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Human Security: 'New Security' in an ill-liberal era

Comments by Mark B. Taylor to Civil Society Conference "Towards Human Security", on the Occasion of the 10th Anniversary of the Mine-Ban Treaty

Minister, Excellencies, Nobel Laureates, Comrades and Friends;

Thank you to ForUM – the Norwegian Forum for Environment and Development – for organizing the event and for inviting me to speak;

Thanks to the Red Cross for hosting and Trygve for hosting:

Thanks for Minister Gahr Støre and Bill Pace, and all of the others speakers this morning for a series of excellent presentations....you have all helped make my task of closing out this Plenary session a rather daunting one ...

...and thanks to all of you for coming

Standing here before you all - on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the landmine ban – I must confess that I am humbled. I am humbled by what I have heard today, by what has been suffered and sacrificed by individuals and communities, and I humbled by what all of you - together - have achieved.

It is an honour to be invited to speak to you, particularly on this occasion.

I have been asked to speak on Human Security, to give you something to think about, and to be short! I suspect the organizers thought I might be able to create some common understanding of what is human security... But...after what we have heard this morning, I don't think there could be any doubt in this room about the core elements of human security: human security is freedom from violence. We can quibble about words and qualifying concepts - what the landmine movement has shown us over the past 10 years is that the notion of freedom from violence lies at the very centre of what we mean when we *speak* of human security, and that the notion of solidarity is at the heart of what we *do* when we try to make human security a reality, when we try to provide protection.

The landmine movement has also shown us that the simplicity of the Human Security concept is key to its effectiveness. Human Security works. And, as we have heard today, it does so at two important levels: the movement for human security both saves lives and helps to make more humane the institutions which claim to govern the world on our behalf.

So, what more should be said? At the risk of spoiling the celebration, let me be the critic I am sometimes paid to be and sound a few critical notes before we go off to the Parallel sessions... Because I think there is something to the argument that human security – and the multilateral system in which it is embedded - faces a potential crisis of legitimacy. That challenge has at least two sources: one is the very real changes to the international system since human security was first elaborated in the mid-1990s; and the second is the changing nature of the problems human security is trying to solve, especially conflict. I will try to deal with these briefly and then see if I can't find a happier note on which to conclude, because I think the

experience of the Landmine movement offers responses to these challenges, especially for civil society.

The landmine ban was an expression of human security at its early best: grassroots, organized solidarity with victims as the basis for both protecting people and changing international policy. Those organizations involved in the ICBL were able to maintain their people-centered focus on solidarity even while engaging in international diplomacy. The solidarity expressed through that activism meant that the resulting ban on landmines implied a broader principle: that the measure of success of an international security policy should be the extent to which it is effective in protecting people.

This approach to Human Security led, over time and across a range of sectors, to an international 'responsibility to protect' which was elaborated at the Millennium Summit in September 2005. The responsibility to protect sought to transform state sovereignty, imbuing it with a legitimacy derived from a state's ability to provide human security to its citizens. At the same time, it implied that a state's inability or unwillingness to provide such protection would undermine a state's claim to the traditional protections of sovereignty, not least a sovereign claim against interference in its internal affairs by other states. In other words, a state's claim to sovereignty was no longer a given, it was dependent / conditional on its ability to protect its people.

In terms of international relations, this was radical. Not only did it qualify the right of a government to rule, but it marked an innovation in security policy: the old assumptions which subordinated citizens to the demands of national security were replaced by a concept which put the individual, and not the nation-state, at the centre of security policy. The 'responsibility to protect' is the key-stone in the normative architecture of human security. As one former diplomat has put it, "if (state) sovereignty is conditional on how a state treats its own people, then the rest of human security falls into place"¹

As we've heard this morning, the first decade of human security policy development was a successful one in terms of building international norms and institutions (both rules and organisational mechanisms) ...and by 2005 these efforts provide empirical evidence that human security responses have been effective in saving lives....when they happen.

The problem is, of course, they happen all too irregularly. Our humanitarian responses are well developed....But our political responses – especially responding to conflict - are not: the Rwandas, Chenyas and DR congos of the 1990s are still with us, for example, in Darfur, Afghanistan and Iraq. And as those examples show, in some cases, we fail to take action to defend human security, in others our action is the problem: at the September 2004 session of the General Assembly, U.S. President George Bush justified the invasion of Iraq by saying it has "helped to deliver the Iraqi people from an outlaw dictator", not far off the justification for the NATO war in Kosovo. Secretary-General Kofi Annan told the same meeting the Iraqi invasion was "illegal".

But the challenge for human security is not just that it can be hijacked by the great powers or undermined by their negligence. There is a deeper conceptual challenge as well.

The concept of human security, and the principle of the responsibility to protect, are fundamentally state-based. Although they re-focus security on the individual and community, human security doesn't throw the state out - it reverses the responsibilities: the state should work

to ensure the security of their citizens, not the other way round (in this is could be said to ‘re-boot’ the social contract).

From an historical perspective, human security and the responsibility to protect are the logical next steps in the attempts of the human rights to pressure states to take measures to *enforce* respect for human rights, or for the human development movements to get states to do what is necessary to *eliminate* extreme forms of poverty and exploitation. So, while the new concepts represented a radical break from a state-centered approach to security, they still assume – correctly in my view - that ultimately the state is the best guarantor of human security.

The problem arises because these concepts do not have a similar framework for dealing with non-state sources of vulnerability and insecurity. These often play out in *informal* settings.... where power resides mainly outside the state's formal institutions, often in informal or private networks; in most cases, the power and to make economic decisions (e.g. redistribution) or political decisions (managing internal conflicts) is located somewhere other than formal institutions and is negotiated in a space that is not electoral politics. Crucially, the power to define exclusion and marginalization are informal and beyond reach.

