The 57th Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs

21-26 October 2007, Bari, Italy

REPORT on WORKING GROUP 5
Non-military Threats to Security

Co-conveners: Professor M E Muller, South Africa and Dr. Aharon Zohar, Israel

Rapporteur: Happymon Jacob, India

The group had a great deal of discussion on the theoretical as well as the practical, policy and political aspects of the many non-military threats to security. The group recognizes that major threats to humanity today emanate not only from inter-state wars or arms races but from environmental degradation, climate change, diseases, inequality, poverty to name a few. This is the age of subaltern politics. The group particularly stressed the importance of re-theorizing security so that the program for action to combat non-traditional threats to security is not without adequate theoretical and conceptual foundation. Human discourses and concepts of non-military security should translate themselves into discursive practices, political projects, and national and international advocacy.

It was considered that human security, from a conceptual point of view, is an evolving, expanding and developing concept. Human security is a much debated and written about concept and it did evoke a great deal of discussion in the group. Despite criticism about its ‘expandability’, which can potentially render it ineffectual from a practical point of view, it was felt, after considering the pros and cons of its ‘all-inclusive’ and ‘expandable’ nature that it is better to let the concept evolve and expand in the course of time. Human centered discourses should be seen as a normative aspect of the international community. Such discourses carry the power of emancipation and upliftment of the downtrodden.

It was pointed out that today a large share of human discourses is unfortunately limited to citizens, leaving stateless people even more vulnerable; it is necessary to include non-citizens in such crucially important discourses.
Sometimes there can be tension, from a practical point of view, between the standard of justice and standard of humanity while implementing the principles of human discourses. However, both standards are intrinsically interlinked to the human discourses of security, rights and development, and include associated responsibilities. It is not justice alone that should prompt us to act in favour of human security. Humanity offers us an equally forceful trigger as well as a clear basis for identifying moral, political and legal obligations. In this regard, it was pointed out that sometimes reaffirming our humanity may come first.

It was also felt that even as human discourses give a lot of importance to developing universal norms, it is necessary to give importance and recognition to local narratives. Promotion of Subaltern schools of human discourse assumes great significance in this regard. When dealing with universal human discourses, care should be taken to avoid both ethnocentrism and ethno-guilt. While local peace and justice systems and local narratives on non-traditional security are to be promoted, it is also important to understand that universal principles are not necessarily equivalent to Western principles.

One of the ways security can be demystified and used for the wellbeing of disadvantaged sections of humanity is to use the tool of securitization. The concept of human security, that keeps the human person at the centre of theory and praxis, has benefited a great deal from the concept of securitization which is an inter-subjective, constructivist, emancipatory and political project.

Despite its (securitisation’s) inherent strength in empowering the security of the human person, it needs to be kept in mind that undue and careless processes of securitisation can lead to depoliticisation, creation of militarized solutions to political problems by self-seeking security elites. Such misuse has been witnessed in the ongoing war on terror, the perception of Islam and in dealing with the environment.

Under such circumstances, it is necessary to de-securitise such issues and bring them back to the normal political realm where open and unconstrained debate on issues is possible and nuances can be understood as a result. The importance of the dynamic and the discursive process in the acts of securitization and desecuritisation needs to be stressed here.

An important thematic debate in the group was terminological in nature. Whether issues at stake and under discussion in a group like ours are to be termed as ‘threats’ or ‘challenges’ was carefully considered by the members of the group keeping in mind the fact that terms, words and
speech can go a long way in understanding issues and problems and can consequently determine the *modus operandi* of addressing them. It was felt that the seriousness and context of the threat would need to be carefully considered while terming it one way or the other.

The deliberations of the working group had focused on the following non-military threats to security: climate change, migration human rights, circumvention of international law, poverty, diseases, HIV/AIDS and demographic issues. There were more issues i.e. water resources, energy, food production etc. that were not mentioned.

One of the key main threats to security are climate change and environmental degradation. The existing global security framework itself needs to be transformed in order to include threats to human security such as environmental degradation. It was pointed out that while climate change and its impact on security will impact on the entire world, it will harm the developing and poorer parts of the world more acutely.

Even as more and more focus should be given to environmental security, it is necessary to inculcate attitudinal and behavioral changes in safeguarding the environment.

Migration and related human rights issues were considered to be another important issue in the non-traditional security paradigm. The international convention for the protection of rights of all the working migrants and members of their families, passed in December 1990 by the UN General Assembly, admits that many working migrants and their families are unprotected by national norms. These issues should be addressed by the international community.

Illegal immigrants face more violations than the legal ones even though legal immigrant workers are not completely free from rights violations. More significantly, it was pointed out that there is a gender dimension to the rights violations of the immigrant communities as women suffer more from poverty, rights violations and even sexual abuse. Thus governments of the well-off countries have to be persuaded to keep this in mind such humanitarian concerns when framing policies relating to immigrant labour.

