Introduction

Canadian human security initiatives have tended to focus on the protection of individuals from threats of violence associated with war, genocide, war crimes, and terrorism. Over 90% of conflicts now take place within states. Civilians are very often the primary victims of these modern conflicts, many of which are shaped by ethnic or religious violence and state-sanctioned executions, and involve brutal paramilitaries, child soldiers, landmines, small arms, and terrorism.

Human security and state security are, in theory, mutually supportive. Human security is realized when states are effective in fulfilling their international and national security obligations. However, it is threatened when states are at war internationally, repressive domestically, or simply lack the capacity to provide for public security. It is equally true that large-scale human security failures tend to undermine the legitimacy and security of states.

Human security, as shaped and experienced by individual citizens and state actors such as soldiers or police, is very often determined by local security conditions. Human security is violated or provided within specific geographical locations, for example, rebel territories, ethnic enclaves, safe zones, or refugee camps. With half of the world's population now living in cities, human security is increasingly being shaped by the unique dynamics of urban realities.

This is not a new phenomenon. Long before the emergence of the modern state system, cities were the first geo-political structures capable of supporting human security. They were the first sites of a conscious social bargain through which individual freedoms were traded for a set of common rights and responsibilities maintained by civic authorities. However, it took almost 4,000 years for cities to grow to the point at which, by the year 1800, they hosted just 3% of the world's population. Just 100 years later the urban population had grown to 13%. By 2005, it was 50%. And by 2030, 60% of the global population will live in cities.

Cities have grown to the point at which the mayors of some of the largest cities in the world now govern more people than the majority of the world's sovereign states. Indeed, some cities are now capable of exerting powerful effects upon peace and security independently of state actions. The phenomenal growth of these increasingly powerful entities presents a host of human security challenges, as well as opportunities, with implications for the human security agenda.