Capacity Building for Human Dignity: The Essence of the International Order in the 21st Century

By Keizo Takemi (State Secretary for Foreign Affairs)

Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I would first of all like to say what a great pleasure it is for me today to have this splendid opportunity to meet with you at the prestigious Asia Society and to discuss prospects for building a new international order in the 21st century.

Now, as we approach the turn of century, we are struggling through a whirlwind of fundamental change. That change is reflected in the substantial transformation which the international society is experiencing. In the midst of such changes, humankind is seeking, from an array of positions and perspectives, a new global order in which human dignity is protected. Out of this search there is emerging the profile of such an order. In Japan, the Obuchi Government is cultivating the concept of "human security" as a new element in its foreign policy with a view to enhancing this new international order.

As someone who studies international relations, including Japan's diplomatic relations, and as one who is responsible for setting Japan's current foreign policies, I would like to introduce to you today the concept of "human security" and Japan's efforts relating specifically to this idea. It is a concept that has become an important aspect of Japan's diplomacy in the context of creating a new international order for the 21st century.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In recent years the international community has been engulfed by the sweeping changes that have accompanied economic globalization. With the end of the Cold War, the former Socialist bloc countries have been making the transition to free market economies, while emerging economies, including various Asian nations, have also entered the global marketplace. These developments, coupled with the liberalization of trade and investment, and rapid advances in information and communications technologies, have produced a world in which massive movements of people, goods, money, and information are taking place on a global scale and at lightning speed.

This globalization has helped to bring about economic growth and higher standards of living. But it has also had negative effects, and has brought forth an awareness of problems that threaten the dignity of people—problems such as poverty, environmental degradation, international organized crime, including illicit drug use and trafficking and human smuggling,
and so on. Additional problems resulting from regional and internal conflicts have also emerged, such as dangers of antipersonnel land-mines and small arms and the involvement of children in armed conflicts. These conflicts inflict severe suffering on civilian populations, particularly women and children. This situation may be called "the diversification of threats." The idea of "human security" is being developed to cope with these issues in the recognition that they are threats to the dignity of individual human beings.

On August 17th, a powerful earthquake inflicted serious damages to Turkey. The number of casualties has reached more than 39,000 so far. In response, the Government of Japan promptly sent a rescue and medical crew of the Japan Disaster Relief Team as well as a team of experts for rehabilitation of life-lines, and decided to extend emergency and humanitarian aid of approximately three million dollars, composed of funds and materials such as medicines, tents, blankets, generators, and carpenters kits. Japanese food business quarter will also send foodstuff. In so doing, Japan recalls with appreciation the assistance it received from the United States and other countries at the time of the earthquake in the Kobe area a few years ago. I believe that, from the viewpoint of "human security," it is an important task for the international society to cope effectively with natural disasters.

Indeed, it is my view that the further development of this idea of "human security" will lead to the rethinking of the international system itself, going beyond just responding to situations as they arise. Under the existing international order, the state has been the basic constituent component, and within this framework, international peace and stability as well as economic prosperity have been pursued, with the advancement of the national interest as the key motivating factor. However, in coping with these many new problems, it has become apparent that this kind of framework is no longer a panacea. That is to say, non-state players--for example, international organizations, NGOs, multinational corporations, and so on--are beginning to play a much greater role in every aspect of efforts to solve these problems--from information gathering and the enlightening of public opinion to the mobilization of resources and activities in the field. For example, I believe everyone is well aware of the tremendous role that the UNHCR, in collaboration with NGOs, is playing in providing assistance to the Kosovar refugees.

Naturally, this trend does not in the least diminish the significance of the state as the basic component of international society; states will of course continue to retain their territorial sovereignty, democratic legitimacy, and enforcement power under the law. But it is becoming increasingly important to address these challenges to human dignity from the standpoint of protecting the interests of individual human beings, with each individual exerting his or her own initiative. This emphasis on "human security" is a new idea. It could help shape a new order for humankind, one in which efforts for protecting the dignity of each individual human being are effectively pursued through mutual cooperation among various entities, such as international organizations, states, local governments, NGOs, private enterprises and individuals themselves.

(Literacy and the importance of primary education)
Ladies and gentlemen,
The concept of human security appeared in the UNDP Human Development Report 1994, which called for greater attention to be paid for improving the welfare of individual human beings.

