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Perceptions and Practice of Human Security in Malaysia

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Abstract

This paper discusses the understanding of human security in Malaysia. As the country prepares to achieve its vision of becoming a developed nation by 2020, exposure to the forces of globalization and integration into the international economy and the ASEAN community have on the one hand improved the economic standing of the country and its people while on the other hand exposed Malaysian society to a range of downside risks or threats that could undermine the past achievements of programs for human development. The paper covers three main areas. Firstly, we deliberate on the notion of human security from international and regional standpoints before explaining differential interpretations and understandings of the term at national and local levels. Secondly, we examine the multiple issues and threats viewed as imperative by various stakeholders. Thirdly, we identify some of the approaches taken in mitigating human insecurities and discuss the lack of measures in further improving the level of human security in the country. The term human security remains lodged at the periphery, and propelling it to the center will require a higher awareness level of its significance. Greater commitment from all stakeholders—particularly the government—is indispensable in order to prioritize policies that actually empower individuals and communities not only to free themselves of their insecurities but more importantly to enable them to live their lives in dignity.

Keywords: human security, human rights, Malaysia, civil society organizations, comprehensive security

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Introduction

At its core, the essence of security is protection. The role of the state, therefore, is to provide protection for its constituents. This is traditionally understood as putting in place proper rules and laws, ensuring that they are efficiently enforced to keep society safe so that people do not live in constant fear. While the ability of states to fulfill this role has varied throughout history and between regions, the more recent waves of globalization and the enthusiasm of developing nations to liberalize their economies and integrate into the wider international community have not only created challenges for states to keep abreast of the demands arising from rapid societal changes and at the same time appropriately shield their societies from external destructive forces, but have even become the main source of insecurity for some.

Increasingly integrated and competitive, Malaysia is equally exposed to such challenges. The shift in economic policies from an agriculture base to an industry-based export-oriented economy began in the 1970s and further developed over the last four decades in accordance with the country's Vision 2020 policy of becoming a developed nation. This development has brought with it various security challenges, especially for a country with a multicultural society. The May 1969 racial riots prompted the state to introduce an affirmative action program to eradicate poverty and achieve national unity by reconfiguring the socio-economic structure of its society. The framing of this program as necessary to prevent further racial violence could thus be seen as containing elements of human security. While the program has not been without its critics, some observers have argued that it has had positive effects in diminishing "the likelihood of intense ethnic economic rivalry" (Khoo 2004, 12), thereby averting serious ethnic violence, such as experienced by Indonesia in the late 1990s.

Although Malaysia's security and its national survival were put to the test due to *Konfrontasi* (Indonesia-Malaysia Confrontation, 1963-1966), it has not experienced any inter-state conflicts since then. Apart from two domestic incidences—the Communist Insurgency War and the Sarawak Insurgency—Malaysia has remained relatively peaceful and stable. However, understanding the domestic security situation through the traditional lenses of state security would arguably be insufficient in addressing the myriad of issues and concerns ranging from food and health securities to personal and economic securities. While these may not threaten the survival of the state, they could adversely affect the security and wellbeing of both individuals and communities.

What would those issues and concerns be? What roles have the state and non-state actors played in the development of a nation where people are free from fear, free from want and have the freedom to live in dignity? More importantly, what mechanisms have been proposed, adopted or applied in protecting and empowering the people to reduce, if not to eliminate, the downside risks that causes them to fall into insecurities irrespective of whether the threats were artificially or naturally induced?

Focusing on Malaysia, this paper, guided by the principles set forth in JICA-RI's project on *Human Security in Practice: East Asian Experiences*, seeks to discuss three key questions: 1) How is human security understood or perceived by different stakeholders in Malaysia? 2) What are the primary and secondary threats that lead to human insecurity in the country? And, 3) Have there been any measures of protection and empowerment taken by the different stakeholders to improve the level of human security in Malaysia? The paper concludes the discussion by highlighting several salient points and providing suggestions on ways forward.

In addressing the questions raised, this paper predominantly employs a two-pronged qualitative research method. Firstly, a document analysis was undertaken to

construct the narratives of human security discourses in the country, and secondly, structured interviews with local stakeholders were conducted to explore their views and perceptions. The methods employed include face-to-face interviews, phone conversations and email correspondence. While the initial idea was to approach a wide range of stakeholders with differing backgrounds, we ended up with a higher concentration of interviewees from civil society movements mainly due to the number of positive responses to our interview request.

1. The Conceptualization of Human Security and Its Understanding in Malaysia

To better contextualize human security, this section is divided into two parts. The first part discusses the development of human security as a concept from its inception at the international level to discourses at the regional level. The second part discusses understandings of human security as viewed by different stakeholders at the national level.

1.1 Human Security as a Conceptual Framework

The call for a more human-centered conception of security came from the realization that traditional security, whether it is being defined as cooperative security or comprehensive security, was incapable of addressing the atrocities committed within the boundaries of the state. The building of postwar international regimes and the subsequent end of the Cold War have contributed to better inter-state stability and have shifted debates away from the primacy of territoriality to domestic upheavals. Civil and ethnic conflicts, such as the ethnic cleansing that occurred in Srebrenica in 1995, demonstrate the limitations of a state-centric paradigm of international relations. There was hence a need to shift the emphasis to the individual and to develop a new

security agenda that placed importance on humanitarian interventions and the responsibility of states to protect their citizens.

The 1994 UNDP Human Development Report led by the late Mahbub ul Haq was instrumental in reevaluating how the term 'security' was understood. The report underlined seven areas of focus (food security, personal security, community security, health security, political security, economic security and environmental security). This set in motion later refinements of the concept, with Canada and Norway taking the lead in developing a narrower version based on the principle of 'freedom from fear' and the ensuing introduction of R2P (responsibility to protect). On the other hand, Japan promoted a broader understanding of the term by placing an equal, if not greater, emphasis on 'freedom from want'.[1]

Human Security Now, the report by the Commission on Human Security—set up on Japan's initiative—further developed the human security concept as an operational tool for policy implementation by incorporating the two approaches of top-down protection and bottom-up empowerment (Commission on Human Security 2003). The incorporation of freedom from want issues is deemed essential in that it allows a wider range of concerns such as communicable diseases, food shortages and environmental degradation to be classified as threats, and thereby securitized. This enables states to address them collectively instead of viewing them merely as human development issues. The expansion of such threats has culminated in the notion of non-traditional security (NTS). Although NTS is often used interchangeably with human security, it is not the same, with the former continuing to be state-centric. The involvement of non-state actors in the decision-making process and the need to empower them are central to the tenets of human security. While the September 11

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[1] For a more detailed explanation of the concept of human security and its development, see Teh (2012).

attacks disrupted the development of human security by reemphasizing the role of state security, the former has regained momentum with issues such as terrorism requiring a more holistic approach than a simple military response.