The group also considered that in order to ensure justice for humanity, it is necessary to have respect for international legal norms, laws and international courts. However it is saddening to see the manner in which some states circumvent the provisions and spirit of the International Criminal Court. Specific mention may be made of the UN Security Council Resolution that the ICC must refrain from initiating any investigation or trial against any state that is not party to the Rome Treaty on the basis of the facts or omissions connected to an operation established or
allowed by the UN. To cite another such example, the United States has repeatedly signed bilateral treaties with individual countries to claim immunity for its forces brought to trial. Such actions by governments will undoubtedly violate human rights.

Poverty is another non-military threat to be discussed and tackled. There are many global structural reasons for its continuation and aggravation. The adoption of the ‘Washington Consensus’ in Latin American countries is a case in point. The adoption of socio-economic policies suggested by the Washington Consensus pushed many of these countries into deep crisis. In real terms, this meant reduction of the role of the state from its traditional economic ones, consolidation of oligopolic economies, disinvestment in basic infrastructure, fund cuts in education and health and the privatization of these sectors, increasing external debt etc. This combined with the lack of representative democracy, social and political instability, large scale corruption among other such socio-political problems in these countries have added to the existing insecurity of the people. It was felt that the role of the state has to be re-established as coordinator of social organisation, provider of public goods and as regulator of fair, democratic labor and labor union relations. Allocating resources and determining priorities cannot be left to the market.

One important means of empowering the people especially the youth is by imparting socially relevant education. The use of education to resolve socially complex situations for students was appreciated by the group. The exposure of youth to research and developments in science will not only prompt them to continue with their quest for knowledge but will also instill scientific temper in them. In an era when we talk of the responsibility of scientists to be ethical in their endeavours, it is necessary to promote such alternative ways of promoting scientific temper and ethical scientific practices.

Diseases pose a great deal of insecurity to humanity especially to the more unfortunate ones. While on the one hand certain diseases are just not curable, these incurable diseases have a more pronounced impact on the poor. Even when some of them are curable, millions die due to sheer lack of health infrastructure and medical help. HIV/AIDS is one such disease that has killed hundreds of thousands of people all over the world. Africa is the continent worst hit by the AIDS epidemic. Of the 40 million people living with HIV/AIDS worldwide, nearly 75 per cent live in sub-Saharan Africa, which is inhabited by just 10 per cent of the world’s population. More so, among the 22 million people who have died of the disease, 14 million have been in this region.
Malaria is another such killer disease. More than two billion people, around 40 per cent of the world’s population live in areas of high risk of malaria. It may also be mentioned that around 90 per cent of the world’s disease burden falls on the developing world. Yet only three per cent of the research and development expenditure of the pharmaceutical industry is directed towards those ailments since their markets are not particularly lucrative to the companies. Here lies the social responsibility of science and scientists.

While it is necessary to give funding to the developing world to fight these diseases, funds alone won’t get us anywhere. There needs to be public education, increased awareness and local government responsibility to fight these human security threats effectively.

While considering effective ways of fighting HIV/AIDS new research findings would need to be considered. To cite an example, evidence now exists that HIV infection has a much greater impact on the mucosal immune system of the gut where 98 per cent of the CD4T cells are found than on its systemic counterpart, that is, the bloodstream, where only 2 per cent of the CD4T cells are found. This latest insight on HIV infection has implications for ongoing vaccine research and development, improving existing therapies and finding attractive therapeutic approaches for HIV infected persons.

Another aspect of crucial importance in this regard is the issue of anti-biotic resistance which may be termed as a formidable threat to the human race. Because of extensive usage and misuse of antibiotics, we are today faced with a number of super bugs that can not be killed by existing antibiotics. Super bugs are those pathogens that have developed multiple mechanisms to express antibiotic resistance to counter antibiotic effects. It is necessary that the general population and the scientific community wake up to this threat. The strategies to deal with them are currently preventive in nature such as using environmentally safe multivalent vaccines, multiple antibiotic therapy, recombinant genetic technology and public education about the nature of antibiotics. It was also pointed out since the total sales of all kinds of antibiotics is only around $25 billion per year, most pharmaceutical companies are moving away from drug research and development owing to higher cost and time involved and low return of investment.

On a different note, there was also an important presentation in the group on the future of the global population which evoked a lot of substantive debate. While the deliberations of the group were more or less focused on direct and immediate threats to human beings, the argument that the global population, especially in the developed world, will stabilize as a result of which the
elderly will outnumber the young and the global population will cease to grow led to an interesting discussion. Such restructuring of the age-pyramid will have implications for global security, social security, economic priorities and ethnic composition of countries. Such issues of long-term impact on humankind will need to be factored into understanding security, the group felt.

In conclusion, I would like to report that we discussed the important concept and practice of human security from a variety of perspectives including political theory, international law, medical research, science education, demography, and sustainable and equitable development. One of the key benefits of debating non-military security issues in groups like this with participants from a broad spectrum of disciplines and streams is that there is a real possibility of doing so beyond disciplinary boundaries: many of these non-military threats are international and interdisciplinary so we need the expertise of participants from a variety of fields.

**Concrete Suggestions for Future Pugwash Agenda**

- Continue to include more discussion on non-military aspects of security in pugwash meetings.
- Include a greater variety of issues.
- Include a plenary panel discussion on non-military security at the next Annual Conference.