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Human Security and Climate Change

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Ambassador, ret.

Mr. Chairman,

Dear colleagues and friends in our search for wisdom,

Many thanks for your invitation and for the opportunity to project some thoughts into the future of our security agenda.

In fact, as so often in human history, the future has already started and as Martin Luther King said, we are all too often confronted with the fact that tomorrow is today. Failed civilizations are marked with the pathetic words “too late”.

Both human security and climate change are not for tomorrow. Both had to be addressed already in the past and need urgent action today. In fact, several of your presentations have dealt with different aspects of human security as well as of the consequences of climate change. The task I see for my contribution is therefore more on the broader general conceptual side which of course is supposed to be pertinent for the policy challenges we face.

Allow me to start out with a brief review of the concept of “human security”, well introduced in some quarters yet still rejected by an astonishingly broad coalition of governments. The chapter “human security” in the UN Summit Outcome Document 2005 consists of only five and a half lines and contains nothing more than a commitment “to discussing and defining the notion of human security in the General Assembly”.

The concept of “human security”, however, is to be seen as part of the fundamental reorientation of our global agenda, moving from state-

focussed issues and policy responses to an increasingly citizen-focussed approach.

This process consists, first of all, in the recognition of human rights as the corner stone of our global constitutional framework, the reconceptualisation of economic development into human development and of the complementation of state security by human security. All three concepts reflect the processes of horizontalisation in our societal framework with the citizen becoming ever more self-determined, actor, partner and contributor to our common good as well as the primary victim of the new global, transnational threats and impediments. In this agenda and institutional development vertical processes of government have been increasingly replaced by horizontal patterns of governance partnerships between state and non-state actors in public space.

Today, one could argue, human rights have assumed a constitutional standing where the sovereignty of the citizen could be seen as weighing already more than the sovereignty of the state. This has been articulated in the principle of the “responsibility to protect” of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty and then - surprise, surprise - unanimously adopted by the 2005 Summit Meeting of the United Nations in par. 139 of the Outcome Document.

Second, the concept of “human development” reflects the basic conceptual approach of human rights. It has been defined by Mahbub Ul Haq in his first Human Development Report of 1990 as the process which broadens the spectrum of choice, i.e. the freedom of human beings and of communities.

Third, the concept of “human security evolved in the context of the human development discourse and was first dealt with in the Bonn and Ottawa conferences of the Society for International Development, the Stockholm Meeting of the UNDP Study Programme and then made the topic of the UNDP Human Development Report in 1994. Mahbub Ul Haq defined human security as “safety from chronic threats such as hunger, disease and repression as well as protection from sudden and harmful disruptions in the patterns of daily life – whether in homes, in jobs or in communities”. From the very beginning the interrelatedness between human security and human development was underlined.

This new concept soon filtered into the political structures and into national foreign policies. At margins of the 43rd General Assembly foreign ministers of likeminded “good citizen countries” created the Human Security Network which held its first meeting in Bergen, Norway in 1999. The Human Security Network is composed of 12 countries as members – Austria, Canada, Chile, Greece, Ireland, Jordan, Mali, Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia, Switzerland, Thailand and with South Africa as observer. The current presidency of the Network is with Ireland.

While the Human Security Network took a series of initiatives at national and international levels to promote this new approach to our security agenda, Japan, at the inspiration of its Ambassador Takasu tried to bolster its efforts towards a permanent seat in the UN Security Council with making Human Security a key dimension of its bi-lateral and multilateral policies. The latter included the creation of a Commission on Human Security composed of internationally renowned personalities under the co-chair of Sadako Ogata and Amartya Sen whose report

“Human Security Now” opted intentionally at a broader concept of human security.

“Human security in its broadest sense embraces far more than the absence of violent conflict. It encompasses human rights, good governance, access to education and health care, and ensuring that each individual has opportunities and choices to fulfil his or her potential ... Freedom from want, freedom from fear and the freedom of the future generations to inherit a healthy natural environment – these are the interrelated building blocks of human, and therefore national security”.

Finally, the Human Development Report 2000 and a report of an expert group of the Human Security Network of July 2000 underlined the fundamental interrelationship and the mutual conditioning of the three concepts: no human development without human security and human rights, no human security without human rights and human development etc.