In Southeast Asia, the challenges posed by globalization and regional integration have compelled ASEAN leaders to expand their security lexicon to cover a number of NTS issues that have been prevalent in the region. Various statements and declarations have been issued in recent years and cooperation in the area of transnational crime, infectious diseases, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, and maritime security has increased (Rolls and Teh 2014). The preparedness of ASEAN countries to engage in NTS issues reflects Malaysia's acceptance of non-traditional security and its relevance to an interconnected and interdependent world (see Abdullah 2010). Nevertheless, regional cooperation in NTS has remained largely a top-down endeavor with limited participation from civil society groups, while comprehensive security continues to take precedence (Rolls and Teh 2014).

There have been a number of efforts to mainstream human security in the ASEAN region, although these have not as yet produced any concrete results. Attempts to do so have come from both policymakers and scholars. As early as 1998, then Minister for Foreign Affairs of Thailand, Surin Pitsuwan, concerned with the human costs of the Asian financial crisis, proposed the creation of an ASEAN-PMC Caucus on Human Security at the Post-Ministerial Conference in Manila.[2] In 2006, the ASEAN Secretariat partnered with UNESCO to discuss the relevance of the human security concept in Southeast Asia and from 2009 to 2012, a joint project titled "Mainstreaming Human Security in ASEAN Integration" under the auspices of JICA-RI culminated in a three-volume publication. In 2014, Pitsuwan led a team of eminent

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[2] The proposal was toned down to an ASEAN-PMC Caucus on Social Safety Nets but still failed to receive the endorsement of ASEAN leaders (Cheeppensook 2007).

6

persons to establish the High Level Advisory Panel on R2P in Southeast Asia that resulted in a report on ways to build up acceptance of R2P in the region. A series of public seminars ensued in Bangkok, Jakarta and Cambodia in 2015 to further promote the idea.

Despite such efforts, the term 'human security' continues to remain absent from official ASEAN documents. The interest shown by ASEAN leaders in shedding its elitist image and moving the organization towards being a people-oriented organization was, however, seen as a positive step that could bode well for the realization of greater understanding of human security in the region. Yet, the creation of an ASEAN Charter, the formation of an ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) and the successive adoption of the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration (AHRD) failed to receive the strong endorsement of civil society organizations (CSOs)(Peck 2009; Teh 2009). The AHRD, for example, was denounced by a long list of regional CSOs including Malaysia's Justice for Sisters, Lawyers for Liberty, *Seksualiti Merdeka* (Sexuality Independence) and *Suara Rakyat Malaysia* (Voice of the Malaysian People) as a "declaration of government powers disguised as a declaration of human rights" (Human Rights Watch 2012).

1.2 Differing Interpretations and Understandings of Human Security in Malaysia

In Malaysia, the official definition of security has been based around the concept of comprehensive security. Unlike the Japanese version of comprehensive security, which focuses on the protection of state interests from external military and non-military threats, ASEAN governments, according to Amitav Acharya, consider the term "as a framework for coping with the danger of insurgency, subversion and political unrest" with "the attainment of performance legitimacy through economic development" as its main element (Acharya 1999, 69). Broader in scope and in line with the country as a

small power, the understanding of security extends beyond military defense. In 1992, then Malaysian Defense Minister Najib Tun Razak captured the essence of Malaysia's security understanding when he stated that "…the term security is seen in a very broad manner which encompasses both military and non-military elements. Comprehensive security covers political, economic and defense dimensions. Therefore, to us, to achieve security, it has to be comprehensive, i.e. it has to be politically stable, economically strong and resilient, its population, united and strong-willed, and last, but not the least, it has to be militarily sufficient" (72).

Almost two decades later, in September 2000, Najib Tun Razak reiterated a similar definition explaining that "our economic prosperity would be fragile if we lack political stability and that all this would be threatened if we do not have the ability to defend our wealth" (Razak 2001, 55). This echoed former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's earlier definition of security in 1986 as the interweaving between national security and "political stability, economic success and social harmony" (quoted in Mak 2004, 129). Comprehensive security in formal terms has thus been about national resilience: military and "nonmilitary means of empowering and securing the state" and therefore the role of the society and the individual citizens of Malaysia is to maintain the overall security of the country (Mak 2004, 129; Razak 2001, 57).

The expansion of threats under the rubric of NTS into areas such as illicit drugs, religious extremism, poverty, economic disparity, disasters, viral pandemics and transnational crimes falls comfortably within the framework of comprehensive security instead of human security. It will remain so for as long the approach is top-down (elite-driven), with the government continuously playing the role of the security provider. The compatibility of NTS and Malaysia's comprehensive security explains Kuala Lumpur's active role in promoting NTS at the ASEAN level and referencing it in speeches at the United Nations (see Haniff 2015).

By further incorporating NTS concerns under the existing security framework, the government can proclaim its 'people-oriented' policies and circumvent the need to adopt a new security approach based on the UNDP definition of human security, as that could shift the focus away from the state and lead to stronger active participation from CSOs in the development of national policies and governance. This may ultimately challenge the regime's capability to exert control and maintain its political dominance. Since independence, the ruling coalition, the National Front (NF), has successively won all the general elections in the country. In the 2004 general election, for example, the share of seats obtained by the NF reached 90%, yet in the subsequent 2008 and 2013 elections, the NF still managed to maintain to win but saw its share of seats reduced significantly.[3]

The ability of the opposition coalition—originally known as the Alternative Front but later evolving into the People's Alliance—to pull their strengths together and deny the NF its traditional two-thirds majority could perhaps be traced back to the public outcry and call for *Reformasi* (reformation) in 1998 due to a falling out between Mahathir and his former Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, with the latter's subsequent arrest and imprisonment. Although observers had hoped that the political system would mature into a two-party system, this has not yet materialized. Nevertheless, the opposition has succeeded in raising questions over regime legitimacy (Collins 2005, 80), even putting in motion the prospect of political change. *Reformasi* has further given rise to political protests by diverse civil society movements (Islamist and non-Islamist groups) concerned with issues of injustice, eroding democratic values, immorality and bad governance (see Hamid 2009). They

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[3] In the 2013 general election, the NF recorded its lowest percentage of 59.9% and saw its popular vote dip below half to 47.38% for the first time, compared to the opposition's 50.87%.

were able to traverse their own differences in becoming democratizing agents to challenge the dominance of the NF (Case 2003).

