

# **ICHSWA Report to UNESCO**

## **International Conference on Human Security in West Asia (ICHSWA)**

University of Birjand, Islamic Republic of Iran

26-27 November 2008

### **Organization of the Conference**

The main organizers of the International Conference on Human Security in West Asia (ICHSWA) were the Iranian National Commission for UNESCO, the UNESCO Tehran Regional Cluster Office and the University of Birjand. The conference was also sponsored by the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology; the Provincial Government of South Khorasan; the Municipality and City Council of Birjand; the Strategic Studies Research Centre; Payam Noor University; the Research Centre for Cultural and Social Studies; and the Centre for the Fight against Drugs.

This conference was held over two days from 26-27 November 2008 in Birjand, the capital of the province of Southern Khorasan on the border of Afghanistan, in the presence of high authorities, experts and researchers from Iran and neighbouring countries. Notable among them were Mr. Qunli Han, Director of the UNESCO Tehran Office; H.E. Mr. Mohammad Reza Majidi, Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of the Islamic Republic of Iran to UNESCO; Dr. Mohammad Reza Saeidabadi, Secretary-General of the Iranian National Commission for UNESCO; Dr. Jafar Koosha, UNESCO Chair for Human Rights, Peace and Democracy in Shahid Beheshti University; Mr. Ahmadi Moghaddam, Head of the Disciplinary Forces; and Dr. Mohammad Reza Miri, Head of Birjand University.

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## **Objectives of the Conference**

The objectives of the conference were as follows:

- Providing the basis for a comprehensive knowledge of human security for social and political actors (such as decision-makers, university professors and researchers);
- Reviewing different theoretical and practical approaches, perspectives and criticisms of human security, taking into account the role of human development and sustainable development, cultural diversity, and respect for countries' national sovereignty;
- Identifying common areas of human security threats in the region;
- Identifying areas of strategy and approaches for cooperation among countries of West Asia (Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan and Turkmenistan) in the field of human security.

## **Themes and Results of the Conference**

The conference was organized into various working groups, who discussed at length both theoretical and conceptual subjects, such as the origins and meanings of the concept of human security, as well as applied themes relating to its practical implications, for example in terms of the human security situation in the region and the role of bilateral and multilateral cooperation in this regard. The importance of the concept of human security and the value of its implementation in the region were emphasized; being people-centred, it can tackle both traditional security threats and non-traditional threats, such as poverty and environmental degradation, which menace the well-being of populations. The participants underlined that this universal concept cannot only be the prerogative of certain states; it is essential for West Asian countries to engage in this debate and propose their own notions challenging existing definitions of human security. The conference provided a forum in which to make informed decisions about this timely concept, which is currently used in international organizations, and the necessity of the continuation of such work in academic circles was emphasized.

Approximately 200 papers were submitted to the conference and more than 40 papers were presented. The abstracts have already been published and the full papers are collectively being prepared for publication as the proceedings of the conference in the near future. The discussions and points of view presented at such conferences can contribute significantly to the growing literature on human security, especially in diversifying approaches and in codifying new concepts, such as “the security of moral values in societies” and “spiritual/cultural security”, to better reflect the multi-dimensionality of the concept.

The conference also coincided with the opening of “Center for Afghanistan Studies” at the University of Birjand, under the honorary directorship of H.E. Mr. Mohammad Reza Majidi, The Center has been set up to enhance cooperation between countries of the region and is open for collaboration.

A summary of proceedings is as follows:

- Participants agreed for the need to further discuss the concept of human security in academic and policy circles in the region, but also showed worry for the misuse that the term human security has given rise to, in the same way that noble concepts such as human rights and democracy have sometimes been instrumentalized.
- Participants recalled the necessity of decentralizing the locations in which the concept of human security is being discussed in international institutions and capitals, and the need to bring the concept to the field, close to the realities of people whose human security was threatened.
- Participants also emphasized the need to use concepts such as “West Asia” to define the region and to elaborate new terminology for a better alignment with local views and needs.
- During recent years the production and trafficking of drugs has increased substantially in the region. Given this serious human security threat, international organizations must do more to curb and prevent further cultivation and trafficking. They should also provide more support for countries of the region

that are engaged in combating drug trafficking, such as Iran, which has lost hundreds of officers in this struggle. Iran has also developed alternative plantation strategies that can be shared with Afghanistan through the help of international organizations.

- Terrorism has increased in the region in recent years. The presence of external troops is not only helping to prevent this threat, but is further adding to its complication.
- Climate change and drought are affecting livelihoods in Western Asia, including border areas between Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan. This could lead to desertification, water shortages and increases in forced migration. International organizations would need to plan to prevent further climate migration and the further impoverishment of populations in this region.