

Conference: Human Security in Southeast Asia
25-26 April 2024
University of Victoria

Summary of the Discussion

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The conference on Human Security in Southeast Asia was convened on 25-26 April 2024 at the University of Victoria (UVic) by the Centre for Asia-Pacific Initiatives (CAPI), in partnership with the Canada and the Asia Pacific Policy Project (CAPPP). The two-day conference consisted of a graduate student forum, keynote addresses, a roundtable, and panel discussions.

Day 1

As the event began, the CAPI's Director and Professor at the UVic Faculty of Law, Victor V. Ramraj, welcomed the participants, acknowledging and respecting “the Ləkʷəŋən (Songhees and Esquimalt) Peoples on whose territory the university stands, and the Ləkʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.”

Pre-conference Graduate Student Forum

Professor Ramraj introduced the moderator of the graduate student forum, who took over and introduced the graduate students and their research backgrounds.

The graduate students presented on several themes of human security. A forum member discussed the contestation between Indigenization and Internationalization in Canadian higher education. They highlighted systemic issues like microaggressions and social isolation that students faced, and they proposed educational reforms through a transcultural framework to balance knowledge exchange and incorporate diverse perspectives. Policy changes, such as ensuring institutions' financial sustainability and supporting students to transition to permanent residency, may improve students' educational experience and outcomes.

Another student examined the dynamics between the Sikh diaspora, modern narratives of the Khalistan movement, and the notion of a Sikh historical memory. They mentioned that reviewing the plight of the Sikh minority in Punjab helped to contextualize the Sikh collective consciousness, which was created from the unrecognized trauma in response to major historical events. Moreover, by applying a critical discourse analysis using a single-case study method, they argued that the Sikh historical trauma influences the diaspora to portray reactionary dissent against the socio-political disenfranchisement of Sikhs in Punjab, and that creates the conditions for the re-emergence of modern narratives of the Khalistan movement.

Another forum member shared the story of what inspired them to undertake important work on security. They described their fieldwork in an African country, the war in Uganda and the actions of the Lord's Resistant Army. They eloquently explained how gender and transgender play out in the context of wars. Another student commented that the creation of job opportunities by a state in Southeast Asia alone did not lead to human security when vulnerable workers in that state simultaneously faced inadequate education, climate change impacts, debts, land loss, and poor social security and protections.

Overall, the panel noted that human security was a complex concept, with many participants mentioning the importance of considering gender aspects, collaborative efforts, and the significant role of state and non-state actors in furthering human security.

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Professor Ramraj opened the main conference by offering welcoming remarks, introducing himself, and acknowledging and respecting the land and elders. He informed the audience that the spectacular National Centre for Indigenous Laws at UVic, which would soon be open, has won prestigious architectural awards.

Professor Ramraj had the pleasure of co-organizing the Conference with Professor Robert Hanlon from Thompson Rivers University, who leads the CAPPP. He also thanked colleagues from the University of Alberta and Okanagan College, and the Canadian Defence and Security Network, and Phil Calvert, CAPI Senior Research Fellow and former Ambassador to Thailand, Cambodia and Laos. He further thanked his CAPI colleagues, especially Noelle Hinrichs and Katie Dey, for their hard work and support in making the conference happen.

He then mentioned that human security is used to shift our attention away from the hard security issues associated with national security and defence and towards human issues and the needs of people, such as food and water. What is more complicated is how to address these concerns and by whom. It is those questions that drew together students, lead thinkers, civil society, and some other stakeholders from diverse disciplines and areas to discuss human security at this conference.

Professor Hanlon introduced himself, acknowledged and respected the land of his home university, expressed appreciation for the opportunity to participate, and welcomed the participants. Canada is no stranger to Southeast Asia, and the conference allowed us to discuss the role of non-state actors, ask difficult questions, and redefine human security, such as freedom from fear and freedom from want.

Keynote Speakers

Professor Ramraj introduced Professor Nadir Hosen, who has extensive knowledge on Syariah and Indonesian law and over 475,000 followers at X (formerly named Twitter). Professor Andy Knight introduced Professor Siobhan Byrne, her recent books, and her expertise in anti-war research.