The introduction of *Islam Hadhari* (civilizational Islam) and pursuit of good governance under the premiership of Abdullah Badawi (2003-2009) further encouraged CSOs to play a bigger role in nation building. He was credited with initiating the first ASEAN civil society conference in 2005 when Malaysia was the host of the ASEAN Summit. Although *Islam Hadhari* was politically driven, it contained ten main principles that reflected human security considerations such as a just and trustworthy government, a good quality of life, protection of the rights of minority groups and women, protection of the environment, a free and independent people, and balanced and comprehensive economic development. The concept was meant to imbue people with the right ethics and empower them with a global mindset in order to be globally competitive and reduce overdependence on government handouts (Chong 2006). It therefore could be said that there was a noble intention to shift from a strong developmental state to a more regulatory-type state where there would be a vibrant and strong civil society.

However, weak leadership was blamed for Badawi's inability to fulfill his electoral promises of tackling corruption and making his government more accountable (see Zain and Yusoff 2015). This meant that there were limitations in operationalizing his brand of 'civil Islam' and promoting it through government policies. His willingness to allow more space for civil society movements, and the increasing role of the internet in promoting civic discourse was coupled with various unresolved deep-seated issues such as money politics, racial tensions, the increasing cost of living and street crime, and selective persecution of dissidents under his administration. These issues, raised by a respected body, the Malaysian Bar, may have indirectly led to the active involvement of "civil society-based activists in opposition

politicians' campaigns." Many of the activists who became candidates in the 2008 general election even won seats (Weiss 2009, 754). Badawi's subsequent resignation from office in 2009 spelled the end of *Islam Hadhari* and any possible experimentation with the idea of human security.

Due to the dismal performance of the ruling coalition in the 2008 election and the need to shore up its legitimacy, Najib Tun Razak, who took over the helm in April 2009, decided to embark on a Government Transformation Program (GTP) based on the philosophy of "people first, performance now" to address people's grievances and improve government services. Public feedback was taken into account and the issues raised were categorized into seven National Key Results Areas (NKRAs), namely reducing crime, fighting corruption, improving student outcomes, raising living standards of low-income households, improving rural basic infrastructure, improving urban public transport and addressing the cost of living. As with the private sector, performance indicators were adopted for government departments in order to monitor progress and provide tangible results that the public could scrutinize (Lesley 2014). The GTP report released by the government for 2014 indicated positive results with the key performance indicator for the NKRAs exceeding 105% (*Sun Daily* 2015). While statistics may show a reduction in the crime rate of 40% since 2009, Malaysians in general continue to feel unsafe. This perceived insecurity, according to Amin Khan, Director of Pemandu's Reducing Crime NKRA, is due in part to a quarter of crimes going unreported, particularly petty crimes such as common assault and theft (Khan 2015). Despite government efforts to improve accountability, individuals, numerous non-governmental organizations and opposition parties have increased pressure on the government in recent years through street protests on a range of issues, from demanding electoral reforms and stopping the construction of the Lynas rare earth plant, to abolishing the recently introduced goods and services tax (GST), overcoming

dirty politics and demanding accountability and calling for transparency in the investigation of the 1Malaysia Development Berhad corruption scandal.

The government is yet to adopt a human security approach in its domestic or foreign policy. Kuala Lumpur's position on the concept of human security and the R2P was well spelled out by Malaysia's permanent representative to the United Nations, Hussein Haniff at the 66th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in June 2012, when he stated that:

Human security should also not replace state security. We agree that governments should retain the primary responsibility for ensuring the survival, livelihood and dignity of their people and population. Malaysia also believes that human security must be based on local realities as the political, economic, social and cultural conditions vary significantly between one country and the next. Thus, national ownership is of utmost importance in the advancement of human security to the people of a country…

We also take note that the notion of human security is distinct from the responsibility to protect. However, the distinction should not only be confined to the application of the notion, but should also shun the possibility of using force or the threat of force on a State or its people. Malaysia firmly believes there is a need to rule out any possibility in resorting to humanitarian intervention or even harmful sanctions. The application of sanctions goes against the very notion of human security as it only hurts the people...

Malaysia's own national development experience has always taken into account the elements of economic and social development, with the welfare of the people consistently at the forefront of policy considerations. At the heart of those policies is the need to distribute the benefits of economic growth equitably in order to

overcome potentially dangerous national rifts. As such, Malaysia would continue to advocate a *comprehensive approach* to threats posed by, among others, disparities in economic opportunities; infectious diseases; illegal migration; environmental pollution and degradation; illicit drug production and trafficking; human trafficking and smuggling in persons; and, international terrorism (Haniff 2012; emphasis added).

The perception that human security could replace state security should therefore be approached "rather cautiously." Haniff demonstrates Malaysia's apprehension towards the former by viewing it as a potential antithesis of the latter. However, the two concepts are not essentially contradictory. The role of human security is to reprioritize the understanding of security itself. As Amartya Sen explained in an interview in December 2015, "…security ultimately is a matter in which the leading concern should be around human life. So if we are speaking of security, it has to be human security. Since this also means security from external threats and violence, what we call national security is only one of the constituent factors in human security" (Sampath 2015). This brings into the picture a stark contrast between comprehensive security that focuses on the survivability of the state with the role of its citizens as defenders of the nation's interests, and human security that emphasizes the value of individual human life with state security as only but one of the components.

