

Human Security and the United Nations

Kazuo Tase

The concept of human security was first introduced to the international community in the 1994 UNDP Human Development Report. After various political and academic discussions since then, the concept is now being established as one of the important notions to uphold the UN Charter.

The biggest challenge for the concept to be accepted had been that two definitions, one wide and one narrow, were proposed in late 1990s, each of which had different goals. On the one hand, a very wide and comprehensive approach was submitted by Japan, who mainly aimed to have the concept as the basis for their economic and development assistance, especially at the time of the Asian financial crises in 1997. The primary focus of this approach was creating a "safety net" for people's livelihood. On the other hand, Canada submitted a narrow approach focused on saving human lives in acute humanitarian crises, in response to the inaction of the Security Council in 1995 Rwandan genocide. Initially, this approach was recognized also as humanitarian intervention that envisaged situations where the international community needed to go beyond the UN Charter.

Japan's approach was mostly harmless for both developed and developing countries. However, as it may have been too comprehensive and was not conceptually distinct from other policy notions, it fell short of attracting interest of other UN Member States. In contrast, the Canadian approach triggered strong suspicion and raised concerns among developing countries, especially among those who were cautious of Western intervention into internal affairs. As a result, in the United Nations deliberations in late 1990s, the concept of human security was labeled either as a dangerous or an elusive notion, and thus did not take root in the international discourse. Japan and Canada held policy meetings to find common ground, but were unable to find ways to work together.

Two international commissions achieved a breakthrough soon after the millennium. These were the Commission on Human Security (CHS) and the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS). The former was established by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in response to a call from Japan, while the latter was convened by Canada. CHS was co-chaired by Amartya Sen and Sadako Ogata and tried to define the concept of human security by bringing humanitarian and developmental expertise together. The ICISS, chaired by Gareth Evans,

tried to narrow conditions where the international community could legitimately intervene in grave humanitarian situations using force. CHS submitted its final report "Human Security Now" to the Secretary-General in 2003. ICISS published its report, titled "Responsibility to Protect", in 2002. Since around this time, R2P (abbreviation of "Responsibility to Protect") was being considered as a separate notion from human security.

Interestingly, the core messages of both reports are still alive in the United Nations. In fact, they are even establishing themselves as important parts of the normative international framework for the next several decades, where sovereignty shall no longer be absolute. The fundamental message of the CHS report was that we need to focus more on humans, their demands, potential, capabilities and aspirations, breaking down the walls between institutional silos on the supply side. In the CHS logic, interlinkages represents a key word to realize human centeredness. On the contrary, ICISS's fundamental message was that there exists a need to build more robust norms and institutions to prevent grave human tragedies and respond to serious humanitarian situations. The notion of the responsibility to protect has been refined, sophisticated and tested in the last decade, and is now fully in line with the UN Charter. The 2005 World Summit Outcome was the cornerstone of support for both notions. Since then, human security and the responsibility to protect seem to have complemented each other as new approaches to address deepening global interdependence.

The first Secretary-General's report on human security was issued in April 2010, declaring that the notion does not include the use of force in its realization. In 2012, the second report was issued based on which the UN General Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution defining human security. Among others, the General Assembly supported the following element that should constitute the core part of the human security notion:

"The right of people to live in freedom and dignity, free from poverty and despair. All individuals, in particular vulnerable people, are entitled to freedom from fear and freedom from want, with an equal opportunity to enjoy all their rights and fully develop their human potential."

In a sense, human security is a broad-based concept that goes back to the founding spirit of the United Nations. After 65 years, our institutions have become too complicated, fragmented and excessively specialized, somewhat forgetting the people they are supposed to help. As a tool to focus on people, the concept of human security could be the strong logical and philosophical base for future comprehensive UN reform.