



THE PRESIDENT  
OF THE  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

28 August 2008

Excellency,

I have the pleasure to enclose herewith the informal summary of the thematic debate of the General Assembly on Human Security that took place on 22 May 2008.

I would like to take the opportunity and thank all Member States and Permanent Observers for their support and active participation in the debate.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Srgjan Kerim', written in a cursive style.

Srgjan Kerim

All Permanent Representatives and  
Permanent Observers to the United Nations  
New York

**SUMMARY OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY THEMATIC DEBATE ON  
HUMAN SECURITY  
New York, 22 May 2008**

**I) Introduction/Background**

1. The United Nations General Assembly held a thematic debate on human security at United Nations headquarters, New York on 22 May 2008. The aim of the General Assembly thematic debate on human security was to reflect on the scope of the concept and to further explore ways to follow up on the reference to human security in the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document (A/RES/60/1). The thematic debate was addressed by the President of the General Assembly H.E. Srgjan Kerim and the keynote speaker H.R.H. Prince El-Hassan Bin Talal of Jordan. Some 40 Member States took the floor during the debate.

**II) Opening speech**

2. In his opening speech, **the President of the General Assembly (PGA)**, H.E. Srgjan Kerim stated that the notion of human security has been recognized as an important tool by a growing number of Member States. The PGA noted that the United Nations through its global efforts to advance security, development and human rights is an important nexus in further evolving the notion of human security. Furthermore, the PGA recognized the added value of human security for bringing together the different agenda items of the UN and tackling them in their totality and interconnectedness. The PGA emphasized that lasting results can only be achieved through a collaborative effort by bringing together Member States, international organizations, UN Funds, Programmes and Specialized Agencies as well as civil societies and NGOs. The PGA highlighted the need to promote a new culture of international relations with the principle of human security at its core. He hoped that this debate will help clarify the notion of human security and provide guidance on how it can contribute to UN's efforts in bringing peace, development and human rights to peoples everywhere.

**III) Keynote speaker**

3. **H.R.H Prince El-Hassan bin Talal of Jordan** began his presentation by reviewing the current global conditions regarding population, food, resource, environmental, energy, monetary, cultural, and state security, referring to them as transnational issues as well as multipliers of human security with the capacity to spread either stability or instability in and around the world.

4. H.R.H Prince El-Hassan bin Talal then elaborated on these diverse and yet pivotal security concerns, highlighting the various ways in which issues of population growth, poverty, food, resources, ecology, migration, energy, money, peace and cultural understanding have the capacity to highly impact individual lives at the global scale. He urged Governments to move beyond traditional notions of security and view the full range of inter-personal, community-oriented, and culturally-founded relationships that capture the true notion of human security.
5. Throughout his presentation, H.R.H. Prince El-Hassan bin Talal stressed the need to promote international and cross-boarder cooperation by providing everyone the opportunity to live free from fear and want and by developing their full potentials in a healthy and supporting environment where individual, state and international rights are seen as indivisible and a dynamic unity and not as a source of polarization and conflict.

#### IV) Debate by Member States and Observers

6. Member States and Observers thanked the PGA for convening this informal thematic debate on human security. Recognizing the General Assembly as the most appropriate organ to further discuss the concept, several Member States noted that the debate on human security presents an important step toward widening the recognition of human security as a significant concept within the United Nations. Moreover, many Member States noted that despite the differences of views on human security, the difficulty in defining the concept does not diminish the contribution that human security brings to addressing current global challenges from achieving the Millennium Development Goals to advancing peacebuilding efforts and responding to climate change, among others.
7. Some Member States mentioned the risk of a “**conceptual overstretch**” with regards to the human security concept. They warned that if the international community subsumed everything under “human security”, it would be difficult to identify the added value of the concept. In this context, some Member States highlighted that a very broad concept of human security could actually drain it of any real operational applicability. At the same time, however, other Member States underlined the inherent dangers of limiting the concept too narrowly. It was highlighted that the fact that the concept of human security is not clearly delineated must not prevent Member States from working closely together in order to improve the living conditions of those most in need. Several Member States noted the need to seek consensus on a more limited programme where the human security approach can be applied.
8. Members of the **Friends of Human Security (FHS)** informed the participants that the FHS as a flexible and open-ended platform for Member States has agreed to pursue concrete collaboration in line with the broad understanding of human security as articulated in the report of the Commission on Human Security. They recognized the added value of human security as: i) a people-centered approach

