

Remarks by Madam Sadako Ogata
Advisor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs
at the Symposium on Human Security
June 2, 2013 Yokohama

“Development of the Concept of
Human Security”

Thank you, Minister Kishida.

I am particularly pleased to speak at this symposium. I have had the privilege of engaging in the development of the human security concept and policy. I believe human security has a special relevance for the future of Africa and its people.

I came to embrace human security through my experience as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). My tenure was a turbulent one. As the Cold War ended in many parts of the world, the nature of conflicts changed from inter-state to intra-state, thus creating human insecurity across the globe. As High Commissioner, I had to deal with not only refugees who crossed international borders, but also internally displaced persons.

Facing millions of people who had been forced to leave their homes, the concept of human security began to impress me as a useful entry point to deal with the prevailing insecurity situation affecting many people. By directly focusing on the victims, I realized we can learn what could be done to protect them, identify their needs, and address the root causes of their insecurity.

Human security, therefore, is not an abstract concept. On the contrary, it is a most practical principle that I came to appreciate through my days as High Commissioner.

After I retired from the post of High Commissioner, I had the opportunity to serve as the co-chair of the Commission on Human Security together with Professor Amartya Sen. The commission produced the report “Human Security Now” in 2003 and helped consolidate the notion of human security that had been examined in many circles.

Since then, significant efforts have been made to translate the concept of human security into concrete actions. UN agencies have implemented some 200 projects in 85 countries with financial support from the UN Trust Fund for Human Security, which Japan set up aiming at clarifying and promoting human security. The Trust Fund has produced good practices of protecting and enabling vulnerable people, and has promoted collaboration among various UN agencies. As a result, human security has now evolved into a powerful policy tool.

The UN member states made a further step forward by adopting the General Assembly resolution on human security last September. This resolution has helped not only to provide a common understanding of the concept of human security, but also leads the way for further collaborative action.

Last month, the High-level Event on Human Security was held at the United Nations, creating a greater momentum to advance human security based on the General Assembly resolution. I had the honor to address at the event, together with the Secretary-General, UNDP Administrator Helen Clark who is here with us, and other prominent and ardent supporters of human security.

I expressed my gratitude for the significant advancement the international community has made toward realizing human security. I was particularly heartened by listening to the representative of the African Union, who characterized human security as indispensable conceptual tool of our time. Yet, I also had to remind the audience that in too many parts of the world people are still left at the mercy of threats to their survival, livelihood and dignity.

The international community has clearly made significant progress in protecting and empowering people. However, the progress has not been as fast as I wished. This is partly because some states are still concerned that human security might trigger too much interference into their domestic affairs. Human security, actually, calls for stronger governance and effective institutions. Human security complements state security. A bright future for countries and their people require both state and human security.

As the international community strives for establishing the post-2015 development agenda, it is high time for us to revisit the principle of human security, based on the powerful General Assembly resolution. Human security teaches us that the survival, livelihood and dignity of people serve as the basis for achieving peace, development and human rights.

I sincerely wish that all leaders of African countries, international organizations and NGOs who get together at this TICAD show strong solidarity and take concrete actions to advance human security throughout the African continent and beyond.

Thank you.