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FREE DOM FROM FEAR

"IN A WORLD WHERE WAR,
TERRORISM AND HUMANITARIAN
CRISES CAN SEEM ALL-PERVASIVE,
THE *HUMAN SECURITY REPORT*
OFFERS A RARE MESSAGE OF HOPE"

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, The Desmond Tutu Peace Centre

While the global media readily gives front page coverage to war-induced death and destruction, more than a decade of positive changes on the global security front has been quietly ignored — until now. Zoe Nielsen, associate director of UBC's Human Security Centre, and the Centre's research team have compiled the *Human Security Report 2005* — the most comprehensive study of its kind. The *Report*, which is published by Oxford University Press, but is available in its entirety online, shows that all forms of political violence, except international terrorism, have declined worldwide since the early 1990s.

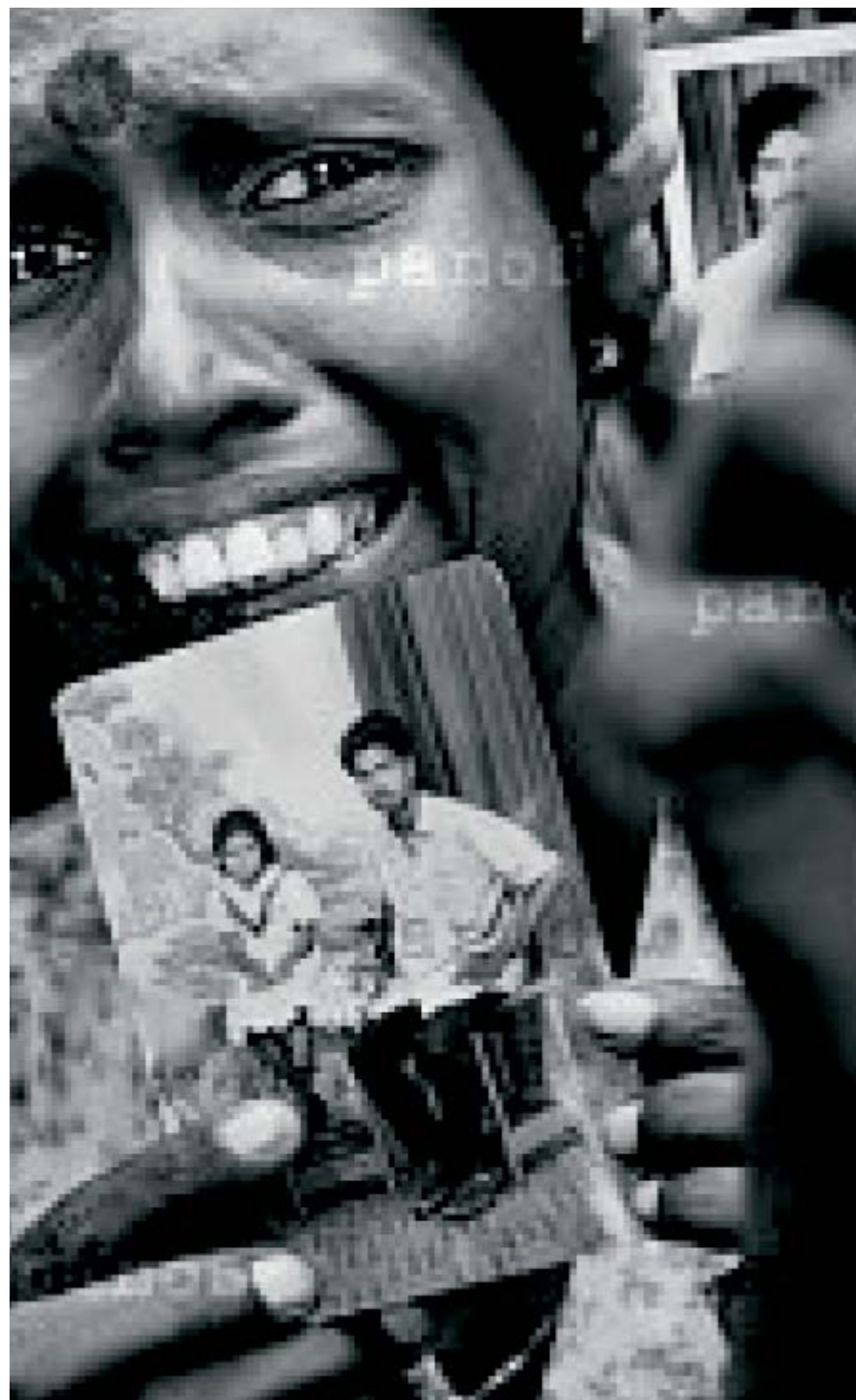


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frontier: *What is the Human Security Report?*

Zoe Nielsen: The *Human Security Report* maps the incidence, intensity and consequences of global violence. In addition to updating the core data sets that measure the number of conflicts, the instances of one-sided violence (the killing of innocent civilians), their location and the number of people killed, each *Report* will also have a thematic focus.

