Expectations for the UNTFHS

*Remarks made by **Surin Pitsuwan**, Thai member of Parliament and former commissioner of the Commission on Human Security, at a JCIE workshop in Tokyo on May 31, 2006*

Ladies and gentlemen, let me begin with a confession. I was asked to join the CHS by Mrs. Ogata at the end of the last cabinet meeting in Bangkok, after we were voted out back in 2001. She asked me if I would be interested in joining her, and I told her I would because I was just looking for a job. I served on the commission for more than two years, under Mrs. Ogata and Professor Amartya Sen. Now I serve as a member of the Advisory Board on Human Security, which advises the UNTFHS. The advisory board meets at least once a year in New York to monitor the propagation of the human security concept in order to make sure that it is understood, that it is being implemented, and that it is being refined on the ground with all these projects that the trust fund is supporting.

The background of the concept was this: Back in the middle of the 1990s and the late-1990s, the two parts of the world were facing two different kinds of crises. In the West, it was the issue of Rwanda, the issue of Kosovo, and the issue of Srebrenica. The issue was how the international community could help rescue the people—the minorities—who were living under threat. And you remember the controversy at that time, when the UN secretary-general [Kofi Annan] said, "Four million people are being killed in front of us, but you are arguing that you have sovereignty. What do you expect us to do?" In response to that question—or that challenge—the Canadian government came up with a commission, and that commission was named the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty. It took them one year—ahead of us—to come up with their report. Rather

than referring to the right to intervene to protect people, they came up with the phrase "the responsibility to protect" as the title of their report. In other words, rather than the right to intervene, we are now talking about the responsibility to go in and protect. And they have listed conditions that would allow the international community to go in and protect, which means to go around the claim of sovereignty of each state.

The Eastern part of the world, if you remember, was facing the problem of a financial crisis, and Keizo Obuchi, as foreign minister, came to various meetings among the ASEAN gatherings, and he was touched by the plight and the suffering of the marginalized people as a result of the crisis. So, he was thinking ahead as foreign minister at the same time that the Japanese government was pumping money into those economies as part of its rescue package. The rescue package included the macro level of all of the affected countries as well as the grassroots level, the latter coming in the form of what was known as the Miyazawa Fund, named after the finance minister, [Kiichi] Miyazawa. So the Japanese—or Eastern—approach to the problems experienced by people in the East as a result of the crisis was more of a softer approach. Rather than intervening or rather than dealing with issues that were threatening the lives of the people, we in the East, the new commission under Amartya Sen (Amartya Sen had a lot to do with influencing the concept) and Sadako Ogata (who has had experience on the protection side, protecting refugees) came up with the concept of empowerment and fulfillment of human potential, based on the assumption that the best protection for any human being would be his or her own ability to stand on his or her own feet in the face of all challenges, of all eventualities, of all calamities that might come their way. If the Western approach was the responsibility to protect, the Eastern, or Japanese-led approach (or Amartya Sen–led approach) is compassion to be shared. So we have a responsibility to protect and a compassion to be shared among human beings.

The commission issued its report under the title *Human Security Now*. This one is luckier than other commissions at the UN because at the end of the commission's tenure there was money to move on to make sure that the findings would be implemented, or at least would be promoted, at least would be propagated. With most of the commissions at the UN, when the report is finally written, it goes onto a shelf and that is the end of the commission's work. But this one has a life of its own because there is a commitment from Tokyo, a commitment from the Japanese government, to keep working.

In order to propagate the human security concept, the secretary-general proposed that there should be a trust fund, with a board overseeing the disbursement of the funds, to propagate the concept and to encourage a paradigm shift from the traditional state security approach to a human security approach—the concept that was defined in the report. At any given time, there is US$200 million revolving for all these projects everywhere, on every continent, in every country that needs it.

The advice that it should take an integrated approach, that it should be implemented through joint programming, is not part of a strategy to ensure that from now on human security shall be integrated in its approach or shall be conceived through joint programming. The idea is to better propagate the concept of human security within the UN system. I remember one of the advisory board meetings where we decided very conscientiously that the trust fund shall not be a fund that UN agencies come to when they cannot find the funding for a good idea anywhere else. That is not the purpose. The purpose is for the trust fund to support the implementation and propagation of the idea or of the concept of human security within the UN system. And the more agencies working together, the better. That is the purpose. If a program or project that comes from UNICEF [United Nations Children's Fund] or UNIFEM [United Nations Development Fund for Women] or any other agency comes to us for rescue, as a last resort because they could not find any money in the system, that is to be discouraged. It has to be conceived and planned as a conscious effort to implement the concept of human security. Each UN agency was expected to adapt its own working style and to adopt the concept of human security as defined on page four of the commission's report.

