

# **Informal Thematic Debate of the 65<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly on Human Security**

**14 April 2011, 3.00-5.45 pm**

## **Interactive Debate 2: Human Security – Its Application and Added Value**

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### **The Environmental Dimension of Human Security: Freedom from Hazard Impacts<sup>2</sup>**

#### **1. Natural Disasters and Human Security**

The cascading effects of a devastating earthquake and tsunami in Japan on 11 March 2011 that triggered a major nuclear catastrophe points to the relevance of Beck's theory of a "global risk society". The number of victims of the earthquakes in Haiti and in Chile in 2010 and of the tsunamis of 2004 and of 2011 differed due to the respective social vulnerability as a result of the degree of protection and coping capacities but also due to local resilience based on the empowerment of the people. While hazards cannot be prevented, their impact can be reduced.

These hazards did not affect national and international security but they had severe impacts on the human security of human beings and the most affected communities and on their water, soil, food, health and livelihood security. This is the background for a fourth pillar of human security as "*Freedom from Hazard Impacts*" to deal with the environment, sustainable development and disasters and to include the respective organizations, programmes and initiatives within the UN system.

#### **2. Two Parallel Policy Debates**

Two debates focused on environmental and human security in the UN General Assembly and the UN Security Council. The UN Secretary-General has responded with his reports on *Climate change and its possible security implications* in 2009 and on *Human Security* in 2010, where he referred to "the threats posed by natural disasters" for human security and suggested applying this concept to climate change and to the increase in frequency and intensity of climate-related hazard events.

#### **3. Goal: Introduce the Environmental Dimension of Human Security**

The *Global Environmental and Human Security Handbook for the Anthropocene* argues that the end of the Cold War, globalization and global environmental change have caused a global reconceptualization of security. It develops the environmental dimension of human security

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<sup>2</sup> The author appreciates the critical comments and suggestions of Úrsula Oswald Spring, UNAM-CRIM (Mexico). This paper draws also on our joint scientific work and has benefitted from intensive discussions. He is grateful to Mr. Michael Headon (UK) for language editing this text.

and reviews the human, environmental, water, food, health, livelihood and gender security debates. It refers to the new human and environmental security challenges we face and reviews *coping* efforts with *Global Environmental Change, Disasters and Security*.

#### **4. Fourth Human Security Pillar: Freedom from Hazard Impacts**

In 2005, the United Nations University Institute on Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS) suggested “Freedom from Hazard Impact” focusing on “reducing vulnerability of societies confronted with natural and human-induced hazards”. Human security addresses threats that endanger the lives and livelihoods of individuals and communities. Its mission is “to improve the knowledge base for the assessment of vulnerability and coping capacity of societies facing natural and human-induced hazards”.

“Freedom from Hazard Impacts” calls for reducing the environmental and social vulnerability and enhancing the coping capabilities of societies confronted with environmental, geophysical and climate-related hazards. “Freedom from hazard impact” implies that people can mobilize their resources to address sustainable development goals. Human security as freedom from hazard impact is achieved when people who are vulnerable to environmental hazards and disasters that are often intensified by poverty, food insecurity, improper housing in flood-prone and coastal areas are better warned of impending hazards, and are *protected* against them and *empowered* to prepare themselves for them.

#### **5. Human Security Network, Friends of Human Security and UNGA Debate on Human Security on 22 May 2008**

The *Human Security Network* endorsed this goal. The *Friends of Human Security* have discussed climate change and disasters since April 2007. In the UN General Assembly meeting on human security in May 2008, many countries listed environmental degradation, climate change, natural disasters and forced migration as major threats to human security.

The Secretary-General in his report of 2010 applied the human security concept to “Climate change and the increase in the frequency and intensity of climate-related hazard events”, where “vulnerable groups are particularly at risk,” from the “the immediate impacts of climate-related disasters” and “displacement and migration”. He also noted agreement:

on the need to place climate change in the broader context of sustainable development and poverty eradication ...[by] mainstreaming disaster reduction and risk management into national development plans, promoting community-based adaptation and mitigation plans, and accelerating the transfer and deployment of information, knowledge and technologies, ... to ... countries most vulnerable to climate change.

He stressed the need for “a better understanding of the interlinkages between climate change and other dimensions of human security” that could “help assess the causes and identify the actions needed to manage the combined risks of climate-related insecurities”, in fragile spots where “the international community is required to assist countries in reducing the social stresses that emerge when State institutions are overstretched and the delivery of basic services is inadequate”.

#### **6. Threats to the Environmental Dimension of Human Security**

Since 2007 climate change has been an agenda item of the human security debate at the UN. “Freedom from Hazard Impacts” may now be added as a fourth pillar. Putting the environment and natural hazards on the human security agenda means addressing its impacts on water, soil, food, health and livelihood security.

Global environmental change as the outcome of the interaction between the earth and human systems and of direct human interference with nature has become a scientific, political and security issue since the 1970s. Since 2004, climate change has become a security concern. While the international security debates have addressed it as a ‘threat multiplier’, the national security debate has addressed threats for a nation and how to respond.

A human security perspective on climate change puts human beings, communities and humankind in the centre, addresses how *physical* and *societal* impacts of climate change pose HS dangers, and how human beings, states and the international community can cope to avoid major human catastrophes.

As ‘we’ are the threat (through our energy consumption), it is ‘we’ who have to change our consumption and must adapt governance structures to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions by 50% between 1990 and 2050. This implies a shift from *business-as-usual* strategies towards an alternative sustainability paradigm.

