Foreword

When the idea of an independent Commission for Human Security was launched at the 2000 UN Millennium Summit, there was general agreement on the importance of "freedom from want" and "freedom from fear". Today, three years later, the fears are larger and the apprehensions greater. This report is an attempt to respond to both old and new worries and also to the underlying reasons for concern.

In addition to the persistent problems and vulnerabilities with which the world has long been familiar, there is a new wave of dramatic crises at the turn of the millennium related to terrorist attacks, ethnic violence, epidemics and sudden economic downturns. There is also a fear that existing institutions and policies are not able to cope with weakening multilateralism, falling respect for human rights, eroding commitments to eradicate poverty and deprivation, outdated sectarian perspectives in education systems and the tendency to neglect global responsibilities in an increasingly interrelated world.

At the same time, the opportunities for working towards removing insecurity across the world are also larger now than ever before. Globalization, despite its challenges, creates new opportunities for economic expansion and, if properly aligned, can reach peoples and countries that were previously excluded. Democratic principles and practices are continuing to gain ground and to attract stronger support. There has also been a massive increase in the role of civil society and of community organizations. Further, the Millennium Development Goals represent a major initiative aimed at removing deprivations, on which efforts to improve human security can build.

This report should be seen in the light of the increased challenges the world faces and the enhanced opportunities. Human security is concerned with safeguarding and expanding people's vital freedoms. It requires both shielding people from acute threats and empowering people to take charge of their own lives. Needed are integrated policies that focus on people's survival, livelihood and dignity, during downturns as well as in prosperity.

The demands of human security involve a broad range of interconnected issues. In its work, the Commission has concentrated on a number of distinct but interrelated areas concerned with conflict and poverty, protecting people during violent conflict and in post-conflict situations, defending people who are forced to move, overcoming economic insecurities, guaranteeing the availability and affordability of essential health care, and ensuring the elimination of illiteracy and educational deprivation and of schools that promote intolerance. The recommendations of the Commission involve policies aimed at both empowerment and protection, and focus on what can be done in the short and the long run to enhance the opportunities for eliminating insecurities across the world.

This report can, of course, be no more than a beginning, but it is, we believe, extremely important to move rapidly in the right direction. The task demands leadership and vision as well as commitment from the world community.

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The independent Commission on Human Security was an initiative of the Government of Japan. We are grateful for the support and encouragement of UN Secretary-