The keynote speakers thanked the moderators and discussed food security in Indonesia, gender mainstreaming, and peacebuilding. They provided some historical contexts and background information on human security. Traditional security was different from human security. The concept of human security, first coined in 1994, sought to show that the world would not be at peace unless people have security, including socio-economic security. Human Security was developed in the Responsibility to Protect Report of the International Committee on Intervention and State Sovereignty (R2P). Speakers on the panel also reiterated that the state plays an important role, but non-state actors are also important.

Professor Hosen presented Indonesia as a case study. Food security and the availability of rice between 2020 and 2024 was a focus of Hosen's talk. The Ministry of Defense was tasked to implement a national strategic project on food security. The government sought to increase rice production in order to depend less on rice imports. That posed several questions: where to get the lands to grow rice, how clearing forests to get land affects food security (as forest clearing aggravates flooding) and how to reconcile this with the changing traditional local practices and way of life of the indigenous communities. The Indonesian government also offered free lunch program as part of the presidential election campaign to address the food crisis. However, assistance programs are often associated with political commodities. The success of ensuring food security depends on the actors involved.

Professor Byrne noted the importance of gender equality for peace and to further the goal of human security. Canada's third National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) was mentioned as an example. Regional actors, scholars in conflict mediation and

peacebuilding work, women-led peace groups, national committees, and NGO working groups remain active today. Applying a feminist approach as one way to think about solutions is a strategy to make the security process more inclusive.

The moderator then thanked the keynote speakers, whose remarks opened up many questions for subsequent discussion.

16th CAPI Roundtable on Southeast Asia in Global Context: Non-State Actors and Human Security in Southeast Asia: Religion, Civil Society, and Indigenous/Ethnic Minorities

CAPI Senior Research Fellow and former Ambassador Calvert and Professor Ramraj provided a format for the discussion, which consisted of the panellists' self-introductions, their work on human security, and follow-up questions.

The panellists' backgrounds included overseeing the work on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), expertise in Syariah law, experience with UN peacekeeping, in Southeast Asia, and also publication of academic books on human security. They discussed the extent of state and non-state roles and power in shaping, affecting, or improving human security. It was suggested that in thinking about human security, we must ask: 1. What is human security? 2. Security against what threats? 3. Who provides security? Another question was whether human security is a Western concept. One answer to human security is freedom from the threats people experience, as the concept was connected to freedom from fear and freedom from want. Elements of security are connected; in reality, we cannot separate traditional security from human security. Preventing violence in the first place is a better approach than waiting to address the violence.

With regard to the moderator's question on the interconnectedness of SDGs and human security, the panel responded that the SDGs principle of Leaving No One Behind is a good example because we need to take into account different systems, such as local systems. These systems are pivotal to the lives and resilience of people. SDGs are state-led, but human security is not simply a state-led effort and is not limited to those goals in SDGs. Human security is not simply a concept to be discussed; it is about the society people belong to – a concept that needs to be realized in practice.

Actors and their agencies affect human security. What each of us can do and what options we have to work toward human security involve the participation of state and non-state actors. All actors must work together. Non-state actors could not successfully address the issues without the state's involvement. Non-state actors, such as youth, are important at the local level. Technology, the internet, and social media allow them to expand their networks. Some panellists cautioned about the complexity of collaboration between actors. The question of "what is secured" might bring trauma to people who went through the war and experienced military intervention. The process of bringing perpetrators to justice can sometimes conflict with the prospect of peace in the country. Non-state actors could have their own agenda, receive funding, or be influenced locally or abroad. The government and non-state actors could hijack each other's work on providing service. The panel agreed that both states, with good leaders and non-state actors, are important in finding an appropriate balance between state and society – and that we should be more focused on the "human" part of the term "human security."

The moderators then thanked the panellists and audience for their engagements.

Professor Ramraj provided closing remarks and recapped the discussion themes of Day 1, which prepared the participants well for further discussion on Day 2.

Day 2

Professor Ramraj opened the second day of the conference with a territorial acknowledgement and invited Phil Calvert, CAPI Senior Research Fellow and former Ambassador, to introduce the keynote speaker.

Keynote Speaker

Phil Calvert mentioned that discussing human security and any kind of security would be incomplete without talking about China and China in Southeast Asia. He then introduced the keynote speaker, Professor Philippe Rheault, from the China Institute at the University of Alberta, who had extensive experience and knowledge of China.

Professor Rheault thanked the moderator and the organizers. He mentioned that the China Institute, an independent think tank, seeks, among other things, to deepen understanding of China and find ways to invite engagement with it.

