Mainstreaming Human Security in the Asia-Pacific Region
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Any talk of "Human Security" today must surely and inevitably address the current situation in Burma/Myanmar and the plight of the people in the face of the recent crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators by the military junta ruling over the country. The world should not forget that it was Daw Suu Kyi's democratic part which won the elections in 1990 and it is her party which should be recognized as the legitimate government of the country. The will of the people has since been suppressed by authoritarianism and Daw Suu Kyi is still under arrest in breach of international law.

In the face of the recent rise in fuel and food prices and related deprivations in that country, it is no wonder that people demonstrated. It is an abhorrent reality that use of force has been applied against peaceful demonstrators with resulting deaths, injuries and arrests. There is now plenty of revulsion being expressed by the world community against those who should be responsible. Yet action, real action, is tardy and constrained for lack of adequate international will, particularly on the part of those who should exert influence over the powers-that-be in the country. Amidst all the global, regional and local procrastination, it is Daw Suu Kyi's words which inspire: they – the powers-that-be – are not free from fear. It is they who are insecure when faced with those who represent democracy and human rights, and the higher moral ground personifying human security. It is they – the powers-that-be – who commit crimes against humanity in their moral insecurity, resulting in rampant violence and violations.

We are also faced with a moral dilemma today. Can our discussions here add value to what should be done? Or will they simply add a plethora of words to the profusion of vocabulary? It all depends on us.

Our Asian region is a region of great diversity and paradoxes. It is home to the country with the world's largest Muslim population with a democratic system. Asia is peopled by the world's two most populous nations – one democratic and the other highly successful economically but with political ambivalence. Regrettably the past couple of years have witnessed three Coup d'Etats in the Asia-Pacific region, creating ripples of unease throughout the land. Democratic and undemocratic regimes often exist at lose quarters, while the development patterns vary from developed and high technology societies, mainly in urban areas, to rural and developing areas, with different paces of industrialization and agricultural production. There remain great disparities, and while poverty has been reduced on several fronts, it is still pervasive in many parts of the region. Warfare adds salt to wounds. Think of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Occupied Palestinian Territories. Think of the millions of refugees and internally displaced persons. Think of humane responses of asylum, contrasting with inhumane practices which lock them in prisons or immigration centres, when they are merely seeking a safe haven. Think of food shortages and natural disasters. Think of the excuse that the country is too poor to feed its people, when the country is in fact too rich in its nuclear arms

proliferation and militarization. Contrasts, contradictions living side-by-side on the world's most populous continent.

What about human security? The notion of "human security" is subject to a variety of interpretations. At the heart of the notion is the need to shift the former emphasis on State security (national security) to the security of individuals and communities. It implies freedom from fear and freedom from want. Intriguingly, the practitioners of human security vary in their emphases; some address the fear factor (e.g. freedom from threats to life such as those caused by armed conflicts), while others underline the want factor (e.g. elimination of poverty and underdevelopment). However, it may be asked what the comparative advantage of "human security" is, when fear and want factors are already covered by other notions such as human rights, democracy, peace and sustainable development. A possible answer is that it is more geared to addressing the threats factor and to shift the State-centric focus to a more individual-centric dimension. Yet that leads to the challenge of moving from the conceptual to the practical – particularly to translate the conceptual perspective into programs and activities with a difference.

In searching for the "what, who, how, where and when" to mainstream human security into the Asian region, there are various entry-points which invite us to self-reflect on how we can contribute. The first entry point is to recognize that human security has gradually crept into the multilateral setting and has become an increasingly acceptable and accepted concept in international relations, with possible Asian contribution. For instance, at the World Summit of Heads of Government under the United Nations (UN) umbrella in 2005, the Outcome Document, with Asian support, thus stated that:

"The interrelated challenges of human security and peace require an integrated multilateral response of the international system, a consistent human security policy that focuses on the responsibility of each and everyone. In short, it is a call for the globalization of responsibility for human security".

