocent people. The world has either stood watch when the problems started, or it response was too little too late, or the assistance never came at all.

We also inhabit a world where ordinary people continue to be denied their basic human rights that would enable them to live their lives to the fullest. The world is still struggling to realise the fundamental principle contained in the Report of the United Nations Secretary General, Kofi Annan entitled in *Larger Freedom*, which argued that there is an important and inseparable link between development, peace and human rights.[1] Worse still, it appears more difficult to realise some of the observations contained in the Report of the Human Commission. The Commission on Human Security made a simple observation that human security is concerned with safeguarding and expanding people's vital freedoms and as such it requires both shielding

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[1] In Larger Freedom, Threat, Challenges and Change, Report of the UN Secretary-General, 2004.

people from acute threats and empowering people to take charge of their own lives.[2]

This paper provides and overview of human security challenges in the world. It departs from the premise that although we now live in the 21st century, ordinary people still suffer from human security challenges carried over from the ravages of the previous century.

2. Broader Understanding of Human Security

In order to ensure that there is shared understanding of what human security is, it is important to provide a simple descriptive definition of human security. In a nutshell, it is the security that focuses on the protection of the people as compared to an exclusive focus on the protection of the State.[3] It is important to emphasize a mistake that is often made is to conclude that those who advocate for human security are against State security. However, this is not necessary the case.

The fact of the matter is that the ideals of State security are rooted in specific historical, political and even economic developments. Largely and in many respects the dominant theories on security, and indeed those regarding development, reflect the history and experience of Europe and North America.[4] In this regard, security is synonymous with the security of the state, generally against external threats. This state-centred understanding of security reflects state development patterns in Europe and North America where, during previous centuries, local leaders established territorial communities through the violent conquest of their neighbours.[5] Thus, security was defined in narrow and largely militaristic terms.

However this definition has proven inadequate in understand the contemporary challenges faced by people in different parts of the world. In

[2] Human Security Now: Commission on Human Security, 2003.
[3] Human Security Now: Commission on Human Security, 2003.
[4] Cilliers, J. 2000. African Security. Paper presented at the Ministerial Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Co-operation in Africa, May 2000.
[5] Cilliers, J. 2000. African Security. Paper presented at the Ministerial Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Co-operation in Africa, May 2000.

some countries of the world in the 20th and the 21st century, the sources of insecurity have become largely internal and while in others areas, the State itself became the source of that insecurity instead of being a provider of security. This view is synonymous to the findings of the Human Security Commission that the State remains the fundamental purveyor of security. Yet it often fails to fulfill its security obligations—and at times has even become a source of threat to its own people.[6] Therefore, human security is about the shift that must be made by not assuming that the existence of the State means the protection of its citizens. It is a shift that challenges the view that acquiring a strong army with state-of-the-art military hardware would simultaneously mean security for the people of a State. Thus, human security must be seen as complementing State security, enhance human rights and consolidate human development.

Accordingly, the Commission on Human Security's definition of human security is thus:

> *to protect the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfillment. Human security means protecting fundamental freedoms—freedoms that are the essence of life. It means protecting people from critical (severe) and pervasive (widespread) threats and situations. It means using processes that build on people's strengths and aspirations. It means creating political, social, environmental, economic, military and cultural systems that together give people the building blocks of survival, livelihood and dignity.[7]*

3. Challenges Confronting Human Security
There is a myriad challenges in the world today that confront human security and essentially these are problems cut across a variety issues. These include:

3.1 Civil Strife and Wars
Different peoples of the world are currently victims of many conflicts and live in war tone societies. Africa takes its fair share of these challenges. In Sudan, the people of that country have not been able to fully enjoy the peace and stability that they expected following the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the Khartoum government and the Sudan's

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[6] Human Security Now: Commission on Human Security, 2003.
[7] Human Security Now: Commission on Human Security, 2003.

People Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A). The mostly devastated part of the country is Darfur region where ordinary people, the women and children, continue to suffer as victims of the carnage. The situation in Darfur brings to fore of the debate the inextricable link between human security and the responsibility to protect. Critical questions have to be addressed. For instance, how should and under what circumstances should the international community intervene in a country where there is great human suffering. Concomitant to this is how should such interventions be undertaken without undermining individual State sovereignty.