What the hell am I talking about?

I am talking about states that are run like private enterprises (such a Charles Taylors Liberia); mass movements run as the enforcement arms of extortion rackets; or political factions are reduced to clans ...

I am talking about a nearly seamless continuum of collective violence - from the massive and systematic gender based violence in industrial zones to war zones; from urban gang violence, through post-conflict crime, to irregular and guerilla wars, to invasion, counter-insurgency and occupation.

I am talking about the integration of local war economies to regional and global markets and how that integration helps sustain self-financing wars; where access to natural resources in a number of developing countries - intersects with conflicts over power and identity, and helps to accelerate the informalisation of the state Commodities that would otherwise provide the basis for economic and social development instead become illicit conflict trade...even as they make up the coping economies of vulnerable households.

I'm talking about the fact that the greatest human cost of conflict in these places may not always be from direct violence within or between states, but indirect effects of regionalized civil wars. Often the ‘secondary effects’ of war – to health, food security, education - constitute a far more deadly form of violence with long term developmental implications. Nowhere in recent times has this reality been more grimly demonstrated than during the wars in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where millions people died in what has been called Africa's World War.

Our international responses have not dealt with these phenomena very well at all. Far too little is understood – and far too much assumed – in our efforts. Human security approaches have been often blinkered to the ways in which state-building can worsen the situation, or at least not result in increased protection: Palestine is a case in point, but so too is Haiti, many parts of Africa, and of course Iraq and Afghanistan. But the problems of international responses in those situations are only partly a result of great power politics. There is a systemic problem in the interaction of an international ‘liberal’ system and what are informal and basically local “ill-liberal” political-economic structures. Worse, it is likely that the emerging international division

of labour will aggravate differences in vulnerabilities to violence: the current competition between China, Russia, the U.S. and Europe over strategic natural resources is transforming the post-Cold War / post-colonial trading relationships, not least for Africa and Asia. We know that as disparities in income and wealth sharpen the lines of conflict within weak-states, and collective violence will rise as a result. Some argue we can best deal with these problems by integrating those areas, bringing them in from the margins of global economic and political power – to democratize globalisation, if you will. But so far our politicians prefer to marginalise, criminalise and exclude.

Not only do we tend to have our own visions of what kinds of states should be built or re-built, regardless of what politics actually looks like on the ground; but more and more we relate to those we like, and impose sanctions on those who we dislike, often under the excuse of the war on terror; even though all the evidence indicates that these policies simply increase insecurity for people, perpetuate the criminalisation of the most vulnerable – such as migrants – or the criminalise political factions regardless of their political base and legitimacy. Think Hamas. Think Hizballah.

One might say that while the concept of human security, and the principle of the responsibility to protect are fundamentally state-based in their responses, the problems they are seeking to control are increasingly non-state in nature.

Which brings us back to the ICBL. The ICBL helped establish the principle that the measure of success of an international security policy should be the extent to which it is effective in protecting people. The success of the ICBL also served to expand the community of those who are permitted to decide what constitutes a threat. Redefining security to focus on people, and expanding the decision-making around threats, was not undertaken at the request of states, nor was it accomplished by relying on already existing international laws or institutions. It was initiated and led by social movement campaigners working in solidarity with people who were threatened by landmines.

Underlying that solidarity is, first, compassion for the victims and, second, a moral imperative to act based on the knowledge that our actions at home – both as civil society and through the actions of our governments – help determine the margins of survival for those living in affected communities. That is, it seems to me, a far more profound form of solidarity than one based on a claim that states are in breach of international law. That's not to denigrate international law – it has been central to all the principle human security successes of the past 100 years - but simply to place the political and moral imperative for human security front and centre. In the long run, that is also a powerful source of legitimacy and a more sensible measure of effectiveness.

In the world of international policy-making, the politics of fear (terrorism vs. national security) have returned with a vengeance. At times like these, it is worth remembering that we have been here before: the banning of the dum dum bullet over 100 years ago did not mark the beginning of a century of more 'humanitarian' warfare, nor did the mine ban convention herald the dominance of human security in our policy making. But both campaigns were evidence of social movements making lasting changes to change the behavior of states in relation to each other and in relation to their own citizens. In the process, they both contributed to re-definitions of security which have stood the test of time and the vagaries of international politics.

If these lessons are anything to go by, the key to delivering lasting policy change with both legitimacy and effectiveness will be the ability of social movements to identify threats to people around which to mobilize grassroots demand for change. The most obvious - and central - of questions for human security policy will have to do with means of violence themselves: Landmines, Clusters, Small Arms, depleted uranium munitions, nuclear weapons... But to deal with the structural violence will require an analysis of the social relations governing coercion. This, it seems to me, will be fundamental to priorities, tactics and strategies of human security campaigning. That will mean pushing states to regulate mercenaries/private military companies; to enforce accountability for companies who find themselves on the wrong side of the law in wars and dictatorships; it will mean figuring out how to engage with non-state armed groups; it will mean dealing with environmental impacts on household survival and coping.

The principles are clear: a rejection of violence and an assertion of people over profit. For the new security campaigners and advocates the trick will be to start from a position which is agnostic about who are the actors and instead focus on what they do. For the social movements seeking to advance a human security agenda, the real questions will not be who or what is worse - dictators or terrorists, intervention or non-intervention, the ill or the cure - but what are the threats and to whom? Asking these questions will help us re-define the security challenge, from one which measures success in terms of targets 'acquired' to one which measures success in terms of lives saved.

ⁱ Don Hubert, comments to the seminar "Human Security, The Next Generation", lecture 23 May 2007, Fafo, Oslo.