The idea of conceptual interdependence does not really end there. It is typical for the human security agenda that the various dimensions of human security - e.g. poverty, hunger, health, crime, violence, lack of otherness capacity, environmental degradation and disasters etc. are all interrelated. A purely sectoral approach will not provide the appropriate responses. Human security, like human development and human rights is a cross-cutting agenda.

Climate change is a case in point. To understand the security dimension of climate change we have to accept its relation to human rights and to human development. Climate change is therefore not only an agenda of

mitigation and adaptation to the consequences but is related to entire spectrum of development, economic, social, environmental and societal agendas.

Climate change discourse has been with us now for over 40 years. I remember the conflicting analysis coming to the UN Secretariat from the meteorological institutes at Columbia University in New York – the world is getting colder – and at Leningrad University – the world is getting warmer. The four assessment reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the fourth one was made public in 2007, in spite of the intended submission to governmental instructions of its authors, became ever clearer in their message and revealed an agenda spectrum of action which in many ways is typical for what we have to address in our security agenda of the 21st century and beyond.

Climate change is trans-national – global – in its effects and in its multiple interdependencies; it addresses the security of the human being, of communities of geographic regions without regard to state borders.

Climate change is the result of state policies but also of citizen actions. Mitigation and adaptation require capabilities and investment at all levels of society and state.

The challenges of the climate change agenda contradict the time-frames of our current political culture and institutional set-up which is primarily focussed on the short-term of electoral rhythms. Inter-generational solidarity and sustainability has not yet entered our societal and our political cultures and decision-making.

Climate change accentuates the existing inequality and lack of equity in our global societal structures – those who contribute most to the rising global temperature patterns through the emission of Greenhouse Gases are also those least affected, most capacitated for adaptation and in some respects even benefiting from it. A study of IIASA on the impact of climate change on agricultural productivity reveals the threat of reduced agricultural output in certain regions of Africa and South Asia of up to 55 % whereas agriculture in the Northern regions of the US, in Canada and in Siberia will benefit and enhance output up to 45 % until 2050.

Climate change will redesign the allocation of natural resources benefits while creating enhanced scarcities in some regions and contribute to intra-societal and international competition. Climate change has therefore been described as a “threat multiplier”. It will make relations worse which are already burdened by tension. Water resources, land resources and climate change induced disasters can make competitive relations more divisive leading to conflict and forcing people to flee and find refuge in other less affected areas. Climate change will enhance the vulnerability. Poverty will be compounded by climate change and will be one of the greatest threats to development.

Declining rainfall and water scarcity will have a significant impact on agricultural production and food security. Developing societies will have to confront an increasing risk of crop failures. Rising sea levels and overexploitation of aquifers will lead to soil salinisation. Fish production will be affected by changes in rainfall and temperature both in fresh water systems as well as in coastal zones suffering from lack of freshwater inflows and contamination.

By some predictions the number of malnourished – the subject of global objectives since the first World Food Summit in 1974 – will not only not perish or be halved but is expected to increase by another 600 million people. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon only a week ago has demanded an increase of food production by 50 % until 2020 – that is tomorrow.

Climate change will also accentuate the health dimension of human security. An additional 400 million people will be at risk of malaria in regions which are already now unable to meet the basic medical care. Water scarcity, already now a serious impediment to human security and to development will increase dramatically. According to some predictions the number of people without sufficient water will increase to 1.8 bio during the second half of this century.

It is the developing countries, in fact those who have contributed least to climate change, who are already experiencing the most human insecurity and who have to cope with the worst effects directly threatening human survival. Africa is one of the continents most vulnerable to climate change and climate variability

Vulnerability is to be seen as the key to the human security dimension of climate change. The current focus on climate change mitigation through programmes of GHG reductions overlooks the lack of capacity of many societies in developing countries to cope with the challenges of adaptation. Climate change is already contributing to enhanced natural disasters

Even under conditions of modest impact of rising temperatures the human condition for a rising share of world population will be under enhanced threat. The UN HC for Refugees assesses that already in 2007 there were 11,4 Mio environmental refugees a number to increase to 240 to 250 Mio by 2050. There is a demand that environmental refugees receive refugee status in a future Protocol under UNFCCC. It is noteworthy that the HC for Refugees currently denies his responsibility for environmental refugees – it would more than overburden his anyway limited institutional capacities.