The precursors of this development included the 1994 UN Development Program (UNDP)'s Human Development Report which stated that:

"Human security is not a concern with weapons – it is a concern with human life and dignity…human security is people-centered."

Later the UN secretariat established the UN Trust Fund for Human Security, but its remit was very broad, precisely because the UNDP definition was so broad. This was followed by the independent Commission on Human Security which prepared the report entitled "Human Security Now", which was presented to the UN Secretary General.

That Commission's report defined human security as:

"to protect the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfillment…The vital core of life is a set of elementary rights and freedoms

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which people enjoy. What people consider to be "vital", what they consider to be "of the essence of life" and "crucially important" – varies across individuals and societies."

The linkage with human rights was identified by the report as follows:

"those rights have to be upheld comprehensively – civil and political as well as economic and social…Human rights and human security are therefore mutually reinforcing…"

The notion was then taken up by the High level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, set up by the Secretary General to promote UN reform. The UN has now established a Human Security Unit within the Office of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. The Unit has sponsored many seminars on diverse issues ranging from peace/armed conflicts to transnational crime/human trafficking. There is also a global human security network of like-minded countries which has tackled themes such as protection of civilians in armed conflicts and weapons reduction.

Interestingly, unlike human rights which have specific benchmarks in the form of human rights treaties of binding force as well as entrenchment in the UN Charter, human security is less well-concretized since it lacks an international instrument, such as a treaty, on the issue. However, this need not to be an impediment if implementation measures are evolved to concretize human security in real terms, particularly at the national level. This is already happening to some extent, as will be seen in the sections below. It is thus a work-in-progress which can blossom progressively through lessons learned.

On another front, the aspiration of human security is challenged by "what to do?" where there are serious human rights violations such as genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes and crimes against humanity. On the one hand, the international community should have the resources and will to protect the victims, particularly under the UN whose Security Council is the only multilateral entity vested with the power to adopt binding coercive measures such as sanctions. On the other hand, many states are adamant about their national sovereignty and are prone to advocate all too readily the concept of non-interference in the internal affairs of a state as an argument against military intervention. The position is now clearer since the Outcome Document above which voices a new notion – "the responsibility to protect" – the obligation of all countries to protect their peoples from those violations, failing which the UN should act to curb such violations. This obligation differs from the previously vague notion called "humanitarian intervention" advocated in some quarters which claimed that the international community, even individual states, have the right to intervene militarily in the case of egregious human rights violations – even where the situation pertains to the nationals of another country.

The criteria for action in respect of the responsibility to protect are clearer than the call for humanitarian intervention. Under the former, where a country fails to take action against the serious violations noted above, for example genocide, the UN has a legitimate reason to act on behalf of the victims, even through enforcement or military measures.

The criteria for action include the need to prove that the action is necessary and proportionate to the risk/threat and the parameter that the action is not to aggravate the situation. The arbiter should be the UN Security Council as the pinnacle of the multilateral system. However, what remains a disputed area is this: where the multilateralism fails to act, do countries have the residual power to take military action against another where the latter fails to abide by the responsibility to protect? Alas, the quandary of unilateralism.

A second entry point is to maximize regional inputs to promote human security. As in other regions, Southeast Asia has witnessed the growth of regional cooperation which has impact on democracy, human rights and human security. This is the case of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). While the region still attaches great importance to the principle of non-interference in the affairs of a State, the more enlightened governments should increasingly position themselves to advocate that the commitment to human security, democracy and human rights should not be – cannot be seen as interference in internal affairs. National sovereignty should be measured and treasured by respecting the will of the people, and not the fiat of political kleptocrats.

On a salutary note, the notion of human security has crept into ASEAN's vision for the future and the concretization of more specific targets by the year 2020 under three pillars: the ASEAN Security Community, ASEAN Economic Community and ASEAN Socio-cultural Community. For instance, in relation to freedom from fear and freedom from want, human security-related activities are implied in one or more of the activities under the action plans to implement the three Communities, e.g. anti-poverty measures, protection of vulnerable groups such as women and children, human rights education, and the potential setting up of a regional human rights mechanism.