Relating to the question of sovereignty there is a view that while there is a need for the international community to respect each country's sovereignty, there is an equal need to ensure that States are made aware that with sovereignty comes responsibility. This is particularly relevant in the case of Sudan, where it would seem that the government has not been willing to fully embrace the support of the international community. Thus far, there is an African Union Mission (AMIS) in Darfur, however because of the AU's capacity challenges calls have been made to bolster AMIS through UN support. These calls have been resisted by the government of Sudan.

To be sure, this is not a critique of the stance taken by the government of Sudan; rather it is one of the few recent examples that show the challenge with regards to the connection between human security and the responsibility to protect.

Elsewhere in the world there are similar devastating challenges. For instance, the world recently paid witness to a military invasion of Lebanon by the Israeli army. Without necessarily providing merits and demerits of such an intervention one cannot ignore the plight of the people of Lebanon during and after the attacks. Immeasurable amounts of destruction in the form of property, physical infrastructure and general people's livelihood. The world reacted to this challenge, but it is correct to argue that perhaps the response, which helped secure a cease-fire, only occurred too late. Among other things, conflict results in refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) who are

faced with different challenges. More often than not, the women and children are the most vulnerable in these situations.

3.2 Global War on Terror

The manner in which the global war on terrorism was launched clearly thwarted if not entirely undermined the objectives of human security. To be sure, one would not be opposed to a decision by a State or a group of States seeking to tackle terrorism and rid the world of the problems it presents. However, the manner in which this war has been carried out flies in the face of all the noble goals that humanity has attempted to achieve since the turn of the 21st century.

One of the best ways of ensuring that the objectives of human security are implemented is through multilateral action preferably under the aegis of the United Nations (UN) or any other regional structure such as the AU. However, the war on terror has primarily been undertaken within unilateralism, that is, outside of the collective mandate of the UN. When such unilateral action is undertaken, it would seem that States are left on their own will to do as they please.

Furthermore, the war on terror has resulted in the violation of some of the basic human rights and standards, such as rights to a fair trail and rights not to be arbitrary arrested nor detained. What we have seen is the implementation of the so-called rendition policy, where terror suspects are being moved from one country to another often below and above the limits of justice. This is one of the things that human security sought to prevent, that is, basic violations of people's freedoms.

3.3 HIV AIDS and other Communicable Diseases

The world is still battling with dealing effectively with diseases such as HIV and AIDS and other communicable diseases. The devastating effect of HIV and AIDS is that it is robbing many societies of their economically active segments of the population. HIV and AIDS create a strain on the already overstretched government resources especially in the sphere of health.

Furthermore, many people still suffer from preventable diseases, especially in Africa, such as malaria.

3.4 Poverty and Underdevelopment

A sizable number of the world population find themselves in situations of poverty and underdevelopment. According to the 2006 Human Development Index issued by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) about 1.2 billion people are without access to safe water; and almost 2.6 billion are without access to sanitation. Furthermore, about 2 million children die each year due to lack of access to safe water and sanitation.

While a huge number of people continue to live in poverty and underdevelopment, the world leaders have failed to reach agreement of an appropriate international trade and development agreement. It would virtually be impossible, for the countries of the South to fight poverty and improve the lives of their people without a proper international regime on development. Therefore, Parliamentarians the world over, must continue to criticize the collapse of the DOHA Round of international development negotiations.

3.5 Human Rights and Good Governance

Another challenge facing human security is in the area of human rights and good governance in the world. While it can said that the latter part of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century have seen improvements in the area of good governance, more work remains to be done. For example, there is a need to strengthen the rule of law in many societies especially those coming out of conflicts. There is also a need to ensure that the advances made in specific countries in the area of human rights and good governance are not reversed.

The Report of the Commission on Human Security observed that the process leading to a democratic system is fraught with risks and potential reversals as competing social, political and economic forces vie for control and power.[8]

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[8] Human Security Now: Commission on Human Security, 2003.

This is particularly true of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) today as the country battles to remain stable following a successful round of Presidential and Legislative elections. The legitimacy of the result of the Presidential run-off between the incumbent President Kabila and Vice President Bemba is being contested by the latter. The international community has to put pressure on the parties to ensure that in their contestation of the result, they remain within the realm of the law.

4. Addressing the challenges

The challenges facing human security present themselves in different ways and as such, they require interventions at different levels. However, what is certain, and as stated in the report of the Human Security Commission, the challenges require an integrated approach from all stakeholders.