His speech touched upon aspects of the United States (US) and China in Southeast Asia and the constantly evolving dynamics in Southeast Asia and between China and various Southeast Asian countries. For example, the shifting situations in the Philippines, Myanmar, and Indonesia, as well as the South China Sea disputes, affect how countries in the region engage with China. The power dynamics and rivalry between the US and China also pose challenges for Southeast Asian countries. Still, it might also open some space for Southeast Asian countries to develop a more independent posture in their engagement with major powers.

He also noted improvements in some aspects of human security, but there are also things of great concern. Southeast Asian countries have both senses of optimism and concern. The region, in a way, benefits from China's economic growth. Southeast Asia's demography is also very favourable. As China moves up the value chain, it leaves more room for some Southeast Asian countries as they do not have to compete with China. However, some states in Southeast Asia are politically aligned with China, and it is a concern that some countries are sacrificing freedom for economic development. He gave examples of water and labour migration. The development in the Mekong upstream can affect the country downstream, affecting water fluctuation. In combination with climate change, it can negatively affect agriculture. The concept of ASEAN centrality enabled the region to have one voice; however, it has also been affected by China's systematic attempts to engage in bilateral engagements.

Professor Rheault also considered where Canada could be involved. He said that we should not underestimate the role of Canada in the thoughts and changes on human rights. Canada was involved in drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was at the forefront of the effort to promote freedom from fear, and the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). Canada has the capital, and its investments can provide job opportunities in Southeast Asia. Canada can support many areas, including health administration, medicines, and climate. He concluded that to be impactful in Southeast Asia, Canada should be creative in finding areas of development assistance where Canada can have joint programs with China while still aligning with Canada's values.

Professor Ramraj thanked the keynote speaker for the overview and for bringing China into the discussion, which set the stage well for following discussions.

Panel 1

Human Security: Health, Gender and Development

Professor Rosalind Warner from Okanagan College introduced herself and acknowledged and respected the land where Okanagan College resides. She was pleased to introduce the panellists and then provided the session format, which included the contextual remarks, the self-introduction and their work by panellists, and a series of questions concerning the situation of human security today.

One panellist's organization (Hope International) works on development in about fifteen countries, including some Southeast Asian countries. Their work supports human security approaches, primarily water, sanitation, hygiene, food, health, nutrition, gender, sustainability, and livelihood. Another panel member's medical humanitarian organization (Médecins sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders), specializes in armed conflicts and situations of violence more generally, does about 16 million patient consultations per year, takes a couple of million people to hospitals, and continues patient care and community-level public health. The medical humanitarian organization maintains a presence in several countries and supports vaccination activities. The presenter discussed climate change as a risk multiplier; it affects infectious disease patterns, some of which used to be predictable. Another member focused on women and security in relation to human security and mentioned that women, men, boys, girls, and every one of a range of experiences views conflict differently. The different actors bring diverse perspectives to conflict prevention, solutions, and peacebuilding. Human security can mean many different things to many different people, and it varies across time, places, and institutions, as well as individual and collective human security. Human security can also be seen via everyday security, such as health security, job security, and housing security.

The panel also shared some of the challenges they observed. A panellist wondered whether the world fully grasped the massive scale of the humanitarian crisis and needs. There is a lack of capacity to work in different crises. The world still struggles to address public health risks and infectious diseases. Some challenges of the development assistance are related to funding, such as inadequate or delayed funding, especially for locally based organizations. Moreover, security is also a question of power, and sometimes the word security is used by some groups to pressure another group in the name of security.

The panel shared their thoughts and experiences on addressing the challenges. Early warning and technology data are used to prepare for the intervention in assisting. The world needs political will and commitment to actually invest in meaningful solutions and strategies. In addition, by applying the lens of everyday security, we can build solidarity by bringing in the voices of more groups such as women and providing an opportunity to create awareness of their challenges and needs and find solutions. Collaboration is thus essential, such as working through local partners. A panellist commented that the success of their organization's projects is due to working with small community-based organizations that have a very intimate relationship with the communities and partners over the long term through sustained funding and relationships. According to another panel member, Canada works to implement peace and security, focusing on women's security in Canada and abroad through its national action plan (WPS), which is the cross-government approach coordinated by Global Affairs Canada. The action plan includes a commitment to addressing non-traditional security threats, such as climate-related conflicts and technology-facilitated gender-based violence. Threats to people are also considered along with the threats to the state, such as in the case of cyber security issues. For example, the work of women peacebuilders on the ground is critical to implementing human security, and thus, ensuring the security of women peacebuilders, such as fighting gender-based violence, disinformation, and surveillance, is essential. Canada also has a partnership with ASEAN on women, peace, and security.

