



## “Human Security” offers new way to understand development challenges in the Arab region

**Human security is not merely about survival; it is about re-launching people at risk on a safer course, supported by political, economic, social and cultural building blocks for a better life**

**BEIRUT, 21 July, 2009** —In Arab countries, a widespread lack of human security undermines human development, according to the *Arab Human Development Report 2009: Challenges to Human Security in the Arab Countries*. This report is prepared by independent scholars drawn from the region.

The report argues that human security is a prerequisite for human development, and that the widespread absence of human security in Arab countries undermines people’s options. Human security refers not only to questions of survival, but also basic needs such as access to clean water and quality of life concerns. Human security in the Arab countries is often threatened by unjust political, social, and economic structures; by competition for power and resources among fragmented social groups; and, in some cases, by the impacts of external military intervention.

The *Arab Human Development Report 2009* argues that the concept of human security is a useful lens for viewing challenges to, and envisioning solutions for, human development in the Arab region.

“The tendency is to think of security only in military or state security terms,” said Amat Al Alim Alsoswa, Director of the UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States and UN Assistant Secretary-General. “But the security of people themselves is threatened not just by conflict and civil unrest, but also by environmental degradation, discrimination, unemployment, poverty, and hunger. Only if these sources of insecurity are addressed in a holistic manner will the people of the Arab region be able to make progress in human development.”

The concept of human security offers a way to reorient development policy in the Arab region toward areas that will have the greatest impact on human well-being. In effect, to focus on human security is to focus on a broader development agenda that determines whether people are able to live secure lives and achieve their potential. The report makes it clear that piecemeal policy approaches will not suffice. Employment generation programmes, for example, will not reach their full potential if people do not have proper nutrition and healthcare.

The conceptual framework of the Report is rooted in the UNDP 1994 Global Human Development Report, *New Dimensions of Human Security*. It identified seven interdependent threats to human security and argued that human security can only be a reality if all threats are taken seriously and acted on without hierarchy.

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The report identifies several ways that Arab countries can improve human security:

- **Strengthen the rule of law** to guarantee essential rights, freedoms and opportunities for all, and to resolve conflicts over power and resources which create great instability. In six Arab countries, there is an outright ban on the formation of political parties, while restrictions on political activities and civic organizations in other countries often amount to *de facto* prohibition. National security measures such as the declaration of emergency law often serve as a pretext to suspend basic rights, exempt rulers from constitutional limitations, and afford security agencies sweeping powers.

“The civil state ruled by laws that respect human rights is the best guarantor of human security,” said Madawi Al-Rasheed, professor of religious anthropology at King’s College in London and a Core Team member for the *Arab Human Development Report 2009*. “In the Arab region, states are far from this ideal.”

Moreover, whereas some analysts focused on the Arab countries treat identity differences as a source of insecurity in the Arab countries, the authors of this report argue that the diversity of the population in Arab countries requires insightful management by the state under the larger concept of full citizenship.

- **Protect the environment** by strengthening institutions, enacting and enforcing laws, integrating environmental concerns into development planning, and raising environmental awareness through youth education. Desertification threatens about 2.9 million square kilometres, or roughly one-fifth of the total area of Arab countries. Meanwhile, natural resources are being depleted at an alarming rate, as population pressures mount. The average number of live births per woman in the Arab region is 3.6 compared to a global average of 2.6. At this growth rate, the region is expected to be home to nearly 385 million people by 2015, up from approximately 330 million currently.

“The human security of people in the Arab region depends, first and foremost, on the health of the environment that sustains all of us,” said Amat Al Alim Alsoswa, Director of the UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States and UN Assistant Secretary-General. “Urgent action is needed to put the region on a development path which is more sustainable.”

- **Safeguard the rights of women** by changing laws and attitudes which entrench gender-based discrimination. The report notes that women in Arab countries have little access to justice and few possibilities of legal redress when they are victims of violence. In conflict areas, women’s insecurity increases sharply.