Among interviewees from CSOs, there is a lack of clarity on the concept of human security and none of the organizations were employing it as a working framework. Interviewees feel that the concept is too broad to be properly understood. Some of the CSOs are well established, from even before the advent of human security, and their activities tend to focus more on the championing of human rights. Aliran, for example, is a national reform movement set up in Penang in 1977 with an

aim to "raise social consciousness and encourage social action that will lead to social justice".[4] Although their activities are not couched in human security terms, they are connected to the term since the organization prioritizes individuals and helps to address their insecurities. In the words of the president of Aliran, Francis Loh, "Aliran is involved in the struggle for freedom, justice and solidarity but we don't really look at it from the point of view of human security as such… It is not one of our agendas" (personal communication, March 17, 2016). When questioned whether Aliran practices human security, Loh adds, "Of course we do. One of the biggest issues that we are very concerned about now is forced migration. Many of our members and Aliran itself have been working with the forced migrants in terms of trying to fight for a better deal for foreign workers… especially [the] Rohingya" (Ibid).

Debbie Stothard, a Malaysian and founder of the Bangkok-based ALTSEAN-Burma (Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma), established in 1996, echoes this view, noting that most CSOs are human rights organizations trying to address individual elements of human security without necessarily referring to the concept; "it's not very high up in the public sphere" (personal communication, March 21, 2016). Charles Santiago, a Malaysian parliamentarian and the Chairperson of the ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights admitted that Malaysian society has had little discussion on the concept in comparison to neighboring countries such as Indonesia and the Philippines (personal communication, January 29, 2016). Interestingly, he adds that it is no longer a new concept and international interest has gradually faded with the "Sustainable Development Goals" (SDG) gaining increasing attention at meetings of the United Nations.

Despite showing some uncertainty in regard to the meaning of human security, CSOs agreed with the essential moral values and norms conveyed by the term, which

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[4] Aliran website, http://aliran.com/.

they claimed were equivalent to those of human rights. However, they prefer to employ the term 'human rights' since they believe it is broader in scope compared to human security that they see as focusing more on socio-economic interests. Some even regarded human security as a component of human rights. In the current context of Malaysia, CSOs hold the view that human security is endangered, with the country being plagued with political crises and economic uncertainties.

In relation to fundamental human rights, CSOs subscribed to the provisions stipulated in several universal declarations and conventions on human rights. For instance, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) was frequently referenced in regard to the protection of human life along with the right to live in dignity, as well as anything that is related to human security. On social and economic interests of the people, conventions such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) would become the point of reference.

Some CSOs came to know about the concept of human security primarily through international forums and conferences held outside of Malaysia. Marina Mahathir, a respectable Malaysian socio-political activist and columnist, learned about the concept at an international meeting that was held in Singapore some years ago. Though she has not used this term in her advocacy for women's rights, she agreed that it encompasses a wide range of issues involving human well-being (personal communication, March 22, 2016).

Among our interviewees, Aegile Fernandez, Director of Tenaganita, a Malaysian NGO founded in 1991 and concerned with the rights of women, migrants and refugees, seems to have the best understanding of the concept. She stated that the introduction of human security in the 1990s was a step forward as it indicated a shift in public attention from national security to individual security. Prior to that, people associated national security issues with war and genocide, but human beings deserve

15

more than survival. She said the concept reminds people of the need to protect the wellbeing of individuals and vulnerable communities. For instance, it was important to address the rights of foreign workers at the workplace, the right to enjoy access to education for their children and so forth. It was a good sign that international bodies and local governments are paying more attention to tackling threats to individuals' lives and livelihood. For her, the ultimate aim is for human beings to live in dignity, which is a key feature of human security. Living in dignity means that individuals will be able to secure their freedom from fear and freedom from want. On top of that, individuals will be respected as human beings with thoughts, opinions, emotions and aspirations (personal communication, January 20, 2016).

2. Threat Considerations by Different Stakeholders in Malaysia

Considering that Malaysia is a developing nation, political and economic situations shape the perceptions of local stakeholders in terms of the immediate and major human security threats to the country. Malaysia's economic growth has been affected by both internal and external dynamics. Externally, this was a result of, firstly, the Asian financial crisis in 1997, followed by the 2008 financial crisis and, more recently, due to China's economic slowdown. Internally, government debt remains at a very high level and falling oil prices have not helped improve the situation. Worse, the country's currency has depreciated sharply against the dollar. The political challenges that the government faces from the opposition and criticisms over the use of controversial laws to clamp down on civil disobedience have further compounded the situation. It is against this backdrop that the concerns below, covering both freedom from want and freedom from fear, were identified and discussed.

2.1 Economic, Health and Personal Concerns

Prominent human rights bodies such as the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM) and ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR), as well as influential social groups such as IKRAM Malaysia, an NGO that addresses the welfare of the people based on Islam, have invariably expressed concerns over the current economic situation of Malaysia and even claimed that it should be made the top agenda of the country. To them, poor economic management and market-oriented economic policies are the fundamental reasons for people living with insecurity. The symptoms of a deteriorating economy include escalating living costs and cases of poverty. All these have deepened the sense of insecurity among the Malaysian people and this may contribute to the growth of extremism, racial disharmony and religious intolerance in the near future. Hafidzi Mohd Noor, the Chairman of MyCare (a humanitarian agency of IKRAM), warned that the voices of extremism are contagious. Instead of working to contain the situation, he sees some politicians as being inclined to incite hatred between different segments of society (personal communication, February 22, 2016).

The economic issues raised by our interviewees include the implementation of a goods and services tax (GST), the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA) and economic mismanagement. One of the interviewees argued that the government's support for trade liberalization goes against the notion of human security, as the privatization of roads, electricity and water supply are likely to deprive the rights of the bottom class to basic amenities. Another indicator of the tendency toward trade liberalization is the signing of the TPPA by the Malaysian government on 4th February 2016. TPPA opponents have condemned the controversial conditions, which are perceived as more favorable to multinational corporations than to local small and medium enterprises (SMEs). With all the challenges lying ahead, local stakeholders

are disheartened that policymakers have yet to introduce any feasible long-term policies to empower local SMEs and social communities. With regard to the GST, several anti-GST protests have already been held in the capital city, with the latest in April 2016 occurring in conjunction with the first anniversary of the tax's implementation (Anand 2016).