A *policy-focused human security approach* to climate change prioritizes the climate-induced security threats humankind will *face* during the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Its task is to develop policies for coping better with the human security impacts of climate change by measures of mitigation, adaptation and resilience-building to *protect* and to *empower* the affected people. This requires local survival strategies and global strategies for a decarbonization of the world economy.

In a human security approach non-military means prevail. The development of new scientific knowledge, its technological application and its effective political implementation matters. Such an *approach* allows policymakers and scientists to develop coping strategies. Its task is to allocate the resources needed for these policy measures in order to achieve the goals in a proactive manner. This a fundamental shift from short-termism to a legally binding post-Kyoto regime in order to promote sustainable development and resilience in the poorest countries most affected by climate change, and to recover environmental services for adaptation and mitigation globally.

## **7. Societal Impacts of Global Environmental Change for Human Security and its Sectoral Components**

From a human security perspective climate change directly impacts on water, soil, food, health and livelihood security. It affects water quantity and quality, posing a direct challenge to human health. Water is also crucial for soil and food security. The policy agenda has evolved from poverty alleviation, diverse development paradigms, and sustainability to financial, physical, human, societal, political and cultural capitals and to sectoral security issues that affect human security.

1. *Water security* suggests “that every person has access to enough safe water at an affordable cost to lead a healthy and productive life and that the vulnerable are protected from the risks of water-related hazards.”
2. “Soil security is achieved when efforts succeed to conserve soil fertility, contain land degradation and combat desertification and when the consequences of drought are reduced by improving livelihood and human wellbeing of the people.”
3. *Food security* is achieved “when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”.
4. While the WHO uses a state-centred understanding of health security related to epidemics, bioterrorism and prevention, a human security approach focuses on the interrelationship

between human health and environmental services as important health providers, and expresses the crucial relationship between water, food and health security.

5. Livelihood security treats the poor and vulnerable as active participants with a policy agenda focusing on development and structural inequity. Livelihood security is closely related to water, food and health security, where highly vulnerable groups are exposed to human insecurity due to external and internal pressures and the existing entitlement base in land rights and access to productive tools, inheritance, etc.

Climate change will exacerbate these sectoral security problems if the communities and social groups fail to create mitigation and adaptation strategies with resilience-building through preventive learning and decisions.

## **8. Human Security Perspectives on Water and Soil Security**

For many developing countries water insecurity is a severe threat for human security as a result of rapidly growing demand and climate change impacts. Soil erosion, degradation and desertification have become severe challenges for human survival and are push factors for internal displacements and human migration. “Virtual water” as food trade can relieve conflicts over scarce water if the population can afford these imports.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, land degradation and desertification as well as famine and migration have been perceived as human security threats by the *Commission on Human Security*. Drought and famine are challenges to food security and to health security. Desertification is also a critical environmental and human security challenge.

## **9. Human Security Responses to Security Dangers Posed by Global Environmental Change Impacts**

What policy responses are needed to achieve human security as “Freedom from Hazard Impact”? “Dangerous climate change” may become a human and international security threat if the stabilization of the increase of global average temperature of 2°C fails. If the linear effects of climate change should cross a threshold and trigger “tipping points in the climate system”, such as the melting of the glaciers in the Andes and in the Himalayas, its geopolitical impacts may be far more extreme than the effects of 11 March 2011. The industrialized countries are not immune to the consequences of climate-related hazards.

## **10. Strategies for Coping with Environmental Threats to Human Security**

The catastrophe of 11 March 2011 stresses the need to develop the *Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015* further to cope with complex emergencies and the cascading effects of complex hazards in order to protect the people.

“Freedom from Hazard Impacts” addresses the consequences for human security but also for water, soil, food, health and livelihood security. From a policy perspective a holistic coping strategy requires better horizontal coordination of strategies, policies and measures of ministries and international organizations. The best human security strategy for achieving “Freedom from Hazard Impact” is to reduce global GHG by 50% globally by 2050. But in Copenhagen and Cancun a lack of political will to implement this goal prevailed.

Even if this goal should be achieved the extreme weather events will further increase and may lead to cascading effects triggered by climate change and its physical and societal impacts. “Freedom from Hazard Impact” requires a proactive environmental strategy for implementing the three Rio Conventions.

The Secretary-General proposed in his report on “Climate change and its possible security implications”

several ‘threat minimizers’, ... [to] lower the risk of climate-related insecurity... Accelerated action at all levels is needed to bolster these threat minimizers.

These measures could enhance the human security of the people affected most. The strategies for sustainable development must be developed further to a fourth ‘sustainability revolution’.

Changes in the Earth System and the inescapable consequences put humankind in a predicament: we know that our actions put our survival at risk ... Even if the survival of the present generation is probably not at stake, that of future generations will be. ... This requires that we all must act now and avoid postponing needed decisions to the next generation to cope then with more severe challenges and more costly impacts of global environmental change.

The daily survival problems of five billion people, their social vulnerability and physical exposure to climate change are creating additional dangers for human security, but also challenges for an integrated human security approach that combines all four pillars.

“Freedom from Hazard Impacts” implies a close cooperation between those agencies working on the global environmental agenda and on the hazard agenda. It may be an appropriate time for the United Nations General Assembly to consider adding to the first three pillars of Human Security as

- “Freedom from Fear” and the peacekeeping, humanitarian law and disarmament agenda;
- “Freedom from Want” referring to the human and sustainable development agenda;
- “Freedom to live in Dignity” and human rights, democratic governance and rule of law;

a fourth pillar as

- “Freedom from Hazard Impacts” that introduces into the human security framework at the United Nations General Assembly the policy agendas dealing with global environmental change issues as well as natural hazards and disasters (early warning, disaster response, disaster preparedness, resilience building and reduction of social vulnerability).