Professor Amartya Sen, the winner last year of the Nobel Prize in economics, observed that "the process of development is not primarily one of expanding the supply of goods and services but of enhancing the capabilities of people." Professor Lincoln Chen, Executive Vice President of the Rockefeller Foundation, tells us that "human security" consists of three vital elements: "human survival," "human well-being" and "human freedom." I would like to emphasize "human freedom and potential." Human beings have encountered difficulties of every kind throughout history, but through their wisdom they have been able to overcome those difficulties. I believe that the source of that wisdom is the freedom of individual human beings to make choices and assume responsibility for their actions, and their abundant potential to live creative and meaningful lives.

I think the most important element in creating an international order where we can realize and enhance "human freedom and potential" is the promotion of the capacity building of each and every human being. In order to ensure human security and create a new international order in the 21st century, the efforts of citizens, particularly NGOs, made on their own initiative, are indispensable. This will require that the capabilities of each individual be raised. In that sense, it can be said that capacity building is key to ensuring that the new century is one in which human dignity is a basic principle.

In this connection, I would like to emphasize the importance of basic education. Taking international cooperation in the field of health care as an example, the concept of primary health care, that is, the view that basic health care services should be provided to all people, is widely shared. But as it has often been pointed out, basic education is also necessary to ensure that the people in the community, particularly women, who are meant to be the recipients of basic health care services, are in fact capable of availing themselves of those services. This past May I visited a health care center in Tanzania that is implementing, with assistance from Japan, a mother and child health care project, and I was struck by how much there still is to do in terms of education in this area.

In order to promote the self-reliance of women in developing countries, Japan is actively extending micro-credit to female entrepreneurs. For example, during my recent visit to Tajikistan, I announced that Japan was going to assist a micro-credit project being implemented by the UNDP in that country through the Women In Development Fund, which Japan set up under the UNDP. For these kinds of projects as well, in order to ensure that they are effective, basic education and other forms of capacity building for women are essential. Reading, writing, and arithmetic--the three R's--are the most fundamental skills that a person needs in order to enhance his or her capabilities and potentialities.
In Japan, from long before the beginning of its modernization in the middle of the 19th century, it was not only the elite samurai class that could read; basic education covering the three R's was diffused throughout the country even among the ordinary people. It is said that from the beginning to the middle of the 19th century, there were more than ten thousand small schools for the common people. Japan's modernization was achieved based on this widespread diffusion of basic education.

Let me add here that it is my conviction that, as we look ahead to the 21st century, although basic education is provided throughout Japan, it necessary that Japan promote education that fosters free expression and individuality among its children.

Turning to the global situation, we must acknowledge that there are now around 855 million illiterate people, and 130 million children of school age who do not have the opportunity to receive an education.

Based on its own historical experience in the field of basic education, Japan is now providing education facilities in Asia, Africa, and other areas around the world. In addition, in its assistance for basic education Japan has also been emphasizing teacher training, curriculum development, the provision of equipment, and so on in such countries as the Philippines, Indonesia, Cambodia, Kenya, Ghana, and the Republic of South Africa with a particular focus on assistance for science and mathematics education. Looking ahead to the coming century, Japan would like to make further efforts in providing both hardware and software assistance for the diffusion of basic education in countries throughout the world.

(Conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction)

Ladies and gentlemen,

Civil society, including NGOs, international organizations, and other groups, is once again assuming a greater role in efforts to deal with problems relating to regional conflicts from the perspective of human security. These efforts offer a vision for a new order of existence for humankind. Permit me to refer to a comment made by Dr. Mahbub ul Haq from Pakistan, who served as the Special Adviser for the preparation of the UNDP's Human Development Report 1994. In discussing the conflict in Somalia during which the United Nations resorted to the use of force in its unsuccessful effort to enforce the peace, he noted that if the international community and the developed countries had extended to Somalia economic cooperation based on the idea of human security ten years earlier, the conflict could probably have been avoided. In recent years, there has been a growing consensus that by responding to the problems of poverty and social inequities that are the real causes of conflicts, regional conflicts can be prevented and that the recurrence of hostilities can be avoided by promoting post-conflict rehabilitation.

I believe that it is in this sense that Japan can make more positive contributions to conflict prevention. Just before coming to the United States, I visited some Central Asian countries, including Tajikistan, which is in the midst of implementing the peace process. Last year in July,
Professor Yutaka Akino, who was working for peace in Tajikistan as an UNMOT civil affairs officer, was killed in the line of duty. As he would have wished, Japan will continue to assist Tajikistan's efforts to promote the peace process by strengthening its assistance for the restoration of peace, rehabilitation, and democratization in Tajikistan. On my last visit I proposed, from the viewpoint of "human security", a project in collaboration with a variety of concerned parties, including local governments in Tajikistan, NGOs and international organizations active in the country. The project includes the construction of primary schools where Islamic and non-Islamic children can learn together and health care posts where health care can be provided to all, without ethnic nor religious discrimination. It is my earnest hope that this project will help strengthen the foundations of the peace process through community development.