As I said, Amartya Sen's ideas are very much present in the work. In describing the process of development, Professor Sen quoted Obuchi's speech in 1998: "The process of development is not primarily one of expanding the supply of goods and services but of enhancing the capacities of people." In other words, it is helping people to have more choices in life. Freedom as development, development as freedom. When you have freedom you have more choices.

Prime Minister Obuchi attended every meeting of the ASEAN ministerial conference, and he referred to my proposal to establish what I call the Caucus for Social Safety Nets in Manila. It was not very enthusiastically welcomed by my ASEAN colleagues because it was perceived as another window of opportunity for interference from outside. Anything new would be rejected or would be regarded with suspicion. But social safety nets are

important, precisely because of the questions Obuchi had asked earlier: How are the poor coping? How are the minorities affected? How are the children, the women, the unemployed affected as a result of the crisis? He thought we could come up with our own response to the issue of human security and human suffering. But rather than following the Western approach—the Canadian approach of intervention, of going in to protect, to help, to rescue—he would rather help from the approach of empowerment, from the approach of support, from the approach of developing the capacities of the people in the affected area. And I think that was a very clear indication that a sense of community in East Asia was emerging as a result of the crisis. We wanted at the time to make our own response to our own problems. That was the same time that the idea of the Asian Bond came up, the idea of an Asian Monetary Fund came up, and the idea of Asian community came up. This is the intellectual exchange that Obuchi had in mind when he talked about coming up with our own approach, our own response, to the problem facing us. That is the background.

I would like to turn now to the projects presented at this workshop. What is not stated explicitly—but what I think is exactly what the researchers mean—is that all of these projects are trying to achieve a system of soft safety nets. In other words, we are talking about the social networks, the change of mindsets, the demand for participation, the strengthening of the communities, the participation of the affected people in the process. I would call that a soft environment, or soft safety nets, which refers to the attitude, the ability, the willingness, the quality, and the capability to get involved in solving these problems—problems of human security—in their own communities. This is different from hard social safety nets, which mean providing for the material needs of the people, whether it is food, wells, even health stations; all these things are infrastructure that you can touch, you can build, you can pump the money into and see tangible results. But it is lacking something inside: the attitude, the mentality, the mindset empowering people who want to be a part of the decision making, who want to be a part of the problem-solving process. Without those things, human security will not be established. Human security presupposes an open society, presupposes participation, presupposes a system that would allow people to be active partners rather than passive recipients of help from outside. Essentially, we are trying to build that soft social safety net in the communities.

I wish all my colleagues on the advisory board could be here with you all to benefit from all these very, very useful, insightful comments on the

work of the trust fund and the work of the projects that the trust fund supports. The idea of human security in the context of the trust fund, in the context of the commission, was conceived in meeting rooms, based on the experiences and the knowledge of the 12 commissioners. It is now like a new medicine being tested in the field. We are now turning to you as medical doctors or pharmacists who are observing the results of the operationalization of this human security concept on the ground. What are the problems? What are the limitations? What is the potential of this medicine called human security? It is a bit premature to ask that there be a framework, or to expect that this concept can really be a philosophical concept that is operating effectively on the ground, or that there should be some indicators and indexes to measure how successful it is and how accepted the concept is with the people.

I think, at this point, realistically what could be expected out of these cases would be the question that you all can help answer. Of all the players in the implementation of these projects, who has problems with it, and what are the problems? Do the UN agencies that are implementing these together in joint efforts have problems? Do government agencies and officials? UN agencies have their own turfs, their own mandates; government officials have their own domains; and NGOs [nongovernmental organizations] certainly have their own issues. It is very precise, very concrete, very unique for each NGO. Do the people involved, the recipients and the volunteers, have problems with it? In this mix of efforts, who has what problem with the concept of human security? If that can be defined, I think it will be, again, a positive contribution to all of us who have conceived and who have conceptualized it and who are now trying to propagate it, to push it forward.

As I mentioned at a World Bank gathering [May 29, 2006], we have to remember that the nature of HIV/AIDS is different from that of other diseases. AIDS is essentially a social problem, which has economic implications, which has health implications, which has political implications, which has security implications. Each of the projects that the trust fund supports—whether it's AIDS, whether it's poverty alleviation, whether it's violence, whether it's illiteracy, environmental degradation, famine, trafficking, exploitation associated with trafficking—each is unique in its own way. Therefore, we need to know from the people involved in implementing those projects who has a problem with the concept and in what way, how it can be refined, how it can be improved, and how it can be embellished in order to make the concept more effective, more operationable, and more accepted by the people.