“Though violence against women can be found in every country, women in societies with entrenched male dominance, patriarchal kinship patterns, and legalized discrimination – the situation in many Arab countries – are acutely vulnerable,” said Munira Fakhro, former Associate Professor at the University of Bahrain and an Advisory Board member for the *Arab Human Development Report 2009*. “Much of the violence against Arab women is inflicted unseen in the home, on wives and sisters, daughters and mothers.”

- **Address the weak structural underpinnings of the Arab oil economy** and move toward a more diversified, knowledge-based economy that provides sufficient employment. Arab countries are greatly exposed to the fluctuations of oil prices, as oil accounts for more than 70 percent of the region’s exports. The region also has the world’s highest unemployment rate – 14.4 percent versus a world average of 6.3 percent. Given current population growth, the Arab countries will have to create 50 million new jobs by 2020 to accommodate the anticipated workforce.

“The fabled oil wealth of the Arab countries presents a misleading picture of their economic situation, which masks the structural weaknesses of many Arab economies and the resulting insecurity of countries and citizens alike,” said Walid Khadduri, consultant for the Middle East Economic Survey and a Core Team member for the *Arab Human Development Report 2009*.

- **Tackle poverty and end hunger which** persists despite the comparative affluence of the region. An estimated one in five people in the Arab region lives below the internationally recognized poverty threshold of US \$2-per-day. A significantly larger proportion of Arabs in countries studied by the report, however, lives under nationally-determined poverty lines and still cannot afford bare necessities. Accordingly a more accurate estimate would be that two in five Arabs live in poverty. Large segments of the population in low-income countries face basic deprivation, reflected, for example, in inadequate access to safe water and a high incidence of underweight children. The number of undernourished persons in the region increased from around 19.8 million in 1990-1992 to 25.5 million in 2002-2004.

“Economic security and food security are critical components of human security,” said Walid Khadduri, consultant for the Middle East Economic Survey and a Core Team member for to the *Arab Human Development Report 2009*. “Though the Arab region overall has a comparatively low poverty rate, people in the least developed Arab countries and marginalized groups within affluent countries face serious deprivation.”

- **Boost public health** by expanding access to affordable, quality healthcare with an emphasis on preventive medicine, combating cultural practices which harm women’s health, and promoting compassionate public information campaigns on HIV/AIDS combined with increased testing and treatment.

“A human security approach to health entails treating health not just as the absence of disease, but as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being,” said Rafia Ghubash, President of the Gulf University in Bahrain and an Advisory Board member for the *Arab Human Development Report 2009*. “Human security in the Arab region requires making health a human right.”

- **End occupation, armed conflict, and military intervention** which cause human suffering, erase decades of economic development, and undermine the fragile progress of political reform by bolstering extremist forces and also undermining moderate voices. More than 17 million people in the Arab region have been forced by violent conflict to flee their homes, making this the region of the world with the highest number of refugees and internally displaced persons.

“Occupation and military intervention in the region have the gravest effects on the Palestinian, Iraqi, and Somali people,” said Clovis Maksoud, Professor of International Relations at American University in Washington D.C. and an Advisory Board member for the *Arab Human Development Report 2009*. “The ongoing interventions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Iraq, and Somalia undercut human security in other Arab countries as well.”

The *Arab Human Development Report 2009* was prepared through a highly consultative process drawing on the contributions of over 100 scholars. The report is also informed by a series of youth forums on human security, an opinion poll on selected aspects of human security, and a series of essay-contributions from a representative and diverse mix of Arab policy leaders and intellectuals. The role of UNDP is that of convener and process manager,

ensuring that all viewpoints are taken into consideration, that the final product reflects a broad consensus among the experts involved, and that its messages and findings are disseminated to a broad audience in order to foster a rich debate on human development priorities for the approximately 330 million people who call the Arab countries home. The report does not represent the position of UNDP.

This report is the fifth volume of the *Arab Human Development Report* series. Past reports argued that severe deficits in freedom, women's empowerment, and knowledge were formidable barriers to progress and development in the region.

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