It is in this context that a growing number of international institutions have started to address the security dimension of climate change.

The UNDP Human Development Report 2007/2008 is dedicated to the issue of “Fighting climate change: Human solidarity in a divided world”

Rising sea levels are threatening the coastal zones and in some cases the very existence of small island states. The Alliance of Small Island States organised a two-day meeting in New York to highlight what it considered to be a human right to live in a safe and sustaining environment. It said “climate change directly and fundamentally undermines that right”. A resolution adopted by the Alliance calls for a UN study on the linkages between human rights and climate change and a March 2009 debate at the UN Human Rights Council on this issue. In the concrete case of Tuvalu the islanders could lose their homes and much of their land in the coming decades. But the world has yet to figure out how it will deal with them.

The United Nations Security Council whose agenda for the past nine years has been marked by a rising interest in human security issues, dealt with the security dimension of climate change in a meeting on 17 April 2007. This initiative of the UK Presidency of the Security Council was severely criticised by the Group of 77 denouncing an ever-increasing encroachment of the Security Council on the roles and responsibilities of the other main organs of the United Nations. This represented a distortion of the principles and purposes of the Charter and compromised the rights of the UN's wider membership. At the same time, however, small island nations called for the UN Security Council to protect their lands and resources by using its authority to demand reductions of carbon dioxide emissions and to penalise those nations that fail to comply. This appeal, by the way, is related to the new general norm-setting role the Security Council has assumed in addressing the challenges of terrorism (SC Res. 1378). The exchange of views in the Security Council, in which 55 member countries took the floor – a record for such a debate with a large number of non-members addressing the Council - led to no concrete conclusion such as a resolution or statement by the SC President but reflected the growing awareness of the profound changes of our global security agenda.

Climate change and human security has also been the focal agenda item of the Greek presidency of the Human Security Network. The documents prepared for the annual senior expert meeting and the Ministerial conference in Athens four weeks ago addressed the very issues of climate change and human security with special focus on the gender dimension of climate change and the special affectedness of children. The UNU Institute for Environment and Human Security in Bonn

prepared a very interesting study on Human Security, Climate Change, and Environmentally Induced Migration for the Athens meeting.

At a Geneva conference on Climate Change and Migration earlier this year UN deputy high commission for human rights Kyung-wha Kang stressed the calamitous consequences for the human rights of millions of people, the rights to life, the right to food, the rights to health etc.

In conclusion allow me to refer to a paper prepared by the High Representative and by the European Commission on “Climate Change and International Security” which was submitted to the European Council at its March meeting in Brussels. According to the report global warming threatens to severely destabilise the planet, rendering a fifth of its population homeless. Consequently, Europe needs to brace itself for a new wave of migration due to the consequences of global warming. The migration alert is but one of seven “threats” that Javier Solana and Benita Ferrero-Waldner focus on in pointing to the security implications and the dangers to European interests thrown up by climate change.

Their report ultimately was a wake-up call to the governments of Europe, a demand that they start taking account of climate change and its impact in their security and foreign policy decisions. The main message of the report has been that the devastating effects of global warming will be felt far away from Europe, with the poor suffering disproportionately in South Asia, the Middle East, Central Asia, Africa and Latin America, but that Europe will ultimately bear the consequences. This could be in the form of mass migration, destabilisation of parts of the world vital to European security, radicalisation of politics and populations.

The primary responsibility of the industrialized countries for the disasters and the suffering of Southern regions has not yet really been understood and articulated by the victim societies. We may, however, not exclude the emergence of a “climate Osama Bin Laden” teaching hatred and revenge against the responsible perpetrators leading to all sorts of climate change induced violent operations and related disintegration, “wall-building” and enhanced insecurity for all.

We may have to be induced towards a new understanding of our Global Agenda and the intimate interrelatedness and interdependence of its different issues. This may require new policy concepts and institutional development based on a recognition that our common future is inseparable. The refuge into gated societies and an enhanced security industry would turn out to be a dangerous illusion about the world’s reality. Ultimately – even though current instructions to the SG’s Special Representative exclude this – there is a responsibility of the international community and of those most capacitated to do so, to protect. Prevention in the case of climate change induced insecurity in accordance with related studies amounts to 15 % or less of the cost of bearing the consequences.