FOREWORD

The new *Human Security Report* offers an encouraging message both for the United Nations and for the peoples of the developing world where most armed conflicts still take place.

While global media reporting continues to create the impression that we live in an ever-more violent world, the reality behind the headlines is quite different. The world has become much less insecure over the past 20 years.

This study provides the first comprehensive analysis of this remarkable change. It shows how international wars have declined from an average of some seven a year in the 1950s to less than one a year in the new millennium—a decline that has saved millions of lives.

And with the end of the Cold War came another radical change. Civil war numbers started to drop sharply, with the deadliest conflicts—those killing 1,000 or more people a year—declining by more than 70 percent between 1988 and 2008.

As the conflict between the US and the Soviet Union ebbed in the late 1980s, superpower support for proxy wars in the developing world dried up and many of these conflicts ground to a halt, saving countless more lives in the process.

This was not the only change. No longer paralyzed by Cold War politics, the UN—along with other international agencies, governments, and civil society organizations—led a dramatic upsurge of peacemaking initiatives aimed at ending wars via mediation rather than through force of arms.

Peacemaking in civil wars confronts many challenges, of course, and many of the new initiatives initially failed. But when the number of diplomatic interventions to end wars jumps fivefold in a decade, as it did from the 1980s to the 1990s, even a modest success rate can produce impressive results.

Peacemaking seeks to stop ongoing wars; peacekeeping aims to prevent them from starting again. Here too we have witnessed a major change. Between 1991 and 2007, the number of UN peacekeepers in the field increased by some 700 percent.

Their efforts have made a real difference. Despite the much-publicized failures, the evidence that peacekeeping missions sharply reduce the risk of conflicts from recurring is compelling.

The rise in national incomes and state capacity throughout the developing world has also helped reduce conflict numbers. I have long argued that there can be no development without security, and no security without development, and neither can be sustained without respect for human rights and the rule of law. This study presents persuasive evidence from the research community to demonstrate that this assertion is indeed the case.

Many challenges remain, but the central message of this latest *Human Security Report* is that the system of global security governance that has evolved over the past two decades really does have the potential to help new generations avoid "the scourge of war."

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