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**UN General Assembly: Interactive Debate 2:  
Human Security – Its Application and Added Value**

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**The Environmental Dimension of Human Security:  
Freedom from Hazard Impacts**

**1. Natural Disasters and Human Security**

The cascading effects of a devastating earthquake and tsunami that triggered a major nuclear catastrophe in Japan on 11 March 2011 stresses the relevance of Beck's theory of a "global risk society".

The number of victims of the earthquakes in Haiti and in Chile in 2010 and of the tsunamis of 2004 and of 2011 differed due to the respective social vulnerability as a result of the degree of protection and coping capacities but also due to local resilience based on the empowerment of the people. **While hazards cannot be prevented, their impact can be reduced.**

These hazards did not affect national and international security but they had severe impacts on the **human security of human beings and most affected communities** and on **their water, soil, food, health and livelihood security**. This is the background for a fourth pillar of human security as "*Freedom from Hazard Impacts*" to deal with the environment, sustainable development and disasters and to include the respective organizations, programmes and initiatives within the UN system.

Human security addresses **threats that endanger the lives and livelihoods of individuals and communities**. Its mission was “to improve the knowledge base for the assessment of vulnerability and coping capacity of societies facing natural and human-induced hazards”.

**“Freedom from Hazard Impacts”** calls for **reducing** the environmental and **social vulnerability** and **enhancing coping capabilities of societies** confronted with environmental, geophysical and climate-related hazards.

“Freedom from hazard impact” implies that people can mobilise their resources to address sustainable development goals. **Human security as freedom from hazard impact is achieved** when people who are vulnerable to environmental hazards and disasters that are often intensified by poverty, food insecurity, improper housing in flood-prone and coastal areas **are better warned of impending hazards, and are *protected* against them and are *empowered* to prepare themselves for them.**

## **5. Human Security Network, Friends of Human Security and UNGA Debate on Human Security on 22 May 2008**

The *Human Security Network* endorsed this goal. Greece addressed climate change as a challenge for human security focusing on development, women, children and migrants. The *Friends of Human Security* discussed climate change and disasters since April 2007.

In the **UN General Assembly** meeting on human security in May 2008 many countries listed environ-

from Hazard Impacts” may now be added as a fourth pillar. Putting the environment and natural hazards on the human security agenda implies to address its impacts on water, soil, food, health and livelihood security.

**Global environmental change** as the outcome of the interaction between the earth and human system and of the direct human interference into nature has become a **scientific, political and security issue** since the 1970s. Since 2004 **climate change** became a **security concern**. While the **international** security debates addressed it as a ‘**threat multiplier**’, the **national** security debate addressed **threats for a nation** and on how to respond.

A human security perspective on climate change puts **human beings, communities and humankind** in the centre, addresses **how *physical and societal* impacts of climate change pose HS dangers**, and how human beings, states and the international community **can cope to avoid major human catastrophes**.

As ‘**we**’ are the **threat** (through our energy consumption), it is ‘**us**’ who have to change our consumption and must adapt the governance structures to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions by 50% from 1990 to 2050. This implies a shift from ***business-as-usual*** strategies towards an **alternative sustainability paradigm**.

A *policy-focused human security approach* to climate change prioritizes the **climate-induced security threats humankind will face** during the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Its task is to **develop policies for better coping with the human security impacts of climate change** by measures of mitigation, adaptation and resilience-building to **protect**

**hood security.** It affects water quantity and quality, posing a direct challenge to human health. Water is also crucial for soil and food security. The **policy agenda evolved** from poverty alleviation, diverse development paradigms, sustainability to financial, physical, human, societal, political and cultural capitals and to sectoral security issues **that affect human security.**

1. *Water security* suggests “that every person has access to **enough safe water** at an **affordable cost** to lead a healthy and productive life and that the vulnerable are **protected** from the **risks of water-related hazards.**”
2. “**Soil security** is achieved when **efforts succeed to conserve soil fertility, contain land degradation and combat desertification** and when the consequences of drought are reduced by **improving livelihood and human wellbeing of the people.**”
3. *Food security* is achieved “**when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food** which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”.
4. While the WHO uses a **state-centred** understanding of **health security** related to epidemics, bioterrorism and prevention, a **human security** approach focuses on the interrelationship between **human health and environmental services as important health providers** and expresses the crucial relationship between water, food and health security.

## 9. Human Security Responses to Security Dangers Posed by Global Environmental Change Impacts

What policy responses are needed to achieve human security as “Freedom from Hazard Impact”?

“**Dangerous climate change**” may become a human and international security threat if the **stabilization** of the increase of global average temperature of **2°C fails**. If the linear effects of climate change should cross a **threshold** and trigger “**tipping points** in the climate system”, such as the melting of the glaciers in the Andes and in the Himalaya, its **geopolitical impacts** may be far more extreme than the effects of 11 March 2011. **The industrialized countries are not immune to the consequences of climate-related hazards.**

## 10. Strategies for Coping with Environmental Threats to Human Security

The catastrophe of 11 March 2011 stresses the need to develop the *Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015* further to cope with **complex emergencies** and **cascading effects of complex hazards** to protect the people.

“**Freedom from Hazard Impacts**” addresses the consequences for their **human security** but also on **water, soil, food, health and livelihood security**. From a policy perspective a **holistic coping strategy** requires better **horizontal coordination** of strategies, policies and measures of ministries and international organizations.

The daily survival problems of five billion people, their social vulnerability and physical exposure to climate change are **creating additional dangers for human security**, but also **challenges for an integrated human security approach that combines all four pillars**.

**“Freedom from Hazard Impacts”** implies a **close cooperation between those agencies** working on the **global environmental and the hazard agenda**.

It may be an appropriate time for the United Nations General Assembly to consider adding to the first three pillars of Human Security as

- **“Freedom from Fear”** and the peacekeeping, humanitarian law and disarmament agenda;
- **“Freedom from Want”** referring to the human and sustainable development agenda;
- **“Freedom to live in Dignity”** and human rights, democratic governance and rule of law;

a fourth pillar as

- **“Freedom from Hazard Impacts”** that introduces into the human security framework at the United Nations General Assembly the **policy agendas** dealing with **global environmental change** issues as well as **natural hazards and disasters** (early warning, disaster response, disaster preparedness, resilience building and reduction of social vulnerability).

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