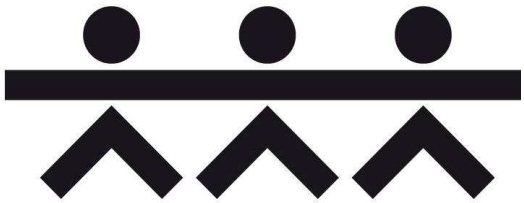

People's Empowerment

มูลนิธิศักยภาพชุมชน

Empowering People for a Strong Civil Society

Peoples Empowerment statement on Human Security

Presented to the Ministry of defense, Kingdom of Thailand

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ASEAN Human Security

- Human security (HS) shifts the focus of security, from the state or community to the **individual human being**.
- The 1994 UNDP *Human Development Report* summarized the idea of HS thus, "HS is a child who did not die, a disease that did not spread, a job that was not cut, an ethnic tension that did not explode in violence, a dissident who was not silenced."[1]
- HS requires State actors must take pro-active measures to both prevent and mitigate harm to individuals.
- Humanitarian aid is an element of HS, yet not the fulfillment of HS itself.
- ASEAN States should cooperate with different elements of civil society, on specific issues that affect HS, such as human trafficking, public health, climate change/extreme weather, and resource scarcity.
- This requires a strong spirit of openness, cooperation, and transparency from all involved.

A definition of Human Security

HS is composed of five elements and may be summarized as followed: **the objective of human security is to safe guard the *vital core* of *all human lives* from *critical pervasive threats*¸ in a way that is consistent with long-term *human fulfillment*.**[2]

I. **Safeguard**: The HS approach is **protective**, and encourages institutions to offer **continuous**, rather then sporadic, protection. This is a shift from traditional attitudes that viewed the need to protect only in a reactive sense (if at all), in light of a particular event, rather then from a preventative perspective. This affects policy in as much as it requires actors both to refrain from threatening individuals HS by their actions (negative action), and to provide safety mechanisms

[1] UNDP *Human Development Report,* 1994, p. 22.
[2] While different definitions exist in the literature, I find this to be the most coherent and inclusive definition, while at the same time remaining relevant to policy makers. Based on Alkire, S., p.2.

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that protect against deprivations when they occur (positive action).[3] Hence HS is **people-**centered, rather than threat-centered, ensuring that **safeguards are in place** to protect individuals at all times, and not just be in reaction to a negative event.

II. **Vital Core**: To be effective, HS must be contained in its scope, yet not be too limited. **HS identifies and protects a limited and basic set of human activities, rights, and abilities, pertaining to physical survival, livelihood, and basic dignity.** This definition is consciously vague so as to allow room for operationalizing the concept in accordance to specific situations, restraints, and institutional realties. While the threats to the vital core of victims of natural disasters may be similar, the realities of a situation in New Orleans differ completely from those in the Andaman Islands, and must therefore be approached differently. The vital core aspect of HS defined thus, is sufficiently malleable to incorporate these differences.

III. **All Human Lives**: The emphasis place by HS on individual human beings, equally, differentiates it from traditional conceptions that placed territorial integrity at the center, and dominated security studies for so long. This shift in security studies, from state centered to individual centered approaches, follows similar shifts in other fields such as economic development and international law. This shift does not *remove* the state from security studies, for it continues to hold a central role in maintaining HS. Moreover, these two focus points are not mutually exclusive, and the augmentation of one can strengthen the other.

IV. **Critical & Pervasive Threats**: Threats to HS are *critical* in so much as they threaten to impair core activities and functions of human lives. The depth of the threat is important in this sense, rather then the suddenness of the event. So while the crash of the US stock market in 1987 was just as sudden as the Great Crash of 1929, it was not as critical. **A threat is *pervasive* in that it is both on a large scale and may possibly repeat itself again**.

V. **Human Fulfillment**: HS has contributed an additional facet to the discourse regarding human lives. **Not only must the life of an individual itself be preserved, it must be done is such a**

[3] This is relevant not only to governments but also to development agencies whose actions may have inadvertently threatened individuals HS.

way that is consistent with that individuals long term good. It is not enough to merely prolong a victim's life in this sense, but rather effort should also be made to enhance his or her capacity to exist. This of course changes from one situation to another, but nonetheless sets the standard higher then merely providing emergency assistance, wherever it may be.

A "working definition" of HS

Today HS maintains (i) joint focus on both poverty *and* violence; (ii) the 1994 "people-centered" approach of the UNDP; (iii) the diverse dimensions of action; (iv) a narrow focus on "critical pervasive threats to the core of people's lives"; and finally (v) the normative claim that HS must be consciously implemented in operational polices and projects.[4]

Taken beyond its limited definition of protecting a state's people and territory from physical assault, state security also includes the education, health, empowerment and well-being of those individuals within the state, thus coinciding with HS concerns.[5]

If in the past, security was regarded as a triangular relationship, between peoples, governments, and physical territories, today it may be regarded as an expanding sphere of multi-partnered relationships, including individuals, governments, institutions, domestic NGOs, international NGOs, and IOs to name but a few. In short, modernity and globalization have brought with them an increase in actors affecting individual lives, hence necessitating a new security framework.

The **strength** of the HS framework lies in its dynamic **ability to adjust itself** to different circumstances. In post-conflict scenarios, HS brings to the surface a wide spectrum of issues that must be dealt with in order to restore security to individuals. These include issues of Public safety (both

[4] Alkire, S., p. 5
[5] The Hart-Rudman Commission on U.S. National Security also relates the material well-being of those living outside the boundaries of the United States to U.S. national security. Alkire, S., p. 29.

negative and positive actions), Humanitarian aid (provision of both food and health care), Reconstruction (of both infrastructure and social structures), Reconciliation processes (to promote peaceful coexistence), and Good Governance (as both a preventative mechanism and to ensure HS). This **holistic approach** seeks to provide security to the individuals in a society, and through them, to the state as a whole.

Political actors may object to the perceived encroachment of HS on their sovereignty, yet these fears often seem to be insincere, since one can not ignore threats to HS that originate from the state itself, either from direct actions or lack thereof. If ASEAN member states are truly concerned with the well-being of their people, they should welcome the increased support and assistance. The goal of HS is the protection of the individual, in a manner that does not necessarily threaten the state. States will continue to play a significant role in this process, and need not fear for their future. Certain political actors, such as tyrants, genociders, and warlords may be worried, but this can hardly be seen as a negative development.

The reframing of focus on individuals and communities, the incorporation of new threats, the expanded group of relevant actors and the inclusion of prevention of threats is not only a natural but practical development. HS realizes the interdependence of different factors and actors relevant to the security of individuals, and provides a comprehensive framework for dealing with contemporary threats.

HS is ultimately an effective framework for devising polices to mitigate hardships and improve individual lives. Only through comprehensive policies, focused on the individuals at risk, can true safety be provided, to both states and the populations within.