In January 2013, the government introduced a new scheme called BR1M,[5] claiming that it was meant to address the issue of rising living costs. However, Marina Mahathir dismissed the scheme as a vote-buying tactic[6] and this view is shared by other local stakeholders. Furthermore, some local stakeholders are dissatisfied with policymakers who, while denying that there has been an increase in poverty cases, have used the economic crisis as an excuse to relinquish their obligation to the people, thus leaving them to bear the costs by themselves.

This has led to complaints against the government for its lack of responsiveness to the current economic woes faced by the general public. For example, an independent statutory body of Malaysia, SUHAKAM, has called on policymakers to take a people-centered or bottom-up approach in the process of formulating and implementing policies. Mohamad Azizi bin Azmi of SUHAKAM noted that the government was interested in providing briefings but not necessarily consultations. He wanted the government to engage and consult more with the people, professionals and civil society groups at different levels of the decision making process (personal communication, February 24, 2016).

Although economic concerns feature highly at the national level, threats at the local government level can be quite different. For the two local governments of Penang State—the Penang Island City Council and the Municipal Council of Province

[5] The full name of BR1M is "Bantuan Rakyat 1Malaysia". It is a scheme implemented by the government in 2013 to provide cash handouts to lower income groups.
[6] Malaysia's 13th general election was held in May 2013.

Wellesley—the issues that pose an immediate threat to local communities are hygiene (hawker food), disease (rabies and dengue) and crime (house break-ins and snatch thieves). These issues fall under the categories of health and personal securities (personal communication with local councilors, March 25 and March 31, 2016). Concerned with poor enforcement, individuals are anxious about their family's safety. However, local councils face restrictions in dealing with certain issues since the political system is heavily centralized. Dengue, for example, falls under the purview of the Ministry of Health and the jurisdiction of local councils is limited to fogging and issuing summonses (personal communication with local councilor, March 31, 2016).

2.2 Mistreatment of Minority Groups

Speaking at the 5th Civil Society Awards at the KL and Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall in December 2015, Ambiga Sreevanesan, president of the National Human Rights Society (HAKAM), expressed her concerns over minority rights in the country. In her speech, she stated that "[f]reedom from fears is what we don't have here in Malaysia. Here, we are not caring enough for the minorities and lack understanding for liberty… With all the denied human rights that we have in Malaysia, I believe we still have a long way to achieve freedom from fears. So this is where civil society plays an important part in achieving it" (Alegria 2015).

She was referring particularly to the Muslim transgender group and the indigenous (Orang Asli) community in Malaysia, who she felt had been mistreated by government agencies and oppressed by mainstream society. Other members of civil society groups such as SUARAM share her concerns over minority groups. SUARAM's human rights report of 2014 outlined the major threats towards minority groups, namely court rulings against transgender people, economic and socio-cultural

insecurities of indigenous peoples, and intolerance of religious extremists towards religious minorities.

Other groups who live in fear are refugees and victims of trafficking. SUARAM's human rights report highlights that Malaysia's rankings in the United States' State Department's Annual "Trafficking in Persons" Report and the "Global Rights Index: The World's Worst Countries for Workers" have dropped to a record low (2014, viii). The Committee on the Rights of the Child, which monitors the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, has called on the government to urgently devise a legislative framework to protect refugee and asylum-seeking children who have been found to be susceptible to arrest, detention and deportation (SUHAKAM 2015b, 11). Tenaganita's Aegile Fernandez notes that Malaysia has yet to develop a protection mechanism for the victims of human trafficking. She said, "We are not looking at these victims as survivors. Here there is no protection mechanism… we need to handle it not because it is our problem that we are not protecting people, but because the US said we have to" (personal communication, January 20, 2016). Debbie Stothard of Altsean-Burma, who shares the same concerns, adds that while advocacy by CSOs on the treatment of the Rohingya boat people has led to a policy turnaround by Malaysia and those fleeing were allowed into the country, the issue is viewed as an immigration concern instead of a human security issue and thus there remains a lack of capacity for operationalizing and implementing commitments for human security (personal communication, March 21, 2016).

2.3 Suppression of Freedom of Expression

In the last couple of years, the move to suppress freedom of expression has been a huge concern for local CSOs. SUARAM's 2014 report showed that the number of

people being investigated, charged or convicted under the Sedition Act 1948 for 2012, 2013 and 2014 was 7, 18 and 44 respectively (2014, 31). They included, among others, activists, academics, journalists, law practitioners, students and elected representatives. In 2015, the number jumped sharply to 220 people (SUARAM 2015, 16). A Universiti Malaya law lecturer Azmi Sharom, for example, was charged under the Sedition Act in 2014 in relation to an alleged seditious statement.[7] Local prominent academics such as Terence Gomez, a professor of Political Economy at Universiti Malaya, were highly concerned about the incident, fearing that such acts would stifle academic freedom and obstruct intellectual inquiry critical to the production of good scholarship (Gomez 2014). Such incidences may indicate that the space for public participation in the process of policymaking is shrinking. Citizens would need to be more cautious in exchanging ideas and opinions over public issues, particularly those pertaining to the government's actions and policies. This could also reflect a lack of protection for public intellectuals who are against oppression and violation of human rights.

3. Approaches Taken by Stakeholders to Resolve Threat Issues

The approaches taken by stakeholders to pursue their causes are shaped by the nature of the organizations and the resources that available to them. Organizations such as IKRAM, Tenaganita and Sisters in Islam (SIS) actually employ both protection and empowerment approaches to assist "clients." Although both approaches are essential, our interviewees held the view that protection is crucial especially when their clients encounter an immediate threat. Effective empowerment could only take place when sufficient protection is enabled.

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[7] The charge against him was finally withdrawn by the Attorney General in February 2016.

One of Tenaganita's missions is to promote and protect the rights and dignity of women, migrants and refugees. It has four major programs, which are 1) migrant rights protection; 2) anti-trafficking in persons; 3) refugee action programs; and 4) shelters for trafficked women and children. Each program consists of rights protection, training and education, and consciousness building among migrants. These programs are carried out through case management, workshops and other activities. Each program also aims to address bigger social problems and to advocate for institutional and structural change (Tenaganita 2015, 117). Fernandez believes that protection should come before empowerment. Empowerment can be achieved once the basic needs of people such as food and security are met (personal communication, January 20, 2016).