- that puts the livelihood and dignity of individuals and communities at the center of analysis and thereby allows for a more concrete assessment of actions needed when addressing global issues; ii) an integrated, comprehensive and multi-sectoral approach that brings together not only physical security but also the sense of security that comes from having enough to eat, adequate healthcare, access to resources, employment opportunities and respect for human rights; and finally iii) a preventive approach that provides early warning so that threats from both violent and non-violent menaces do not result in critical, pervasive and protracted crisis.
9. Furthermore, some Member States noted that in practice the notion of human security has already been implemented in a number of projects carried out by UN Member States as well as UN Funds, Programmes, and Specialized Agencies. Member States therefore stressed the need to move beyond definitional issues and instead focus on concrete collaboration on the basis of a broad and common understanding of human security. In this context, several Member States highlighted the significant contributions of the **Human Security Unit in OCHA** and its efforts to mainstream human security in UN activities, as well as the essential role of the **United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security** in translating the concept of human security into concrete actions that highlight the added value of the human security approach. In light of the understanding that human security's main function is to ensure the harmonious development of human potential in the social and economic areas, a proposal was put forward by a Member State to consider transferring the **Human Security Unit to UNDP**.
  10. Meanwhile, the importance of differentiating human security from the **responsibility to protect** was highlighted by several Member States. In addressing this issue, it was stated that national Governments have the primary responsibility to provide security for their people and that the international community by providing the necessary assistance or capacity building should support Governments in meeting their obligations and in ensuring human security for their peoples. Member States also added that human security should unite efforts by reinforcing collaboration among all actors and should not be the cause of disagreement or conflict of interests.
  11. Furthering the debate, several Member States highlighted that as a **people-centered and multisectoral approach**, human security provides a significant opportunity for the United Nations to better integrate the three pillars of the organization's work (i.e., security, development and human rights) and offer coordinated responses that can more efficiently address current challenges facing the world, such as, rising food prices, conflict prevention and peacebuilding, climate change, and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. In this regard, Member States emphasized the contribution of human security in UN's effort to implement the 'One UN' reform programme.

12. Similarly, the importance of effective and coordinated implementation across actors was underlined by many Member States. They noted that in order to respond adequately to current global problems, a **common action plan** that brings together diverse actors from all sectors of society - Governments, private sector and civil society - is required.
13. Among the more than 40 delegations taking the floor, the issue of **climate change** was brought forward by a large number of Member States describing it as a multidimensional challenge that severely impacts the most vulnerable communities. With limited adaptive capacities and strong dependency on climate sensitive resources among the most vulnerable, many emphasized the impacts of climate change on loss of livelihoods (due to diminishing capacities for agricultural and fishery activities), increasing infectious diseases (due to temperature rises and increased intensity of natural disasters), tensions over natural resources (land and water), and increased migratory pressures (environmentally forced migration). Member States also highlighted the relationship between climate change and the undergoing food crisis.
14. Finally, a proposal for the establishment of a **working group on human security** as a follow-up of the informal thematic debate was put forward and consequently supported by some of the participating Member States. The working group is envisaged to identify specific areas in which the human security concept can be applied thereby further informing the General Assembly of the operational and the added value of the concept.

#### V) Closing remarks

15. Following the interactive debate among Member States and Observers, H.R.H. Prince El-Hassan bin Talal, urged the Member States to take advantage of the creative ambiguity surrounding the concept of human security and to work closely together and improve the living conditions of those most in need. In this regard, he supported the establishment of the working group on human security and urged Governments to set aside their differences and listen to the voices of the millions ravaged by human insecurities and constant daily suffering.
16. In his concluding remarks, the President of the General Assembly evoked the links between human security and the principles enshrined in the UN Charter. He emphasized the need to tackle the interlinked threats and challenges from a human-centered perspective. In this regard he underlined three aspects: promoting balanced development, helping people in conflict and post-conflict situations, and applying international law to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms. Special attention should be granted to the rights of most vulnerable groups, especially women and children.