

4. The Practice of Human Security: The Need for Early Action

Participants widely agreed that a key priority in the practice of human security is increasing emphasis on (and resources devoted to) prevention of conflicts which threaten human security. This is particularly true in situations of mass violence. Human security entails increased attempts to avert conflicts in other parts of the world, thereby preventing human suffering. Too frequently the 'old' Cold War policy was war by proxy; a new people-centered approach to security requires that we address the causes of conflict and take preventative measures through such means as pre-conflict peace-building.

Participants considered why human security is often invoked post-conflict, despite the 'early warning' mechanisms which exist. It was suggested that it is difficult for states to mobilize resources prior to civilian casualties and subsequent calls for action often result in disagreement amongst states about the best way to force rogue states to comply with conflict prevention measures. Finally, issues of national sovereignty, international law, and lack of access often block the efforts of outside states to prevent conflict within or between states. The international law needs to be clarified in this respect. It was also argued that UN resources such as special representatives are not mobilized in a proactive, timely or effective way, and the UN bureaucratic machinery is generally 'mismatched' with changing ideas of pre-conflict peace-building and human security. International institutions are still learning how to deal with the post- Cold War order and learning the most effective means of allocating resources. Reform and streamlining of the UN machinery remains a crucial step in improving conflict prevention, and thus human security.

In considering the 'division of labour' required by human security, one participant concluded that while humanitarian aid and services should be delivered by civilians in pre-conflict and post-conflict peace-building situations, they may require protective services from military forces. The extent to which military activity and NGO intervention can be combined, and under whose auspices (public or private), in potentially incendiary situations has been debated by Janice Gross Stein and others, but more academic work needs to engage this question of the hard-edged side of soft power.⁴

One participant argued that peace-building requires a broader and more flexible mandate from international organizations. Peacekeepers are often too limited in the range of activities deemed acceptable by their mandates. Partial solutions to these problems may be found in creating a UN 'standing' peace-building force, which would integrate military and civilian roles, while broadening the mandate to enable it to use force where appropriate. Global initiatives to reduce the overall number of tools of war, be they

⁴ Michael Bryans, Bruce D. Jones and Janice Gross Stein, *Mean Times: Humanitarian Action in Complex Political Emergencies – Stark Choices, Cruel Dilemmas*, Report of the NGOs in Complex Emergencies Project, *Coming to Terms*, Vol 1, No. 3, Program on Conflict Management and Negotiation, Centre for International Studies, University of Toronto, January 1999. The authors discuss the controversial use of private security forces for humanitarian purposes, in the absence of 'a consistent and predictable willingness to fill the security gap', on the part of the international community (NATO, EU, OAU).