For SIS, of which Marina Mahathir is also its board member, top-down and bottom-up approaches are equally vital. Currently, SIS has a legal unit that provides free legal advisory services to women and men on their legal rights under the Islamic Family Law and the Shari'ah Criminal Offences Law. These laws include inheritance law, divorce and child custody, polygamous marriage and so forth. In addition to these services, SIS conducts legal training programs and forums for different groups of people such as journalists, activists, artists and writers. They also make an effort to conduct awareness programs for Muslim women and engage with religious authorities and conservative groups, but so far, responses to the latter have been fairly discouraging.[8]

Advocacy for policy change and collaboration with policymakers are key approaches taken by local stakeholders in protecting as well as empowering their subjects. Marina Mahathir believes that Muslim women can be better protected by

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[8] SIS has been labelled by a Selangor state religious authority *fatwa* (religious edict) as "deviant" and by some local religious leaders as "insolent" and "extremist".

making changes to existing laws and policies (personal communication, March 22, 2016). This belief motivates SIS to undertake research on Islamic law and develop alternative interpretations to counter the official and mainstream understanding of Islam. A draft family law has been submitted to the government for consideration but the organization is yet to receive any response to this.

In Penang, the current state government, which is under the administration of opposition parties and has limited jurisdictionary powers to promote good governance due to political centralization, has taken several initiatives to empower its people to speak up and express their concerns. According to Zairil Khir Johari, Chief Executive Officer of the Penang Institute and Member of Parliament, the state government has established two speakers' corners—one on the island and the other on the mainland—to encourage people to express their opinions without fear of oppression. It also passed the Freedom of Information Enactment in 2010 to "allow greater democratization and transparency of information," start engaging with the public to listen to their grievances and receive feedback on policy matters through town hall sessions (personal communication, April 4, 2016).

At the local government level, the Penang Island City Council has adopted a bottom-up pilot project called "Gender Responsive Participatory Budgeting" and started to implement "Outcome-based Budgeting" for all its departments to encourage transparency and accountability in resource allocations (personal communication with local councilor, March 31, 2016). To address street crimes and safety issues, the Municipal Council of Province Wellesley set up a safe city task force comprised of personnel from the Police, Customs Department, Road Transport Department, National Anti-Drug Agency, Ministry of Health, Social Welfare Department and Land Public Transport Commission. Some of the steps taken have included the identification of

strategic locations for installing CCTV, road railings and street lights (personal communication with local councilor, March 25, 2016).

On community participation in policymaking, Tenaganita has been appointed by the Malaysian government to join the National Security Council for Human Trafficking. It also works closely with the Ministry of Human Resources on the issue of providing legal protection for migrant and domestic workers. Through its collaboration with government agencies, explains Fernandez, Tenaganita has tried to introduce the concept of human security to government officials (personal communication, January 20, 2016).

IKRAM, another CSO, also engages actively with government agencies in providing humanitarian aid to groups facing serious risks such as the 2015 Rohingya migrant boat crisis. At home, IKRAM has been concerned about worsening ethnic-relations. Hafidzi concurs with the findings of the human rights reports of the country that ethnic and religious extremism is growing in Malaysia and certain parties could be taking advantage of the situation (personal communication, February 22, 2016). To address this concern, IKRAM actively engages with different parties to find common ground and to resolve any differences through active dialogues.

3.1 Challenges in Cross-Country Cooperation

For some of the stakeholders interviewed, cross-country cooperation plays an important role in addressing and resolving threat issues. These stakeholders do not only address issues at home but are equally concerned with regional humanitarian developments. By engaging in cross-country cooperation, they hope to assist people of different nationalities in overcoming adversity.

3.1.1 Humanitarian Aid

In general, local stakeholders welcome humanitarian aid provided by foreign countries and organizations in various forms when large-scale disasters take place in Malaysia. In fact the Malaysian government has been participating in cross-country cooperation in providing disaster relief. Some examples include the tsunami disaster in Aceh and the Tohoku earthquake in Japan. However, some local stakeholders expressed reservations in regard to the involvement of foreign religious organizations if they carry an intention to proselytize for their religions. However, Hafidzi claimed that MyCare of IKRAM has collaborated several times with Tzu Chi, a Buddhist organization from Taiwan. He insisted that people should overcome their ideological, ethnic or religious differences when it comes to issues involving humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. After all, human security should be the main concern of any religious bodies (personal communication, February 22, 2016).

3.1.2 Expectations of Regional and International Organizations

The 2015 Rohingya refugees[9] have drawn international attention to the humanitarian disaster occurring in Myanmar. Neighboring countries—especially Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand who initially declined to host Rohingya refugees—eventually gave in under international pressure. The influx of refugees from Myanmar to these countries has raised the concerns of local governments, civil society groups and the general public.

Among non-governmental groups in Malaysia, IKRAM has been working closely with the Immigration Department of Malaysia in aiding the Rohingya people.

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[9] Over the last five years, there was a mass migration of Rohingya people from Myanmar and Bangladesh to Southeast Asian countries. In 2015 alone, about 25,000 fled by boat to Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and other neighboring countries. However, they were generally denied settlement in these countries. Malaysia has been one of the intended destinations partly due to its Islamic heritage. In May 2015, more than 3,000 boat people were stranded on beaches around Southeast Asia for weeks, capturing the headlines of international and local media.

Their role is to make sure the refugees have access to basic food and medical treatment. However, Hafidzi admitted that hosting Rohingya refugees is a burden on the society and the national healthcare system, and it was unfair to expect the host country to bear the burden alone. Hafidzi urges ASEAN and the United Nations to come out with more effective mechanisms or ways to resolve the problem (personal communication, February 22, 2016).

Aegile Fernandez was also unhappy with the indifference of ASEAN, calling upon it to take a more proactive position in the refugee crisis that has occurred in Southeast Asia. She said if ASEAN continues to remain indifferent, our neighbor's problems will one day become ours. She observed with disappointment that the governments of ASEAN countries seemed keener on negotiating trade deals than in protecting their own nationals. Fernandez's observation was reiterated by Charles Santiago who criticized the non-interference principle of ASEAN as an opportunistic policy. This principle has discouraged the member states of ASEAN to comment or meddle in the domestic affairs of other member states. Santiago was critical of the ASEAN member countries, pointing out that they use the non-interference principle conveniently when it encompasses political matters but not when making economic deals.

