

HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal
Thematic Debate on Human Security
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Dignity and Justice for All of Us:
Human Security on the Global Commons

President Srgjan Kerim, Distinguished Members of the General Assembly, Dear Colleagues and Friends,

I am honored to have this opportunity to address you on the crucial topic of human security and I thank President Kerim for his kind invitation.

The Third World is my first world, the most deprived and dangerous but also most diverse and dynamic part of the world. The region from which I come, the Middle East, embodies these qualities as well as anywhere in the third world. Perhaps because of its sometimes seemingly insuperable difficulties, the Middle East has accumulated an increasingly rich alphabet soup in an attempt to define it and to categorize the dynamics common throughout the region: MENA (Middle East and North Africa), WANA (West Asia and North Africa), NANE (North Africa and Near East), ROMENACA (Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia), and there must be more. They come and go. The region stretches from Marrakesh to Bangladesh, from Casablanca to Calcutta. It is currently enduring at least three wars which have already resulted in more displaced human beings than at any other time in human history. It contains some of the earth's driest

regions and some of its richest – not only in oil reserves, which often seem more like a curse than an asset, but in its largely untapped human potential which is where we must expend our efforts to engender hope of better lives than most people currently endure.

The term human security was coined to shift the focus of security from the state to the individual, to emphasize freedom from fear and want. But I would like to depart from the familiar dichotomy between security as the *defense of states* and security as a *personal right*, and offer a different perspective, viewing this question through a wider lens, a lens which captures the full gamut of inter-personal, community-oriented and culturally-founded relationships which take place between the levels of individual and state. This lens is the one with which I am the most familiar, and the lens, which I believe gives us a way to frame and implement effective and collective action toward the advancement of human security.

The scale of the elemental crises of the last few weeks in China and Myanmar have given us a glimpse of the challenges that the world will continue to face. They have reminded us of our common vulnerability and shared humanity while also emphasizing the need to bring the concept of human security from the conceptual to the practical as we ponder critical questions of responsibility and sovereignty. It would seem to me obvious that we must frame the meaning of security within an expanded context, that human security must now contain the imperative of *human survivability and resilience*.

Imbalances between nations – population growth, poverty, food, resources, ecology, migration, energy, money peace and cultural understanding – are pivotal security issues. They have the capacity to impact individual lives *exponentially* in all places across the world. As transnational issues, they are *multipliers of human security* – either for widespread stability or instability - and these multipliers can

provide a new foundation for human security as a responsibility of the *global commons*.

Let me explain what I mean by briefly reviewing current global conditions.

Population Security

World population is now 6.6 billion, and we're adding 220,000 new people each day. Our enlarging global population – combined with rising wages, purchasing power and consumption in the emerging economies – has escalated the demand for food, commodities, oil, and other resources. If the world is going to carry 9 billion people by 2050, we must all have the right to population security, ensuring that the resources available on this planet are sustainable in relation to our population growth and consumption per person.

Food Security

As the world grows more populous, many nations are also becoming more prosperous overall. Some two dozen states from the emerging South have enjoyed economic growth and become more dependent on each other's growth; but the poorer states of the developing South are just as dependent on demand from the North as they were thirty years ago. One billion people still live in extreme poverty, 70% of whom are in Africa. Unbearable poverty continues to afflict major regions of Asia and Latin America. Three-quarters of the world's poor live in rural areas, where food accounts for more than half of a family's spending.

As you are well aware, tightening food supplies and rising food demand are now resulting from:

- poor harvests
- lack of fresh water and fertile soil
- rising prices for seeds and fertilizer
- the use of food crops for bio-fuels

- increases in the land needed for meat and dairy production (displacing grain production for people)
- rising oil and transportation prices
- trade-distorting subsidies on agriculture
- and food export restrictions

As demand soars, supplies are unable to keep pace. Food aid, health services, and medicinal supplies also decline as the price of food goes up, pushing hundreds of millions into hunger and malnutrition, economic depression, and social unrest. It should be clear by now that water and food, which are essential to life, are human rights reflecting the personal dignity, common needs and well-being of humanity.

Resource Security

Nonrenewable resources are also being depleted at a rapid rate. As population, industrial output and consumption continue to rise, more and more capital and energy are needed to grow food and to locate, extract, and process the remaining resources. Major new investment is being diverted both into agriculture and the extraction of nonrenewable resources. While this increasing financial speculation in food and resources is decisive in meeting human needs, it is also draining the money that would otherwise be going into industrial production and basic capital growth.

This misallocation of investment – which is further distorted by uneven terms of trade – diminishes the quality of life and security for local populations across the world. Obviously, the inequitable distribution of world resources has a profound impact on human security. Each of us should have the right to an adequate supply of goods based on our interdependence with one another, the interests of our future welfare, and that of our descendants.