Firstly, there is a need to re-confirm the importance of multilateralism under the UN as the only legitimate institution to guarantee world peace. Placing the UN at the centre of world events also means an acceptance that the processes to reform and transform the UN should continue unabated. For instance, Parliaments and Parliamentarians should be able to effectively influence the recently formed Human Rights Council. They also need to be able to make input to the work of the UN Peacebuilding Commission.

Secondly, there is a need to ensure that important international commitments are fulfilled such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It seems that, nowadays it has become common cause and at worse a cliché to state that, "most of the developing countries, especially in Africa, would not meet the MDGs.[9]" The eight MDGs are a significant step by the leaders of the world to tackle challenges relating to poverty, access to health care and access to affordable education.

The MDGs contain valuable and noble goals about the kind of a world that all humanity wants to see being built. For instance, goal one is about eradicating

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[9] Africa and MDGs: Review of Progress, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA).

extreme poverty and the first objective of this goal is to reduce by half the proportion of people living on less than one dollar a day. In a nutshell, the MDGs are an embodiment of human security. Therefore a cliché like the one referred to above should be challenged. One way of challenging it is to ensure that there is a continued focus on the implementation and review in terms of the meeting of targets of the MDGs. It is important for all States to ensure that they focus all the Goals including Goal eight (8). Goal eight (8) of the MDGs deals with building a global *partnership for development*, which must be based on, the proper needs of the countries of the South, especially those in Africa.

4. Role of Parliamentarians

Parliaments and Parliamentarians have a central role in defense of human security both at a national, regional and international levels.

National Level Initiatives:

- Parliaments must ensure that appropriate legislative framework is created in their countries to protect the sections of the population who are most vulnerable; these could be, women, children, people with disabilities and rights of minorities. On an on-going basis, Parliaments must be able to assess how their countries are doing with the implementation of relevant legislation aimed at protecting the vulnerable people. For instance, in 2006 the South African Parliament instituted a review of equality legislation in order to check how far the country has gone in protecting the vulnerable sections of our population.

- Parliaments must ensure that they actively engage in effective oversight over their Executive with regards to international commitments that they make. This applies specifically to international treaties and protocols seeking to strengthen a culture of human rights and respect for the rule of law. Parliaments have to ensure that such

protocols are not only signed by the Executive but that they are ratified and where applicable, ensure that appropriate legislative machinery is put in place for them to be domesticated.

- Related to the above, Parliamentarians especially those in the North, have the responsibility to support their counterparts in the South. Among other things, these Parliamentarians have to follow-up on their governments to check if they are meeting the commitments that they have made towards contributing to peace, stability and development in the world. A practical example would be the United Kingdom Commission for Africa Report. While there it is expected that all Parliamentarians engage with the implementation of the recommendations of the Africa report, this task would be made comparatively easier when the Parliamentarians from the UK engage with their Executive on the implementation of the recommendation of the Africa Report.

Regional and International Levels

- Parliamentarians have to strengthen their co-operation in order to be able to impact on new and emerging issues especially in the context of the UN. These would include, but not limited to, the recently created Peacebuilding Commission and the Human Rights Council. Essentially, what is needed is a strong parliamentary dimension to international affairs, which is able to influence the outcomes of these new initiatives.

- Parliamentary international institutions strengthen the voice of otherwise a relatively weak voice of Parliaments in international relations. Thus, it is important for such institutions to identify the specific areas in their regions which require a focus in as far as human security is concerned and work towards addressing these. For instance, the Pan-African Parliament (PAP), through its Standing

Committee on Justice and Human Rights has been attempting to focus on issues of respect for human rights in Africa. Among other things, it has proposed to create a Desk Office on Human Rights as well to also inter-phase with relevant African Union (AU) institution dealing with human rights.

5. Conclusion

It is almost three years since the report of the Commission on Human Security was issued. Therefore it becomes important to review the extent to which humanity has been able to meet the objectives of human security. It is also important to evaluate those actions taken by world leaders that have either reversed or affected progress towards the realization of human security. It would also be important for Parliamentarians to raise questions relating to the extent to which their own countries have been able to mainstream human security in their legislative framework. At an international level, it is necessary to review the extent to which human security has been mainstreamed in the agendas of international, regional and national security organizations as recommended by the Commission on Human Security.