ASEAN's indifference towards the Rohingya humanitarian crisis has drawn flak from civil society groups in Malaysia. Among them is Saifuddin Abdullah, the former chief executive officer of the Global Movement of Moderates (GMM), who views the non-interference principle as an old idea and believes that it should be readdressed to reflect current situations (Jalil 2015).

However, local stakeholders generally agree that military intervention should not be used as the way to tackle domestic calamities, be it natural disasters or violent conflicts. Hafidzi asserted that military intervention should not come into the picture

because it would not resolve the problems. Referencing the war in Syria, he indicated that foreign interventions have actually made the situation worse (personal communication, February 22, 2016). However, with regard to human disasters such as genocide, some stakeholders noted that they would consider military intervention if is sanctioned by the United Nations.

Marina Mahathir, who was a member of the High Level Advisory Panel on the Responsibility to Protect in Southeast Asia in 2013 and worked on the idea of mainstreaming R2P in the region, acknowledged that R2P is not an easily understood concept. It was developed in the United Nations and intended to be used to address atrocities such as genocidal violence that have occurred in Rwanda and the Balkans. She views R2P as the responsibility to intervene in order to protect the people from a potential humanitarian disaster. While she believes that protecting the Rohingya people is the responsibility of ASEAN, she is also aware of ASEAN's non-interference policy, admitting that the issue is extremely complicated and difficult to resolve (personal communication, March 22, 2016).

3.1.3 Regional Cooperation among NGOs

The activism of the 21st century is characterized by international networking. IKRAM, for instance, is a member of a Malaysia-Indonesia humanitarian coalition called Southeast Asia Humanitarian Committee (SEAHUM). As the vice president of SEAHUM, Hafidzi notes that their member organizations are actively engaging with other humanitarian groups from Thailand, Singapore and Brunei. Similarly, Tenaganita has also built partnerships with NGOs from neighboring countries to better address issues related to women and migrant workers. Fernandez opines that if educational programs were available to migrant workers in sending countries, they would then be more aware of the potential problems in their new workplace and the proper

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mechanisms available to them in the receiving countries. She adds that NGOs in different countries can play the role of pressure groups in their respective countries to push for the development of more comprehensive labor policies (personal communication, January 2016).

3.2 Push for Stronger Political Will and Better Governance in Malaysia

Other stakeholders such as opposition leaders and CSOs attribute the current plight of Malaysia to poor governance and weak leadership. SUARAM's report showed that out of the 232 recommendations for human rights improvements made by the United Nations Human Rights Council to Malaysia, only 150 were accepted by the government, with the rest rejected, including the recommendation "to review the consistency of SOSMA and PCA with international human rights law" (SUARAM 2014, 2).[10]

SUHAKAM's human rights report shares the same tone of disappointment. To SUHAKAM's dismay, none of its annual reports submitted to parliament as required by Section 21 of the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia Act 1999 (Act 597) have ever been debated in Parliament (SUHAKAM 2015b, 4). In its report, SUHAKAM identified two laws—the Sedition Act 1948 and the Prevention of Crime (Amendment and Extension) Act 2013—that it deemed problematic, as they do not fully comply with international norms and are inconsistent with established human rights principles. Despite the fact that the purpose of SUHAKAM is to safeguard the promotion and protection of human rights in Malaysia, it was never consulted or referred to before the amendments to laws or passing of new laws that have a direct impact on human rights, namely the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2015, Sedition (Amendment) Act 2015,

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[10] SOSMA stands for Security Offences (Special Measures) Act 2012 and replaces the repealed Internal Security Act 1960, while PCA stands for Prevention of Crime (Amendment and Extension) Act 2013.

Prevention of Crime (Amendment and Extension) Act 2013, Security Offences (Special Measures) (Amendment) Act 2012, Criminal Procedure Code (Amendment) Act 2004 and Penal Code (Amendment) Act 2003 (SUHAKAM 2015a). Critics like Zairil Khir Johari view some of these laws as "illiberal legislation" that comprise both urgent and long-term threats to the fundamental liberties and human rights of the people in the country (personal communication, April 4, 2016).

To protest against the suppression of freedom of expression, an anti-sedition act movement called *Gerakan Hapus Akta Hasutan* (GHAH) was formed in 2014 and supported by 133 civil society organizations. The movement is spearheaded by SUARAM, Lawyers for Liberty, and IKRAM, among others. The objective of GHAH is "to carry out a national campaign to bring to an end to the ever-present threat against freedom of expression and opinion by the Sedition Act 1948 that hangs over every Malaysian."[11]

A worrying trend in recent years has been an increase in cases of racial and religious hate speech and hate crimes. Although none of our interviewees specifically raised the issue, some acknowledged the increase in racial and religious tensions in the country and attributed the problem to the heightened sense of economic insecurity among the people. A recently published report titled "Malaysia Racial Discrimination Report 2015" notes the correlation between ethnic relations and the socio-economic policy that has been implemented within "the prevailing culture of racial politics" (Pusat Komas 2016, 7).

In addressing human security issues, there is thus a need to move away from a racial or religious lens to a more practical approach that is free from the influence of race or religion (Debbie Stothard, personal communication, March 21, 2016). In 2013,

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[11] For more details, see GHAH's website at https://www.facebook.com/HapusHasutan/ (accessed 24 March 2016).

a National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) consisting of diverse individuals from various backgrounds was set up and the council members came up with three draft bills, namely the National Harmony and Reconciliation Bill, the National Harmony and Reconciliation Commission Bill and the Racial and Religious Hate Crimes Bill. These bills were meant to serve as a legal means for addressing ethnic and religious discontent and to replace the Sedition Act 1948 (Sipalan 2014).[12] It has been reported that the government is in the final stages of drafting a new National Harmony Bill but it remains unclear whether the NUCC's recommendations have been taken into consideration and if the new proposed bill will replace the Sedition Act as demanded by SUHAKAM and other CSOs (Bernama 2016). Non-Muslims, according to Charles Santiago, who is also a Member of Parliament, were deeply concerned with the current development and many were anxious about future prospects for living in Malaysia. He adds that there is limited space for opposition and pressure groups to influence major government policies (personal communication, January 29, 2016).

