Text of Speech by Professor Amitav Acharya, UNESCO Chair in Transnational Challenges and Governance, America University and Global Director of Transnational Challenges and Emerging Nations Dialogue (TRANSCEND), to the "Informal Thematic Debate of the 65th Session of the United Nations General Assembly on Human Security", New York, 14 April 2011

The evolution of the concept of human security has gone through two phases. Between the 1990s and the early 2000s was a period of debate over its various meanings, whether human security was about freedom from fear, or freedom from want. Since then, the debate has entered a period of general agreement that human security is both, as well as freedom to live a life of dignity. It is not a matter of either this or either that. The important challenge is how to look for linkages between these various meanings.

But a common feature of all these debates and synthesis was that they were almost exclusively conducted by the academic community and policymakers of individual countries. Ironically, common people hardly got their voice through, even though human security is really about people's security. What people – especially those who are real victims of human insecurity in their real lives- think of the human security concept was hardly factored-in.

This bias was partly because these debates took place in academia and in intergovernmental institutions and forums, but not in the field. It was also because we did not do micro-research, or case studies in actual conflict areas. Instead, we focused on the broad picture.

Now we have some data to correct this bias. Recently, the Asian Dialogue Society a regional network of academics, policy leaders and concerned citizens and friends of Asia, in partnership with the School of International Studies at American University, and the Madhyam Foundation, a non-profit group in India, and funded by the Sasakawa Peace Foundation of Japan, carried out a study of human security in two regions of India – Northeast India and Orissa. Both these areas have lots of human insecurity – poverty, insurgency and conflict. Our findings, which has just beenpublished as a book entitled, *Human Security: From Concept to Practice* (Singapore and London: World Scientific, 2011), edited by Amitav Acharya, Subrat K. Singhdeo, and M. Rajaretnam, are important not only for the practical aspects of human security, but also for rethinking the concept itself. Let me list four of these findings:

1. *Poor people fear most.* In Northeast India, we found that 76.1 per cent of the people who have an annual income of 1000 rupees or less felt they were "compelled to live in

anxiety?", compared to 60.4 per cent of the people who had an income level of 10,000 rupees or more. The clear implication is that poverty and human insecurity are inextricably linked.

2. *States and state policies are also a source on human insecurity.*One cause of fear is operations by the military or security forces. For example, when asked whether theyfeared the militants or the military (security forces) more, 38.5 per cent of respondents in the North East India cases said they were equally afraid of both, a higher percentage than those who said they were more afraid of the militants and those who said they feared the security forces more. Another factor that came out clearly is bad governance, including government corruption. These findings go to the heart of a very important question about human security, which is security for *the people*, rather than security *for states*.

3. *Political and socio-economic factors behind conflict are closely linked.*Conflict is caused by a variety of sources. The three most important sources of popular dissatisfaction contributing to conflict (hence sources of threats to human security) that came out in both North East India and Orissa are: corruption in government, unemployment, and poverty and lack of basic amenities.

4. *People want dialogue.* More than two-thirds of the people – including people who sympathize with the insurgents- interviewed said they prefer dialogue to extreme solutions such as outright suppression or outright secession. They prefer governments to talk to insurgents, rather than strengthen military operations, or grant independence to them. Moreover, we people want the dialogue to be inclusive, involving the representatives of the larger civil society. This finding is significant for the UN's efforts to find effective solutions to the problem of internal conflicts leading to state break-ups. The key demand of groups fighting governments may not be to break away, but to have their human security respected and fulfilled. Responding to internal conflicts with this understanding mind will go a long way in addressing the challenge of state failure today.

This also leads me to talk briefly about responses to challenges to human security: how to devise effective policy tools to improve the prospects for human security around the world.

Mr Obasanjo has earlier urged the UN to develop a human security index. The foundation for such an index has already been laid in the project and book *Human Security: From Concept to Practice,*which I have mentioned earlier.In our project, we propose three policy tools: (1) Human Security Governance Index and Ranking; (2) Human Security Mapping in Conflict Zones; and (3) Human Security Impact Assessment. While limitation of time does not allow me to go into details, let me mention a few key points about each of these.

(1) *Human Security Governance Index and Ranking:* We now have Human Development Reports (under the auspices of the United Nations Development Program) for countries and increasingly states/provinces within countries, our innovation has been is to extend it to regions and districts (within states/provinces) to allow for more micro-studies and of the local context in which human security assessments and policies must be carried out. Moreover, we include governance, not just threats, in our measurement, since bad governance is a fundamental cause of human insecurity and good governance is key to ensuring the realization of human security.

(2) *Human Security Mapping in Conflict Zones:* People who live in the constant shadow of conflict may have more specific and acute perceptions of human security challenges and needs than people who live in relative peace and order. Hence, a methodology for relating to people in conflict zones and analyzing their concerns and attitudes is vital. Our project presents such a template.

(3) *Human Security Impact Assessment (HSIA):* We have environmental impact assessments for some time, but it is time to extend it and cover the entire gamut of human security concerns. Some projects intended for promoting development, such as large infrastructure projects undertaken by donor agencies, multilateral institutions like the World Bank, national/provincial governments, and corporations, no matter how well-intentioned, may end up aggravating insecurity and conflict in the area. A HSIA enables governments, foreign donors, multilateral institutions and corporations, to better anticipate the impact of their projects not just on development and environment, but also on security as a whole, from a broader perspective. And by necessity, such assessments have to be localized and micro-analytic. Our project has provided the template and methodology for such a HSIA, which can be easily adapted to all parts of the world.

None of this is to belittle the value of broad brush measurements of human security, such as the *Human Security Report,* produced under the leadership of Professor Andrew Mack. This is becoming an indispensable source of knowledge about human security. What I urge is for the international community, including the UN, to compliment the broad picture studies with micro-studies, which give you a better chance to incorporate the people's own perception of the meaning and scope of human security. My call is for allowing the civil society and the common people to get involved in the process of human security research and policy dialogues.

To sum up, the overall conclusion that one might reach from our study is that to an overwhelming extent, people see human security in a holistic way, not in a piecemeal manner. So the lines drawn between "freedom from fear", "freedom from want", and "freedom to live a life with dignity", are easily blurred in people's perceptions of human security, what it means to them and how it is challenged and how it is to be promoted. This is the finding that we need to bring into our ongoing efforts to reach a common understanding of human security and correct

the bias that I mentioned earlier. And while we derive these insights from case studies in India, it is my strong belief that they hold true everywhere.

I conclude by observing that just as the concept of human security itself is people-centric, so should be research and dissemination efforts about it. If the UN, the Human Security trust Fund and individual countries are to effectively promote human security, they might want to invest more on research and dissemination from "bottom-up", by increasing the engagement of common people and the civil society.

Thank you very much for your attention.