

“Human Security, Human Dignity and the Middle East: Searching
for Peaceful Cohabitation”

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No other period than today has witnessed a series of tragic conflicts in the Middle East. As the ongoing conflicts in Iraq, Syria and Yemen in particular convinced us the vital need of mitigating the conflicts and searching for regional stability and peace. The incessant conflicts in the Middle East in the past 15 years since the US invasion in Iraq have generated a global refugee crisis. Adjacent states of Iraq and Syria such as Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon have been particularly affected. Those host countries of the refugees have faced a serious challenge to overcome. Simply put, the tipping point of how much these states can embrace the refugees is getting close and the arrival of such a point is likely to happen in the near future.

The concept of Human Security was first introduced in 1995 by Madame Ogata and Amartya Sen to meet the needs of constructing global development agenda by focusing on people's security in the post-Cold War intra-state settings. The two decades have passed since then and there is a new need to re-conceptualize the notion for the emerging reality of refugee crisis caused by the growing insecurity situation not only in the Middle East but also in the West. Human security is generally defined as “protecting the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human fulfillment, protecting vital freedoms – fundamental to human existence and development.” It precisely means the protection of people from severe and pervasive threats in order to develop the potentiality and capabilities of people for their own sake. It is ideal that human security protection can lead to the securing of people's dignified life. Human security should ultimately provide political, social and economic

environment in which people can assert human dignity.

The Middle East/ North African (MENA) region is a series of highly differentiated and overlapping political and quasi political entities that exist in a highly dynamic and interdependent global environment. It is a universe hallmarked by ancient traditions alongside rapid change as well as cultural ideas and new technologies both from within and outside. From the ancient period of time to the present, the MENA has been favoured by religiously and culturally enriched social and human capital.

However, improperly-done distribution of wealth and resources has led to see the oil rich states within the region as a metropolis drawing human and material resources out of the remaining hinterland comprising the poorer states of the region. This has generated a process contributing to underdevelopment and insecurity. Both the rapid growth and the mobility of the populations of MENA are striking. Data for 1950 reveal an estimated population of 67 million against today's 2015 population of approximately 300 million people. These numbers indicate that MENA has the second fastest growth rate in the world following only Sub-Saharan Africa.

It is also a young population of whom 60% are under 25 years of age with a median age of 22 years against a global average of 29. The population is expected to double the level of 2010 by 2020 despite declining fertility rates in several countries and for the region as whole.

Furthermore, a striking features for economic development is the age structure of the population. Between 2011 and 2020 the male working age population (15-64) is expected to rise by one third with the bulk of the growth in the Middle East as North African labour force growth continues at a much slower pace.

Another key feature of the population is the high rate of both internal and external mobility. Some 15 million MENA descended migrants now live outside their countries of birth. For the most part they are resident in Western Europe and the Americas where their presence has varying degrees of both direct and indirect political and economic impact on the MENA region.

The MENA Diaspora in this century is a distinct part of the MENA itself providing both challenges and opportunities in the areas of security and development. Despite the vagaries in the price of oil and their impact on regional economy the bulk of the populations continue to reside in the resource rich areas of the region.

However, increasing numbers of migrants have moved from conflict areas in search of physical refuge and/or greater environmental security. Dramatic growth in the numbers of Yemenis in London and Syrians in Jordan or Turkey all testify to the flight from conflict seeking security and development. Their presence has revitalized discussion surrounding community held social norms. In this context, the MENA migrant population are involved in a process of shaping and being shaped by the host societies. This process is having and will continue to have long term and powerful impact on both the Arab culture and Muslim societies of the MENA region as well as local economies as migrant remittances provide a critical source of foreign currency for some countries.

The MENA migrant presence abroad has also caused a number of serious problems in the external environment not least of which has been the inability of host governments to provide consistent and adequate levels of protection and support to the migrants and refugees.

The recently developed refugee crisis in Europe hit the receiving governments of Europe and North America. They have almost exclusively focussed their domestic security activities on the MENA Diaspora while ignoring or accommodating the growth of social discrimination, threats and violent action from anti-Muslim extremists. Their failure to balance their work has led to a widespread and now decade old sense of alienation and fear within the MENA communities. One result has been the slowed growth of educational achievement that was caused partially by the alienation of the young people. This phenomenon is both a problem for security as well as a loss of human capital for the future. The result has swung back into the MENA region and

found expression in deep distrust of the West.

The other key feature of the migrant populations from the MENA region is the decline of diversity that characterized the area for several hundred years. Minorities are on the move. The slow but inexorable decline of the Christian populations in Palestine, Jews from Iraq and Morocco, Baha'i from Iran and Maronites from Lebanon are examples of the populations being declined. The minority populations' moving out of the region who have generally been wealthier and more entrepreneurial will eventually represent a real loss in human resources that could enable more rapid economic development. Consequently, the region is becoming substantially more Muslim which might have had an indirect impact on rising tensions with remaining ethnic minorities including Muslim ethnic groups in the region. The most evident examples are Arab strains in relations with Kurds in Iraq and Berbers in Morocco and Algeria.

In addition to the changing demographic aspect of the MENA, the area is highly vulnerable to critical resource degradation that has forced and will force more people to migrate from the region as environmental refugees. Rapid population growth has put enormous pressure on MENA's future of the potable water supply to the area. The region is at present consuming 16 % more water than it can annually replenish. IBRD estimates are quite pessimistic for the future of this region. The already growing number of regional and inter-state wars for control of water resources are likely to increase. Moreover, the region's food security will enter a critical phase. The region, as a whole, counts food products at more than 10% of its total import envelope. Food imports have increased in an era of increasing costs of commodities and transportation.. Food commodity price rises are expected to happen and are likely to impose significant impact on the current development prospects, and to bring about challenges to security for the MENA region.

Weakened global economies have also led to reduced opportunities for Foreign Direct Investment (FDIs) and reduced the volume of both Official Development Assistance (ODA) and

Other Official Flows (OOFs). General perceptions of regional instability has exacerbated the decline in the tourism incomes. The current problems in such a fiscally weak environment represent a challenge to fragile governments such as those in Libya, Tunisia and Egypt in particular alongside others such as Morocco and Jordan who are in the process of stabilizing their economies to meet the immediate demands for job creation and poverty reduction.

It is to be noted that the Arab Spring did not yield any significant new perspectives on the economy. Neither so far has there been sufficient stability, confidence or perhaps vision to support the emergence of a new agenda that would alter the inter-state or regional market arrangements in support of efficiencies. In short the 'Arab Nation' has yet to materialize as strategic site for economic development. Private sector development has not been efficiently done despite much emphasis on the subject. Not only the government initiatives but a degree of citizen engagement and accountability are truly needed to cope with the root causes of poverty and unemployment that have caused social and political rebellion.

What should be emphasized is that the current instability and protracted conflicts in the MENA region are not necessarily all the result of the power game of influential states seeking a hegemonic power. The above-mentioned human insecurity factors are the real causes of the problem today.

It is within this context that global partnership is vital to achieve the more equitable and balanced development of the region. This is because the regional problems have immense implication for the entire world in which we all hope to achieve peaceful cohabitation.