Conclusion

Twenty-two years after the introduction of the concept of human security, the term remains elusive to Malaysian policymakers and CSOs, albeit for different reasons. The government appears to approach the concept cautiously, preferring instead to promote and engage in non-traditional security at the regional and international levels primarily because it falls within the framework of comprehensive security that Malaysia adopts in its security approach. Hence, non-traditional threats such as economic crises, food shortages, health pandemics, human trafficking and

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[12] SUARAM's 2014 human rights report provides a long and detailed list of incidents. Some of them include the controversy surrounding the use of the word "Allah" by Malaysian Christians, the continued raids and seizures of bibles; the throwing of Molotov cocktails at a church in Penang, and the cases of unilateral conversions in relation to conversion of children in custody cases, and led to JAIS stopping a Hindu wedding (2014, 88-103).

environmental degradation are viewed as important and need to be addressed because they could blow up "and become a potential threat to *national security* and public order" (*Borneo Post* 2014; emphasis added).

While the central government continues to see its role as the main provider of security, it does aim to practice elements of human security by providing greater space for the development of civil society movements. This can be seen particularly under the leadership of Abdullah Badawi and his concept of *Islam Hadhari*, while also seeking to improve government accountability to the people through the introduction of GTP and its seven NKRAs under the current leadership of Najib Tun Razak. The NKRAs were cultivated through lab sessions and town hall meetings, allowing the public to become involved in the formulation process by providing valuable feedback (Lesley 2014, 5-6). At the local government level, the Penang Island City Council and the Municipal Council of Province Wellesley, for example, have been working to improve their policies by practicing a more inclusive approach that involves partnering with local communities and incorporating their concerns into policymaking.

Other stakeholders, primarily CSOs, have not adopted the term human security in their approaches, as they are either unaware of it or lack a clear understanding on how to operationalize the term. Some even viewed it as focusing more on freedom from want than freedom from fear. Since most CSOs are concerned with the violation of human rights of the people irrespective of political, economic or social spheres, they find the term human rights more suited to their cause, although in practice, they are actually addressing particular strains of human security. Their focus is on the individual and their concerns are related to the insecurities faced by marginalized groups, not only within the local population but also for documented and undocumented foreign workers and refugees. CSOs that are committed to helping individuals overcome insecurities regardless of race, gender, sex, class, religion, color,

creed, age, disability and even national origin would naturally value humanity and would undoubtedly align their practices with those of human security.

CSOs wanting to affect policy changes in helping to secure the wellbeing of the marginalized still experience an uphill battle due in part to the lack of good governance. Poor governance may reflect the lack of political will in prioritizing and emphasizing human security in government policies. Providing cash handouts for lower income groups, for example, has been viewed by some stakeholders as a populist move and while it may produce temporary financial relief, it creates dependency instead of empowerment in long term. Empowering the poor, the destitute, the oppressed and the sidelined to lift themselves out of insecure conditions requires substantial political will in committing to reforms. Effective political, economic and social reforms entail genuine understanding and active collaborations between the various levels of stakeholders with an ultimate goal of achieving social equality.

The term human security continues to linger at the periphery. In order to mainstream human security in Malaysia, overall awareness of the term and its significance need to be considerably enhanced. More discussions and debates at the national level need to be generated, particularly on how the concept of human security relates to other concepts that have been in use in the country, such as national security, national resilience, non-traditional threats, human development and human rights.

The Malaysian government has been actively promoting the notion of a "people-centered ASEAN" at the regional level—evident in Foreign Minister Anifah Aman's speeches and during Malaysia's role as the ASEAN chair in 2015. Malaysia, as one of the five founding members of ASEAN, should take the lead in making human security the cornerstone of its domestic and foreign policies (see Aman 2012; 2013). As Aman rightly pointed out, developing a people-centered ASEAN requires fostering "a change in the mindsets of governments" (Aman 2012). Making human security the

core agenda of Malaysia would serve as a way forward in changing "from the 'Power to the Government' mind-set to a 'Power to the People' mind-set" (Ibid). A government that has a strong commitment to human security would further empower other stakeholders, primarily CSOs, to play their roles as enablers much more effectively.

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Abstract (in Japanese)

要約

本稿では、マレーシアにおける人間の安全保障の理解について議論する。マレーシアは、2020年までに先進国入りするという自らのビジョンの達成に向け準備を進める過程でグローバリゼーションの力と世界経済および ASEAN コミュニティへの統合にさらされ、それによって国・人々の経済的地位は向上した。一方で、過去に達成した人間開発の成果をも損ないかねない多岐に渡るダウンサイド・リスクや脅威にもさらされることとなった。本稿では、主に以下の 3 点を扱う。第一に、人間の安全保障の考え方について、国際的・地域的観点から描写し、その上で国およびローカル・レベルでみられる人間の安全保障の解釈や理解について説明する。第二に、様々なステークホルダーによって取り組みが不可欠と考えられている課題や脅威を分析する。第三に、人間の安全保障を損なう状況を緩和するために採用されているいくつかのアプローチを確認し、マレーシアにおける人間の安全保障のレベルを一層改善するために不足している方策について議論する。マレーシアにおいては、人間の安全保障という言葉は未だ周縁に留まったままであり、それを主流化させるにはその重要性についてより高いレベルの気づきが求められる。人々やコミュニティが不安全な状況から脱することはもちろん、より重要なのは尊厳を持って生きられるということであり、そのために必要な個々の人間およびコミュニティを実際的にエンパワーする政策を優先させるには、全ステークホルダー、とりわけ政府からのより大きなコミットメントが必要不可欠である。

Working Papers from the same research project

"Human Security in Practice: East Asian Experiences"

JICA-RI Working Paper No. 92
Human Security in Practice: The Chinese Experience
Ren Xiao

JICA-RI Working Paper No. 93
Human Security in Practice: The Case of South Korea
Eun Mee Kim, Seon Young Bae, and Ji Hyun Shin

JICA-RI Working Paper No. 95
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