In Japan, public interest in preventive diplomacy has begun to grow and The Japan Center for Preventive Diplomacy was established this July at the initiative of many parties including NGOs, politicians, businessmen and academics. The Government of Japan will continue to provide financial assistance to this center.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In accordance with this way of thinking, Prime Minister Obuchi, ever since he was Japan's Foreign Minister, has been encouraging the initiatives of citizens for the creation of a new international order for the 21st century. He has done so under the banner, "foreign policy that moves hand-in-hand with the people".

For example, under his leadership, and in collaboration with NGO groups, Japan signed the Ottawa Convention against Antipersonnel Land-mines; he also advocated the goal of "zero victims" from land-mines. In addition, this year the Government introduced a new scheme called "JICA Partnership Programme for NGOs, local Governments and Institutions." In this project, JICA recognizes as its partners NGOs, local governments, think tanks and so on and entrusts the implementation of a project to its partner. With respect to assistance to the Kosovar refugees, the Government of Japan attaches great importance to collaboration with NGOs in supporting these assistance activities and is working for the flexible and prompt implementation of assistance to NGO activities.

Such efforts are not limited to the foreign policy level; on the domestic level as well, the Obuchi administration is carrying out measures to support the initiatives of people, such as the implementation of the Non-Profit Organization Law, promotion of decentralization and administrative reform, and so forth. Further, in March of this year, Prime Minister Obuchi set up a round table among opinion leaders on "Japan's Vision for the 21st Century," with a view to coming up with far-reaching domestic and foreign policy ideas for the new century.

As Prime Minister Obuchi was working for the creation of a new order for the 21st century, the Asian economic crisis triggered concrete efforts by Japan to enhance human security.
The Asian economic crisis has not only dealt a severe blow to economic activities in the region, but has also affected the socially vulnerable segments of the population—the poor, women, children, the elderly—by creating unemployment and shortages of basic foods and medicines.

Japan has been addressing the Asian economic crisis by the following means.

First, in order to revive Japan's own economy, the Government has been implementing economic stimulus measures through fiscal packages amounting to 380 billion dollars which include increased public spending and tax cuts. Japan is also undertaking strict reforms such as measures to revitalize the nation's financial system, as well as putting into effect "Emergency Employment Measures and Measures to Enhance Industrial Competitiveness" and is resolutely implementing administrative and other reforms. As a result of these actions, the first quarter for 1999 showed a two percent increase in economic growth over the previous period. At the same time, Japan has also pledged 80 billion dollars in assistance to Asian countries including about 30 billion dollars under the New Miyazawa Initiative, in support of the efforts of Asian countries for economic revitalization, structural reform and human resources development, and currency stabilization. Of this pledged assistance, which is greater than that provided by any other country, Japan has already materialized about 68 billion dollars.

Second, on the basis of our efforts which I have just outlined, in the area of so-called macro-economics, Japan is carrying out efforts to create "social safety nets" for assisting the socially vulnerable segments of the population hit by the Asian economic crisis. For example, Japan is providing about 33 million dollars in emergency grant aid for the purchase of medical supplies and about 750 thousand tons of rice aid to Indonesia.

Moreover, in an effort to find a more sustainable, longer-term solution to these problems, Japan has led the way for other countries by organizing a symposium entitled "Health Initiatives in the Asian Economic Crisis--A Human-centered Approach" in April of last year in which representatives from developing countries, NGOs, and international organizations, as well as economic cooperation policy makers from donor countries participated. At the symposium a broad consensus emerged on the importance in the context of policy making of improving our understanding of the actual situation facing the socially vulnerable segments of the population; the importance of donor coordination in managing the crisis; the need to construct sustainable and strengthened systems; the importance of adopting a comprehensive approach which in addition to addressing health care problems would also tackle social and economic problems such as poverty; and the need to work in collaboration with NGOs.

In the context of these efforts, Prime Minister Obuchi, in a policy speech in Hanoi last December, stated that the 21st century should be "a century of peace and prosperity built on human dignity" and defined "human security" as an important priority for Japan's foreign
policy. In that speech he announced the establishment of The Human Security Fund under
the United Nations so that governments, international organizations, and NGOs could work
together to strengthen their responses to problems threatening human security.