Environmental Security

Rising temperatures and extreme climate patterns are also having an enormous impact on human security. Many people – especially the

poor in some of the world's most crowded and marginally productive areas – are affected by:

- a lack of water for drinking and irrigation
- a decline in agricultural production
- increased resource scarcity
- loss of supportive wildlife
- widespread disease from mosquitoes and other pests
- declining health
- economic losses caused by hurricanes, tornadoes and cyclones
- volatility in economic output and trade
- and increasing poverty

The harmful impact of these climate extremes on human livelihoods and living conditions, combined with heightened competition for scarce resources, has triggered disputes over territory, food and water supplies, social and cultural traditions, and tribal and religious differences. Fundamental and unresolved issues of territoriality, identity and movement¹ of peoples lead to sectarian and ethnic violence, armed conflict, mass migration, and the spread of infectious disease. The health, well-being and rights of those who are forced to leave their homes and communities through external disruptions must be given particular attention. We usually think of migrants and refugees fleeing political conflict, but increasingly they are also victims of the menacing effects of global warming. We are currently witnessing many instances of this kind of temperature-driven civil strife and social displacement in parts of Central Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America.

Environmental stability, including the protection of displaced persons, is an essential human right that flows from our commitment to human

¹ *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol.28, No. 3, 1999, pp.483-498 (16), *Mapping Political Power Beyond State Boundaries*, Dr. Lothar Brock

dignity, our connectedness with all living beings, and our responsibility to the Earth.

Energy Security

In addition to food, resource and environmental instability, there is growing anxiety about whether the world has enough oil to meet its future energy requirements. As you know, an energy disruption in one area of the world has an immediate impact on prices and energy security in other areas. The national security dangers arising from dependence on foreign oil, combined with aggressive competition for strategic reserves of fossil fuels, will likely lead to further degradation of natural resources, continued global warming, and major economic instability, particularly in the world's most impoverished regions. And this is likely to further inflame extremism and terrorism in some places, particularly where rising energy costs severely impact human livelihood – which is why legal empowerment of the poor through improved access to justice, the rule of law, and property, labor and business rights, is now so critical.

Access to reliable and affordable supplies of clean energy is an essential human right based on the responsibility of the world community to empower the poor to meet their material needs, to fuel economic productivity, and to ensure the quality of life for people everywhere.

Monetary Security

The rising demand for food, energy, and other resources, which is now causing significant declines in supply, has also become a source of macroeconomic instability. Although emerging and developing states have been decoupling from the US economically for several years, they are still closely linked financially and monetarily. If oil producers and states that peg or manage their currencies against the US currency decide that the long-term value of the dollar is unsustainable, they may shift their funds into other currencies. The United States would be forced to (1) reduce its massive current-account deficit (its trade flows

and other international payments) through a significant drop in the value of the dollar; and (2) increase its savings, either through a huge decline in consumer and corporate spending or by slashing its federal budget deficit drastically.

These two fiscal adjustments – especially if combined with the continuing inflation of food, commodity and energy prices – would send shockwaves across the world. It would produce volatility in exchange rates, currency instability, disruption of global capital flows, a disorderly unwinding of global debt payments, and increased protectionism. National budgets, trade balances, economic growth, jobs, income, and political stability would all be affected.

That is why monetary security is vital now for everyone, especially the poor. Our purchasing power, which directly affects the ability to feed our families, pay our bills, save and invest, is an essential social entitlement. The right to stable currency rates – as an expression of our collective cultural values, personal livelihood and self-worth – is particularly important as we enter this uncertain period of adjustment.

Cultural Security

Money, energy, resources and materials are necessary but not all-encompassing attributes of the human experience. Cultural security, a critical but often forgotten multiplier of human security, sets the stage through which all other forms of security ought to be defined and understood. One cannot feel secure without mutual understanding and cultural integrity, a reality which has become increasingly apparent among both the developing and developed worlds. Perceptions of too-rapid cultural change or ‘cultural invasion’ spurred by globalization and migration have strained inter-personal and international relationships. Lasting security for the individual and the nation necessitates a practical approach which understands culture as a pivotal component of human experience and political dialogue.

Preventive Security

There is an additional multiplier of human security which is closely related to the others. In states vulnerable to genocide, ethnic cleansing, and other crimes against humanity, as all may indeed be, there is an obvious need to protect individuals from atrocities before they are committed. The concept of states having a ‘responsibility to protect’ (R2P) citizens of all nations, debated in recent years by the United Nations in response to escalating violence, remains more heightened and ideologically coloured than such issues commonly are. I am of the opinion that the resolution of this debate is overdue.