ASEAN is also now moving to formulate an ASEAN Charter as its key treaty and constitutional document. In the drafting of this Charter, the issues of democracy, human security, human rights, sustainable development, peace and good governance will inevitably arise. There could be various conditions stipulated in the Charter such as the rights and duties of membership, even to the extent of suspension of rights and or expulsion in the case of key violations.

The security arm of ASEAN is the ASEAN Regional Forum; it has engaged in more concrete activities with impact on human security. The Forum interplays with confidence-building measures such as training of law enforcers, preventive diplomacy such as steps to avoid conflicts, and conflict resolution, such as dispute settlement mechanisms. Those mechanisms are, to some extent, already available in ASEAN and are exemplified by the possible establishment of a High Council to help settle disputes in the political field and a panel to settle trade disputes under the ASEAN Free Trade Area and related economic integration.

The third entry-point for integrating human security into the Asian region is through national and local settings, through a responsive mind set, with a concomitant policies and activities. Despite the absence of democracy in a number of countries, the

development picture looks more promising on some fronts. For instance, some ASEAN countries are meeting the target set by the UN Millennium Development Goals to reduce the number of those in absolute poverty (i.e. with less than one dollar a day income) by half by the year 2015.

On another front, several countries are incorporating human security directly into national action. This is exemplified by the shift from national security to human security in national planning and related institutions. There is an important paradigm shift for national security agencies, such as the National Security Council, the military, law enforcers and security/intelligence personnel. For instance, one South-east Asian country which used to concentrate its national security policy on anti-Communism measures has changed gear to tackle "non-traditional security issues" such as anti-crime (e.g. drugs and money-laundering), the statelessness of hill tribe children, the issue of migrant workers and human trafficking/smuggling. That country has even gone as far as to establish a ministry on social welfare and human security – the latter element is seen as part of the quest for freedom from want.

The rise of multiple forms of violence, extremism and terrorism poses an enormous challenge to human security, particularly at the national level. Are national reactions well-balanced in this regard? Democracy itself can be instrumental in preventing violence and extremism. By enabling dissident groups to enter the mainstream of playing by electoral rules and of gaining space in the institutions of government, this can help to prevent a sense of alienation and frustration which sow the seeds of violence and extremism.

When extremism leads to violence, there are already some national instruments – especially the possibility of using criminal laws – to address it. However, there is a need for more multi-disciplinary action to tackle the environment behind the discontent and related root causes. This may entail, for example, confidence-building measures, preventive diplomacy and dispute settlement. It may entail outreach measures to access constituencies – such as religious personnel, community leaders and related financial backers, who may exert positive influence on those who could otherwise resort to violence.

How to tackle the intimidating wave of terrorism? On the one hand, effective measures must be taken against terrorism, and there are already many national criminal laws which are available in this regard, guided by a host of international treaties and the UN's Counter-terrorism Committee. On the other hand, a worrying trend is the spread of laws and practices which are draconian and which pander to political agendas rather than real anti-crime needs. New laws and policies have proliferated – such as those allowing long periods of preventive detention without access to courts; impunity granted to law enforcers for misdeeds; exclusion of the judiciary form examining executive powers; and the creeping powers of the security/intelligence personnel. There is a need for balance between national security and human security, and the UN has already guided actions against terrorism by underlining that anti-terrorism measures should be respectful of human rights. For instance, there can be no justification for torture, abductions and extra-

judicial killings. Yet, in reality, there is much that is amiss, and there is a national tendency to address the terrorism challenge by introducing more and more laws.