Through this Human Security Fund, Japan will assist the Human Dignity Project which
ESCAP, while respecting community initiatives, will carry out in Southeast Asia. In addition,
Japan is helping to organize an international conference in Tokyo on September 6-7 that will
consider ways to assist the people in the Semipalatinsk region of Kazakhstan, in coping with
the apparent effects of nuclear testing at a nearby site once used by the former Soviet Union.
Japan will also provide assistance through the Human Security Fund to a project,
implemented by the UNDP, to retrain medical technicians in order to provide basic health care
services to the habitants of Tajikistan, where development in the area of basic living needs is
being promoted in the context of the peace process. During my recent visits to Central Asia, I
had discussions with leaders of Kazakhstan and Tajikistan on the implementation of these
projects.

It goes without saying that “human security” concerns extend beyond Asia. Last October
Japan hosted the Second Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD-II),
which was held to promote development based on the ownership and partnership of the
people in Africa, the continent where the challenge to enhance “human security” is greatest.
This past April and May I visited Africa in order to attend the first meeting of the States parties
to the Ottawa Convention, which was held in Maputo, Mozambique, and to exchange views
with the leaders of countries such as South Africa concerning the implementation of the
Tokyo Agenda for Action adopted at TICAD-II.

As the world’s largest ODA creditor to the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC’s), this past
April Japan submitted a proposal which included a 100 percent reduction of bilateral ODA
debts to the HIPC’s, with a view to the revitalization of the countries suffering extreme poverty
and in the interest of international peace and stability. At the Summit Meeting this past June,
agreement was reached on the "Cologne Debt Initiative," basically in line with the Japanese
proposal. Japan will actively participate in the Initiative, while striving to ensure fairness in
burden sharing, in order to lead the HIPC’s toward long-term sustainable self-reliance.

In this connection, on August 30 and 31 Japan organized a seminar on debt management, as
a concrete follow up to TICAD-II, in Nairobi, Kenya, to which it invited leaders for fiscal and
financial affairs from African countries with a view to fostering capacity building in the debt
management of these countries.

As for its contribution in response to the Kosovo crisis, Japan has so far pledged a total of
220 million dollars in assistance, including 100 million dollars to the Human Security Fund and
to other funds primarily to assist the rehabilitation of Kosovo and the return of Kosovar
refugees. As I mentioned earlier, Prime Minister Obuchi attaches particular importance to
cooperation with NGOs, and I myself have instructed, for example, that procedures for
providing governmental assistance to NGOs be made more flexible and that subsidy rates for
NGOs be raised.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is hoped that all these efforts will enhance "human security" and thus serve as a foundation for the formation of a new order. In addition, if the wisdom that emerges from these endeavors by various actors in Asia and the rest of the world is shared by all humankind, the new order in the 21st century will be more prosperous and fruitful. It is from this viewpoint that I would like to stress the importance of intellectual exchanges.

With Prime Minister Obuchi in attendance, the "First Intellectual Dialogue on Building Asia's Tomorrow" was held in Tokyo last December, with the concept of "human security" as its main theme. Many intellectual leaders from Asia participated in the conference and, recognizing the realities of Asia in which diverse cultures coexist, discussed their visions and strategies for new development in Asia, taking "human security" fully into account. In July of this year, the Second Dialogue was held in Singapore with the participation of Professor Amartya Sen under the theme of "Promoting Sustainable Development and Human Security."

In June of this year, Japan, building upon the results of the health care symposium held in April last year to which I referred earlier, hosted a symposium to define new policy approaches from the viewpoint of "human security" in the area of development, one of the most important areas of Japan's foreign policy. The symposium was attended by Professor Chen and many leaders from Asia, Africa and donor countries.

It is particularly meaningful for me to have this wonderful opportunity to meet and talk with the members of the Asia Society and other participants here today as it contributes to the expansion of the network of intellectual exchange in the effort to create a new order in the 21st century.

Ladies and gentlemen,

At the dawn of the 21st century, in the midst of sweeping global changes, a new international order is emerging. But as history has always shown, it is the actions of free-thinking individuals that open the door to a new era. It is therefore essential for us to engage in a wide range of efforts, including capacity building, in order to create a new order that protects the dignity of human beings by ensuring "human security." This may be the most important challenge facing the Japanese people in the 21st century, because for too long we have attached perhaps too much importance to maintaining harmony with our neighbors. Thus we as a nation may have to modify this traditional way of life. Finally, I would like to urge that we join together in confronting the intellectual and political challenges that lie ahead and to make concrete efforts, one by one and hand in hand, to build a 21st century in which all the peoples of the world can live in dignity.

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