The moderator asked the audience to join them in thanking the panellists.

Panel 2

Southeast Asia and Human Security in an Indo-Pacific Era: Socio-Economic and Geopolitical Implication for Canada

The panel began by exploring the historical context of human security and how the scope of security has changed over the years. After the Cold War, Canada played a major role in cooperative security with its neighbours and engaged with multilateral institutions to deal with a broad range of threats, including non-traditional security issues such as human security. Canada's support of organizations such as the International Criminal Court (ICC) were critical in developing the concept of R2P which protected populations from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing. However, the panel highlighted the need to balance humanitarian issues with respecting state sovereignty. As international trust and cooperation has eroded, there has been an increased focus on geopolitics, competition, securitization, and militarization. They noted that these trends create challenges for addressing two major existential

crises impacting human security; climate change, which threatens the ability for humans to live on the planet, and AI which threatens the preservation of humanity.

The panel also noted a recent Chinese survey which shows national interest in maintaining peace and stability in the region through economic prosperity. Many regional partners prefer cooperative engagement and worry about strategies focusing on deterring or balancing China's regional power. The panel expressed concern of the current Canada-China relationship which is largely confrontational and makes economic cooperation difficult. The panel agreed that China's dominance implies that all issues in the region have an impact on Chinese interests and are unavoidable. They noted that there is strong regional trust in Japan and South Korea and highlighted an opportunity for trilateral engagement in the region with those countries. They also noted that Canadian provinces are developing their own Indo-Pacific strategies as economic growth is providing new opportunities in the region.

The panel also considered Canada's private sector engagement in the region and the effectiveness of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policies in eliminating forced labour. They compared this to the US human security policy, UFLPA, which targets forced labour of Uyghurs in China which has stronger language and has resulted in three thousand Chinese shipments being seized. It requires not just producers but the producers inputs to eliminate forced labour. This leaves Canadian businesses relying on CSR at risk of having shipments seized if they unknowingly participate in forced labour. One panellist suggested CSR policies have less effective enforcement mechanisms than the human security agenda and create boundaries for Canadian businesses' ability to make an impact in the region.

The panel noted Canada's commitment to invest \$2.3B over five years in the region creates an opportunity to improve Canada's role and industry leadership through strengths such as insurance companies, pension funds, disaster relief, renewables, and AI. They suggested an opportunity to cooperatively address the fentanyl crisis, a common interest with a direct impact on human security. They concluded by highlighting the importance of framing discussions about where we invest our resources, advocating less focus on defence and securitisation and more on development and climate issues.

Closing Speaker

CAPI Senior Research Fellow and former Ambassador Calvert introduced the Strategic Advisor on Indo-Pacific Relations, Intergovernmental Relationships Secretariats (IGRS), Government of British Columbia (BC), Kenneth Macartney.

BC Strategic Advisor Macartney thanked the moderator, the organizers, and other collaborators for putting together a rich and rewarding conference, bringing together, among others, academics, civil society, and government to discuss critical and complex issues and share knowledge.

He mentioned the engagements of the federal and BC governments in Southeast Asia. There is a growing recognition going back many years of the economic and strategic importance of ASEAN as a fast-growing economy with large, young demographics, such as in the wake of the Indo-Pacific Strategy. BC pays attention to the Southeast Asian market, including in the areas of energy, low carbon, innovation, and trade. Many work successes result from engaging with Canadian and international NGOs, institutions, civil society, academics, and business associations in dealing with complex security agendas. The federal government provides a lot of help in building capacity on Southeast Asia, such as through institutions that work on research. He concluded that sustained contributions to human security through Canadian development assistance through Canadian institutions can make an important difference.

The co-organizers thanked the speaker and were delighted to hear about BC's engagement in the region. They also thanked the collaborators, panellists, moderators, graduate students, participants, and the CAPI team. Human security is a disciplinary area, and it takes everyone on board. The organizers congratulated everyone on joining this conference and invited the audience to keep in touch and continue the conversation on human security.

