

The Human Security Paradigm Shift: A New Lens on Canadian Foreign Policy?
Report of the IIR Symposium on Human Security
June 18, 1999

1. Introduction: Background to Symposium

A one day symposium on Human Security and Canadian Foreign Policy was organized by the Institute of International Relations (IIR) and sponsored by the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development. The event was held on June 18, 1999 at the University of Toronto. The symposium brought together 17 academics and government representatives broadly sympathetic to the concept of human security. This paper is an attempt to summarize the discussion, which took place and highlight some of the key ideas raised in the course of day.

The Symposium was the idea of Will Bell, a doctoral student at IIR, prompted by a concern over the dearth of discussion in the Canadian media and government about human security. The speakers included: Bill Bell, IIR; Lloyd Axworthy, Minister of International Trade and Development; and other speakers. The symposium sought to consider the meaning, scope and practical implications of human security, as well as the implications, generally speaking, for Canadian foreign policy. As the discussion took place, the intervention by NATO in Kosovo was at the forefront of Canadian foreign policy and figured as a key case study in the discussion, particularly concerning the use of force in humanitarian intervention.

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In writing this report, the authors wish to provide both some fresh ideas, both outside of government, about the concept of human security, in practical terms for government officials, as well as highlight some of the important theoretical questions such a paradigmatic shift poses for academic, particularly scholars of International Relations theory. While the ideas came out of the discussion held, the organization of this material, and the themes drawn from the discussion are the sole responsibility of the authors.

2. Human Security: Definition and Scope

The notion of the human being as the referent object of international law, development, as is the idea that security includes human security, the absence of violence and other non-military threats. The report is intended to be a contribution to the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade's 'People's Choice' process. There is, however, a great deal of uncertainty about what this means in policy terms, a perceived mismatch between the idea of human security and the practical and policy tools of domestic and international relations, and some real debates, even amongst those

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¹ Human Security: Safety for People in a Changing World, IIRAH, Canada, April 1999.