I think it has to be seen in its historical and intellectual context. One cannot understand, know, use, and employ the concept without knowing where it came from. So it is necessary that the implementers know about the dichotomy, that there is one concept of intervention and then there is this concept of empowerment that we are talking about. I think it is useful to know that intellectual context, that historical context of the concept.

In the end, you need an enabling environment for the concept to be successful. This enabling environment could include leaders, could include officials in the government, could include the business community supporting or working with the projects, and could include politicians at all levels where the projects are being implemented. Politicians certainly could mediate and try to reconcile the different expectations, different perceptions, and different attitudes toward the concept. There is a need for ongoing mediation for all people at every level to understand, to adjust, to accept, and to really recognize what the human security concept means. We cannot leave it alone out there and expect it to be implemented and worked with and accepted as a new approach to development. It has to be mediated every day at different junctures of the project. If it is a two-year project, maybe every three months or every four months we have to have someone come in and mediate between all the people involved. We need to ask them, "Do you understand the concept correctly? Do you all understand it in the same way? Do you understand it in the way that it is being worked with out here?" Otherwise, the concept will be interpreted and implemented differently among different people in different projects in different environments. I think politicians can play that role, politicians who understand, politicians who are committed to that kind of issue.

There was very little mention about the relationship between security and rights in our discussion. In the work of the commission, if one looks at the report, it is clear that the relationship between human security and human rights is very, very close, very strong.

I think the final measurement of success or failure of the concept of human security would be a clear distinction between human security and, again, social welfare. Mrs. Ogata talks about moving toward "the recipients being active partners, from being the objects of the projects to being the subjects of the projects." In other words, they should be in the driver's seat, involved in the implementation of the projects themselves, the people. This also means looking at what people have to begin with rather than focusing only on what they need.

I think a project would be successful if, after its implementation, those involved feel more secure, stronger, and more empowered. In spite of the fact that they still have AIDS, there is still poverty, there is still illiteracy, there is still environmental degradation, people could live and move on into the future in spite of those problems. How can we help those who have problems to live with those problems with dignity, and how can we protect those who do not have the same problems to live honorably, in dignity, with prosperity, and with security in their lives? In other words, the problem of AIDS in a particular village will not affect everybody into future generations. Somebody will have to get out of that environment. That would be the success of human security.

Or I can rephrase it in this way: The system of protection and empowerment could be transformed into a system that could run on autopilot. The system will take care of itself. The system will be able to protect the people. The system will be able to solve the problems that the people have through their own participation and contributions. The system can run on autopilot on its own.

What are missing as elements of security will become or will be regarded as rights that the community owes to individuals in the society. Rather than these people being protected—being given protection—we must be able to turn around and say these people have the right to claim protection, to claim health, to claim support because they are human beings. If we provide health and support and protection, we will run into the problem of asking, "What ethnicity are you? What tribe are you? What nationality are you?" But, if we get all the people involved in the process of implementing the concept of human security, the question of ethnicity, of race, of nationality, of differences will be obliterated. The only thing that will be present will be that as a human being, as a member of the community, people have these rights. I think if somehow we can work from human security into human rights and the relationship between the two, and if we are successful, then it will be a measure of success for the operation of the concept of human security.

As I said, the workshop discussion has been very rich. The bits and pieces of your experiences, of your observations, are extremely useful, and I think that the advisory board will benefit a lot if at one of our meetings a development agency like the World Bank or one of the UN agencies can come in and say, "Hey, we have a problem with this concept. It's nothing different from what we've been trying to do before. You had better refine it; you had better improve upon it." I think that would be extremely helpful.

We have given out funding to projects and programs that include different players in their implementation because we would like to draw out the experiences, the evaluations, and the opinions from each and every implementing agency in order to refine the project itself. We have talked about a handbook or guidelines for implementing the projects. That will be useful only after two or three more years of the trust fund's work, maybe even after five more years.

And let me end with this: Case studies like this are extremely important. Without case studies, without attempts to evaluate the efforts, without having contributions from all agencies involved, the commission and the trust fund will not be able to know for itself what are the defects in the concept. So there is still a lot of work ahead for those of you who are working on case studies and comparing experiences.