

SPECIAL COMMENT

I am pleased to be able to contribute to this issue of *Disarmament Forum*, which examines the relationship between human rights and human security.

Where should we begin, in general terms, to strengthen the links between human rights and human security? First, I believe, by broadening the definition of 'security'. The concept of human security was articulated in a compelling new way last year by the independent Commission on Human Security co-chaired by Amartya Sen and Sadako Ogata. In its final report, *Human Security Now*, the Commission noted that while in the past, debate on issues of security focused on state security, the international community urgently needs a new paradigm that shifts the emphasis from the security of states to the security of people—to human security.

If people are to be protected—the first key to human security—their basic rights and freedoms must be upheld. As the Commission stressed: 'To do so requires concerted efforts to develop national and international norms, processes and institutions, which must address insecurities in ways that are systematic not makeshift, comprehensive not compartmentalized, preventive not reactive.'

Human security also requires that people are able to act on their own behalf—and on behalf of others. That means ensuring respect for fundamental rights to education, proper nutrition and health care, and for individuals to participate in decisions which affect them—all of which empower people to lead productive lives and develop their full potential.

And what does this broader approach mean in the field of disarmament? By making the links between human rights and human security, we bring into sharper focus the most immediate threats that are present in people's daily lives.

Consider, for example, the fact that today threats of new terrorist attacks and the dangers of weapons of mass destruction dominate the headlines. While these threats to security must be confronted, we cannot lose sight of the fact that the weapons that threaten most people on the planet go largely unnoticed by those of us who live far from conflict and war. Those weapons are the 639 million small arms in circulation, and the at least 16 billion units of military ammunition produced every year.

During my five years as United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, I spent much of my time meeting people who were terrorized by armed violence. In places such as the Balkans, Cambodia, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sierra Leone, the proliferation of small arms threatens lives and puts fundamental human rights at risk.

The death and injury of millions of innocent civilians are not the only human rights consequences of small arms proliferation. In conflict-torn countries, governments dedicating limited resources to the weapons of war are much less able to meet long-term commitments to education, health care and adequate housing—all of which constitute internationally recognized economic, social and cultural rights.

Despite a growing awareness among some governments that small arms proliferation threatens human security by inhibiting humanitarian efforts and sustainable development, the impact on human rights is still often underestimated or overlooked. That is why Oxfam International, of which I am proud to serve as Honorary President, along with Amnesty International and the International Action Network on Small Arms, have banded together in a Control Arms Campaign to argue for greater international regulation in the form of an Arms Trade Treaty. The proposed treaty includes legally binding criteria, based on existing international law, to stop the flow of arms to human rights abusers, repressive governments and criminals. Governments would be required not to sell arms where they know that they would be used to violate human rights or international humanitarian law, at last injecting regulation into a dangerously unregulated trade.

The growing support among governments and civil society for such a treaty is a welcome sign. It would mark a significant step forward in recognizing and acting on the clear links between human rights and human security.

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