The idea for the *Human Security Report* came about when Professor Andrew Mack, director of the Human Security Centre, was working at the United Nations as the head of strategic planning in Secretary-General Kofi Annan's office. Mack asked the question, "Is what the UN doing really making a difference?" In the late 1990s, no one could really answer that question.

f: *What is the goal of the Human Security Report?*

ZN: We aim to produce evidence for evidence-based policy. No international organization collects information on trends in global security. Governments, policy makers and others working in this area can't turn to official sources because they simply don't exist. We are trying to meet that gap. We hope to influence policy but we don't attempt to provide policy prescriptions. As researchers, our role is to highlight the research that's available and to allow those more appropriately qualified to determine what to do with that information.

f: *How do you define human security?*

ZN: We define human security in terms of protecting individuals and communities from violent threats. Human security is about looking at security from the perspective of citizens rather than states.

f: *What are some of the surprising conclusions that came out of the Human Security Report 2005?*

ZN: Last year's *Report* had two counter-intuitive messages. The first was that global political violence has really decreased in the last decade and the second is that the single most compelling explanation for the decrease in political violence is the huge increase in



Zoe Nielsen is the associate director of UBC's Human Security Centre. The *Human Security Report* is funded by five governments including Canada, Switzerland, Sweden, Norway and the United Kingdom, with assistance from the Rockefeller Foundation. It is published annually by the Human Security Centre at UBC's Liu Institute for Global Issues, where the in-house team of researchers is complemented by collaborators in Sweden, Norway and the United States. (Photo > Paul Joseph)

"THIS REPORT IS THE MOST COMPREHENSIVE ANNUAL COMPENDIUM OF HUMAN SECURITY RESEARCH EVER PRODUCED. IT SHOULD BE ON THE DESK OF EVERY POLICYMAKER."

Lloyd Axworthy, President and Vice Chancellor University of Winnipeg, Foreign Minister of Canada 1995–2000

international activity that has taken place in the wake of the Cold War. We estimate that only about 30 to 40 per cent of UN conflict prevention and post-conflict initiatives, which include things like peace operations and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programs, have been successful. That's not a very high success rate. But when you remember that these activities weren't really taking place before the end of the Cold War, it becomes clear that the combination of all of these activities has had a huge cumulative effect and even partially successful initiatives can bring profound change.

f: *Why does human security matter to Canadians?*

ZN: Beyond the humanitarian imperative, it is clear that in a globalized world, what happens beyond our shores has an impact on what happens in the country in which we live. This can be in terms of refugee flows, infectious diseases or terrorist attacks.

f: *Why does the general public lack so much knowledge on global conflicts?*

ZN: A lot of it has to do with the media and the imperative of "if it bleeds, it leads." It's

about getting an exciting story out there that will sell a paper. A story of people getting killed in a particular conflict is more interesting than a story of how fighting in a country may or may not have come to an end. In reality, it will take several years before we know whether the drop in battle-deaths represents the end of the conflict or simply a lull in the fighting. Another important issue, as I mentioned earlier, is the lack of official statistics in this area.

f: *What will be the core focus of the next Human Security Report?*

ZN: The next *Report* will focus on the war-disease nexus or what we call the hidden costs of war. What has become very clear from the research is that the majority of people who die in areas of conflict are not killed by bombs or bullets, but from the indirect effects such as war-induced disease and malnutrition. We know the ratio of direct to indirect casualties can range from one-to-one, to one-to-twenty and maybe even higher. There are, however, no reliable global estimates on the number of people

who die from the indirect effects of conflict. We want to shed some more light on this issue because the indirect effects of war are not only profound and undocumented, but are, in many cases, preventable.

f: *What is your background?*

ZN: I'm a lawyer and worked as a clerk for a judge of the Federal Court of Australia. After that, I went to the Fletcher School of Diplomacy where I did a Masters of Law and Diplomacy. From there, I went to the International Peace Academy (IPA) in New York where I was a senior program officer on the conflict prevention program. From IPA, I came to UBC.

f: *What is the personal appeal of this type of research?*

ZN: For me, it's the interdisciplinary nature of the work that I find very interesting. I get to use skills and knowledge that I developed while studying for both my degrees. It is also very exciting to be working on issues that have not received a lot of attention but yet are vitally important and can make a real difference in the lives of many, many people. ■