The final entry point for mainstreaming is most directly linked with us at this conference today. How to do something practical beyond the merely the verbal and nominal? The range of abstracts and papers to be presented at this conference already open the door to an array of meaningful actions, such as programs to generate food security, disaster preparedness, mitigation and relief, protection of human rights, and measures to guarantee the welfare of not only our nationals but also non-nationals, such as refugees and stateless persons.

They are complemented by some "do-ables" which are already advocated internationally, for example in the Human Security Report 2005 (published from Canada) as a priority agenda: inter alia,

- protection of civilians from the impact of armed conflicts;
- reduction/elimination of weapons;
- prevention of and remedies for human rights abuses;
- action against criminal violence;
- action against human trafficking;
- protection of internally displaced persons and refugees;
- action against war and sexual violence;
- protection of child soldiers;
- action concerning HIV/AIDS and conflict.

There is also a shift in practice in regard to countries which contribute development aid. Japan, Canada and Switzerland now have programs based on human security, even though their emphases differ. Freedom from fear more than freedom from want? This seems to be the Canadian approach whereby its program caters to protection of civilians (e.g. the responsibility to protect), peace operations, conflict prevention (e.g. action to eradicate small arms), governance and accountability (e.g. promotion of the International Criminal Court and democracy), and public safety (e.g. anti-terrorism measures). Japan's approach is broader than the Canadian approach; it is more aimed at advocating the protection and empowerment of people. Much of the input has been to provide financial assistance to the Human Security Trust Fund and to help rehabilitate Southeast Asian economies after the 1997 economic crash. In practical terms, it has fostered anti-crime measures including those against human trafficking. Meanwhile, Switzerland's approach is more geared to the freedom from fear approach, such as to support the protection of civilians in armed conflict situations and the laws on the issue, i.e. international humanitarian law.

Asia should no longer envision itself as a mere recipient of development aid. It is strategically becoming a contributor of aid, particularly in the South-South dynamic, which also invites the mainstreaming of human security into programming. A recent Asian-Pacific call for action was provided by the 2007 Summit of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Forum as follows:

"14. We are repeatedly reminded of our region's vulnerability to natural disasters and the devastating human and economic costs arising from threats to human security. We recognized that we all face new risks and challenges to people and economies – including from the potential spread across borders of terrorism, pandemics, illegal drugs and contaminated products, and the consequences of natural disasters. We affirmed that human security is essential to economic growth and prosperity."

They thus affirmed their commitment to tackle terrorism, emergencies and natural disasters, pandemic and infection diseases, food and consumer product safety, and energy security through efficient energy markets, "characterized by free and open trade, secure and transparent frameworks for investment, clear price signals, market transparency, effective governance and competition."

That remains very much a governmental perspective. Today, our value-added is to broaden the practical nature of the human security notion even further, particularly from a civil society outlook and examples. Our conference is most timely as it helps to focus on identifying key issues and actions pertaining to human security in Asia, ranging from a critical assessment of human security to climate change, response to floods and natural disasters, the interplay between democracy and human security and between human rights and human security, displacement and exploitative migration, marginalized urbanites, natural resources and livelihood security, rural development, gender and human security, education and research, international cooperation, and the attenuation of violence and conflict.

In the richness of thought, reflection and commitment which will surely emerge throughout this forum, I am tempted to conclude that the Asian contribution is to exemplify, epitomize actions rather than words. I am tempted to self-reflect to identify my contribution to the process. I am tempted to say a prayer to give strength to the people of Burma/Myanmar. I am tempted to press for more international and regional action vis-a-vis authoritarianism in whatever activities I am involved in. I am inspired by Gandhian non-violence as a part of the Asian heritage, whether whichever part of me is Buddhist, Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Hindu or Atheist. For there can be no physical human security unless we also reach for the non-physical elements of human existence, the intangible worth of human value, human dignity and care, kindness and consideration for others who are in situations of deprivation and desperation. It is that multi-faceted human security which bears witness to the spirituality of humanity, inviting us to be an example of and for Hope-and-Action. Expressing, personifying hope amidst adversity in aspiration and inspiration.