

International Initiatives and Cooperation (Session I Discussion)

Dr. Vira Soomboon:

“Thank you Mr. Feigenblatt, I think it’s a very interesting paper because it is often said that the field of international relations is very poor in terms of theory. They keep talking about realists and non-realists and idealists and liberalism and so on. Mr. Feigenblatt has tried to raise human security not just as a concept but as a paradigm shift. So human security is not just a policy or a practice, but to me, it seems that it can be a way of understanding and imagining politics in the world today. This could be interesting because it could change the whole perspective. He has done a lot of comparisons on how we can change the way we look at the world and think about policy and implementation if we make this shift based on the realist or new realist position to human security.”

Dr. Mary Racelis:

“My field is social anthropology and I think we feel very comfortable in the behavioral sciences with the human security concepts and so on. But one of the things I find trying to promote is that the economic sector of society and the international domain of economics do not seem to have satisfactory ways of incorporating it into ways of their paradigms. Just by way of example, on Monday and Tuesday of next week there’s a major meeting at the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in Manila bringing in different ministers of finance and others from the region to talk on the issue or explore the issue given the growth in Asia: “Is poverty still relevant?” “Who Is Left Behind?” That was the original title and I think there was such an upset in the bank about that that they have changed it to something more innocuous. The point is I was asked to kind of outline the human security elements for the future in Asia and when I submitted a draft my sociologist colleagues said—‘you know, yes it is all very pertinent but you know it’s not going to make a dent on the minds of the economists and financial policy makers whom we have invited to this conference because the language is not economic,’ he said ‘if you can say something about the consequences of insecurity in cost-benefit ratios in terms of unrest and how that affects the gross domestic product then maybe you will get somewhere.’ They said, ‘we sympathize with you but you’re not going to make a dent’. So that’s the issue I would like to present, especially to those representing Japan because the ADB is run essentially with Japanese orientation. The Japanese have a very strong influence on ADB policy and I think we have seen some of the social humanitarian issues coming into that. Your last comment suggests that maybe it’s really an illusion and if the ADB as a primary lending institution for development is now not only questioning the paradigm or the human security prospective of Japan. If Japan cannot figure out how it fits into the economics, what is in the future for human security?”

Dr. Yukiko Nishikawa:

“It was a very interesting presentation! They have different focuses but each concerned a very interesting topic. In the first one, many of us are very interested in human security and refugee issues partly because of the current situation in Burma and especially Thailand, which has been receiving a number of refugees in the past. In terms

of refugee issues and human security, I think there are two human security concerns. Firstly, there is the human security of the refugee themselves. Secondly, the human security of the people in the country that receive refugees. And I think the speaker is working for the protection of refugees. But at the same time, it is probably impossible to ignore the security of the people who receive the refugees, the people who live near the camps, people who live in the surrounding regions of the receiving country. My question to the speaker, as a UNHCR representative, your focus is probably the protection of refugees, but at the same time, I'm wondering whether a UNHCR does any work on human security of the people who live in the surrounding regions of the camps? That's my first question. For my second question, a number of us must be interested in how the Thai government reacts to the situation. As the speaker qualified, Thailand has not ratified the 1951 refugee conventions, but Thailand is one of the leading countries that emphasizes human security. So I'm wondering how Thailand is trying to see the situation – does the Thai government see the situation as refugees are not really concerning human security?

In regards to the second and third speaker, it is always interesting how non Japanese researchers see the situation of Japanese human security policy and the action. My question to the second speaker: the focus, UN Trust fund for Human Security, the issue on human security, we discuss a lot about the concept, but what in reality do people do to restore human security? That is a really difficult question partly because not many methods have been developed to work on human security. So, as the speaker seems to talk to the UNDP country program adviser, what exactly do you think the project has contributed to human security?

And the third speaker: it was very interesting how you see Japan's ODA and your emphasis on the paradigm. It was very new for me, a new way of understanding and interpreting Japanese policy. I think one issue that you may need to look at is that quite often in ODA policy in practice people ask the Japanese government what can we do rather than what do you want to do partly because there are lots of limitations. Some of them come from a historical legacy while others come from a legal framework. It is quite often not an option, or rather that the options are very limited. When Japan does some kind of project, they quite often have to think about what they can do rather than what they want to do. So you may need to look at historical development of ODA policy and how do you see Japan's ODA policy evolution? In the past, Japan was more concerned with aspects of development; nowadays it expands these building components as well development. How do you see the evolution of Japanese ODA policy?"

Unidentified speaker:

"I am from the Global Cooperation Center at Osaka University. The session was quite interesting and quite revealing. I honestly have mixed feelings – it may be like a Thai person reading a newspaper article about Thai politics written by foreign writers for an English newspaper. I didn't know we were doing this? I wasn't conscious about it, but I would like to elaborate. In Japan what is going on is more chaotic and more diverse. I have two questions for the second and third respective speakers: the first, Mr. Gomes, was quite interesting regarding the discussion about the trust fund and human security. One question to Mr. Gomez and, to a certain extent, Dr. Nishikawa, I think some focus of

the Trust Fund like those who promote interagency activities and institution building. Those lines seem to overlap with the UNDP. So if you know anything, I'd like to know about the role of the UNDP and the design and implementation of the trust fund. And the question to Mr. von Feigenblatt – you mentioned the development of the human security discourse in Japan, what kind of pressure, domestic and international, is behind this development in interpreting Japan's policy for human securities?"

