

*The Conceptualization of Human Security in Canada's Foreign Policy: A Critique in Light of Asia's Financial Crisis*¹

Xavier Furtado²

Introduction

More than two years after the onset of Asia's financial crisis, several of the region's economies have been showing signs of recovery. As interest rates continue to decline and exchange rates around the region show signs of strength, many analysts have argued that the region seems poised to resume its journey towards economic growth and development. Improvements in the regional economy have caused some to believe that the worst is over and that standards of living and social conditions in Asia will continue their long march upward.

The complete story, however, is less sanguine. In some countries, industrial capacity continues to decline and private investment remains far from pre-crisis levels.³ These persistent challenges promise even more unemployment and continued hardship. Coupled with the likelihood of continued inflation through 1999, there are few convincing signs that Asia's most troubled economies are on a *firm* path towards recovery. As a result, the declining social security/welfare situation resulting from the crisis is not likely to see any dramatic improvement.⁴ Even if the region's most afflicted economies manage to post strong growth through the remainder of this year and into 2000, these economies will remain smaller than they were before the crisis for quite some time. Consequently, they will be less able to provide their citizens with the sorts of opportunities for economic advancement and human development that were available prior to the crisis.⁵ The absolute number of people living either on or below the poverty line will remain large and the human security challenges posed by the crisis will persist. It is necessary for Canadian policy makers to remain vigilant and continue their close monitoring of the situation in Asia.

The purpose of this paper, however, is to go beyond the income-related effects of the crisis and draw attention to some of the more specific implications of the crisis on human security concerns in three Southeast Asian countries, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam. Using the data uncovered during the fieldwork --- consisting of interviews/consultations with personnel from government, academe and non-governmental/activist groups as well as a review of primary and secondary data most readily available in these countries --- the author intends to provide a critique of how the Canadian policy establishment conceptualizes and articulates human security (as stated in the 1995 foreign policy statement, *Canada in the World*, hereafter also referred to as

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented to the 1998 annual conference of the Canadian Consortium on Asian Pacific Security (CANCAPS) in Victoria, B.C. and to the Vancouver branch of the Canadian Institute of International Affairs. Research funding was provided by the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development and a CANCAPS Young Scholar Travel Award. The author would like to thank Allen Chong (Acadia University) and Marc Lanteigne (Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada) for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

² During the time of research and writing, the author was an assistant professor of international relations at De La Salle University (Manila) and a research consultant to the Asian Institute of Management. He is now with the Canadian International Development Agency. The views expressed in this paper are the author's own.

³ Murray Hiebert, "Capital Idea?", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, July 1, 1999, p. 55.

⁴ For example, see: Lisa Cameron, "Indonesia's Social Crisis", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, July 8, 1999, p. 24.

⁵ "Attracting Attention: The Perception of Malaysia", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, July 8, 1999, p. 82.