The question today is whether intervention in the affairs of a state is a moral duty of the international community or a violation of state sovereignty; yet there is no forward reason why sovereignty could not be shared to reflect the realities of an interdependent world. Preventive security demands that we prepare for potential local and regional conflicts to protect people at risk of grave harm, and this becomes decisive as we face the grim prospect of mass hunger, large-scale environmental disruption, and clashes over increasingly scarce resources like oil and water in some areas. The right to preventive security arises from our collective responsibility to guarantee political stability, protect the defenseless, and ensure human betterment, based on the unique value of every person.

State and Market Security

The final two human security multipliers are ones that you might have expected me to mention first. But I don’t believe they need to be emphasized, since they are so familiar. I’m speaking of states, which have the responsibility of providing political security to the people within their borders. And, of course, free markets – including labor, production, and finance – which provide a vital basis for economic security. States and markets are the cornerstones of modern civilization, and I could not possibly enumerate all of their many virtues in providing essential goods and services to consumers and protecting the welfare of citizens.

But I also think we overestimate their importance to human security. Indeed, because they exist virtually everywhere, there is a tendency to assume that only governments and markets can solve the world's problems, or that governments and markets are the sole agents of human security. Indeed, most of us are conditioned to see the world this way, which I believe is a very limiting point of view.

As I travel and discuss with many people the global challenges we are facing, it becomes increasingly clear to me that there are few foreign policy or commercial solutions that will ensure the common security of humanity. Strategic planning and cooperation for the future of the planet are desperately lacking.

I will be frank. The real issue today is not whether markets are self-correcting or whether they need regulating by states. The real issue is that nation-states and markets are not sufficient to handle the many problems that transcend national borders – problems like world hunger, resource depletion, economic deprivation, wealth disparity, global warming, environmental pollution, infectious diseases, cross-cultural conflicts, and terrorism.

Global Commons

I'm convinced now as never before that there must be a third sector of popular will – a powerful countervailing force dedicated to ensuring human security and cooperation across borders.

Responsibility and authority must shift from governments downwards to individuals, communities and civil society, and upwards to international organizations, regional systems and networks. I also believe that together, as a global citizenry, we must now confront the many problems that impact our lives across territorial boundaries, involving matters of shared international concern that governments and markets are not equipped to address.

The real issues are:

- that states have not relinquished their sovereignty to cooperate with one another more effectively, and market-driven solutions have proven incapable of addressing the systemic problems that transcend national borders
- that a new balance between the common interests of states, markets, and people is essential to economic and social development, environmental harmony, and peace
- that all matters bearing on the global commons must soon be linked together in one multilateral agenda and discussed by a diverse group of representatives from every sector – government, business, and civil society
- that these representatives should launch an immediate *global action program* ensuring the end of poverty, adequate food supplies, fair distribution of resources and commodities, a clean environment, protection of migrants and refugees, reliable and affordable energy, stable purchasing power, and a climate of peace
- that this common action plan must also be seen as a tentative step toward geo-political realignment and global economic adjustment, leading to a greater degree of international unity and the creation of inclusive global governance

I'm presently heading a group of high-level representatives called the Integrity Council that is serving as an advisory body for an international consultation process. We have launched an international partnership – called the Coalition for the Global Commons – to engage civil society groups and individuals across the world in the development of a common global action plan, and empower them to

take an active role in shaping our growing interdependence across the global commons.

My Dear Colleagues, on this 60th Anniversary of the UN Declaration of Human Rights, let us recognize that the principle of ‘Dignity and justice for all of us’ can only flow from human civilization as a single functioning whole – and therefore the question of *cross-border intervention* versus *state sovereignty* is ultimately a false dichotomy. To allow everyone in the world the opportunity to live free from fear and want, and to develop our full potentials in a healthy and supporting environment, means that individual rights, states rights, and international rights must be seen as an indivisible and dynamic unity, not as a source of polarization and conflict.

As human beings we naturally inhabit the future and the present - not just the present. If someone loses food, water and shelter, they can be provided with the means to obtain food, water and shelter, they can be provided with the means to obtain food, water and shelter again. But if that person has also lost their hope and their values, providing for their material needs will never provide them with a future again. Hope can only be rekindled with the re-implementation of those values which had been lost.

When we say that we are looking at human security, what we mean is that we want to alleviate the present situation by creating a system so that, as the future keeps arriving, it arrives in the form of better and better present situations. The consequences of what we do now must bring about a better present moment in which to live. The results of our actions now should lead to improved quality of life and the ability to instill hope.

I hope that by 2010 we can build the first step towards Sir Hersch Lauterpacht’s law of peace.

Thank you.