Robert Vaughn:

"I'm a former MAIDS student and just finished working at the High Commission for Human Rights. Two things I feel problems with human securities just from hearing the presentations. One is accountability. There's no accountability in international law and I think many a time the concept takes away from the accountability of human rights so, when one government adopts human security strategy, it actually takes away the accountability towards international law and ends up not protecting people. In other words, they adopt the strategy instead of human rights convents. I would also like to talk about consensus. Many argue that, because of the lack of consensus, it gives a robust strategy for human security. But it makes it very hard to get anything done in the General Assembly or the Security Council when there's no consensus on an issue. This is why I don't think the concept will be mainstreamed into UN policies because to get 191 countries to agree on something there needs to be a consensus on what the theory is. I think those are the two main problems with human security as a concept. I also think that listening to the discussion on Japan was very interesting. I think that one thing that is neglected is the policy on Japanese aid with regards to using human security as a strategy now in relation to China and how much aid China is now putting into the market. Japan has really adopted the human security strategy and really pushed it hard over the last ten years. It has been criticized in the past for not giving development aid in the 60s 70s and 80s and now that China is becoming a major player in regional aid donations I think that will have a real impact on where Japan goes with this human security strategy."

Unidentified speaker:

"Recently I've heard that Thai government policy to the refugee camps are going to start allow refugees to have more freedom to work outside to generate income to travel to other areas. But, at the same time, they are also having a policy of reallocation of refugees overseas and they've sent ten thousand Burmese to other countries and I'm wondering what's going to happen to the refugees?"

My second question is about Japan. There are fairly good theories about why Japan has picked up human security but I was wondering why if Japan and Canada picked up human security why didn't similar countries, like Germany or Brazil, why didn't they pick up strong human security policies? why is it these two countries? Because Germany is very similar with a constitutional set up with very similar politics in terms of the security council. Why isn't it more widespread?"

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees:

“There are a lot of questions but I’ll try to answer them in the next couple of minutes even though they are difficult questions. First of all, let me propose my idea of human security because there seems to be many definitions and many perspectives on this subject. I understand human security as is related to human rights. Human rights are the basic minimum level of how human beings will live and survive. And that is a fixed standard. It has international laws to support it. It is recognized internationally. Human security is appropriate based on minimum levels guaranteed by international law. So if we use this conceptual framework then looking at the human security of refugees and asylum seekers or stateless persons – meaning that the minimum standards in the human rights law – will guarantee certain basic rights of refugees which they can build on that to realize their human potential which can lead to human development. So in this sense, what I would not try to respond is the comment by the former Prime Minister that the UN is not my father, but the UN is not trying to be and we are UNCR who were invited by the Royal Thai government to come to work in Thailand. We are guests and friends, we are not supra nation states; we work in partnership. As was noted, Thailand is not a member of the 1951 conventions and it is generally known that the work to help refugees is not so smooth in the country. However, Thailand has been hosting over 1.2 million refugees since the Indo-China period and now there are over 140 thousand refugees in the country. Thailand is also a board member of the UNHCR executive committee. So there are many positive signs in Thailand but there is always room for improvement. One of which is related to the living conditions of refugees. Refugees are considered as being over dependent on assistance. And they cannot be secure by their own means. What the UNHCR has been trying to advocate, particularly in Thailand, is to allow refugees to stand on their own feet and earn a living for their own development and security. So there are many rumors as to how the Thai government reacts to UNHCR proposals to request for a pilot to be conducted to allow refugees to work outside the camp. There have been positive responses so far but, given the expected political change in the country, some issues have been kept from further discussion. I will try to respond to some of the other questions from Dr. Yukiko. How does UNHCR focus on the human security of refugees? What about other the surrounding communities, Thai communities? UNHCR is one of the UN agencies that focus on refugees. There are other UN agencies, under the UN umbrella, that focus on other aspects of the UN operations including programs related to human security which focus on the Thai community. The UNHCR has projects related to those surrounding communities who have been impacted by the refugee camps for example environmental projects, support to villages building dams for local communities, and providing some educational assistance to the effected communities. Another question from Dr. Yukiko is how the Thai government sees the situation of refugees in Thailand. As we already know Thailand has been working with UNHCR to address the situation of refugees from neighboring countries. Thailand has been quite flexible to allow UNHCR and refugees alike to cross the border into Thailand. It is understandable given the proximity of Thailand to neighboring countries that many people come to Thailand. Those who are in camps amount to about 140,000 but there are possibly millions outside the camp. So how can the international community share this burden with resettlements and, if this is not yet possible, how can Thailand be more flexible to allow these people to live in Thailand and enjoy their basic human rights?”

Oscar Gomez:

“Professor of the Philippines, I have three answers for you. I will go from the most difficult to the easiest. The economy is based on economic rationality which is very irrational. Economists working on institutional economics going out of game theory have built-in theories on how to make a strategy of competition which is selfishness. I think that is the focus for economical theories on corporation and what we give to human securities. If you go to the business example, there are two initiatives which are very helpful. If you talk about corporate social responsibility you can make human security go inside because that is about what enterprises are responsible for in the environment they are affecting. So you will find that there are arguments for your position. Also, there is a movement now from the international banks about the equator principles, which basically means that you don’t loan money if these countries or these peoples are doing these kinds of things against humanity. This is also one kind of affect on the economic system. Last month the Asian Pacific Economic Council met and wrote one chapter on human security. I don’t agree because they included energy security which could be a weapon of power, you can see what it did to Russia, with cutting the oil supply...but anyway there’s also one chapter on human security so you can find an argument about introducing HS in the economical forum. Concerning your question, the contribution is that they are making them work in teams, there are UN agencies and other partners which, out of the framework of HS, respect the mundane.”

[Tape ends]