Human security: A key to a meaningful conflict resolution and development in a ‘new Ghana’

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Abstract

Ghana is perceived as a stable country in a very volatile region and prides itself of becoming a middle-income country in a foreseeable future. Interestingly, the country is gradually but steadily becoming dangerous and less safety for a meaningful existence. Devastating ethnic conflicts, destructive chieftaincy disputes, mob violence and armed robbery among others, threaten the country’s development agenda.

Ghana in its quest for peaceful and stable society devoid of violence has acceded to and rectified a number of standards and codes including the United Nations (UN) convention on the promotion of human rights; the convention against torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatments or punishment; as well as International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Besides, the country has institutionalized mechanisms for resolving conflicts including the adversarial courts and Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), where aggrieved members of society can seek redress by passing through the laid down procedure without taking the law into their own hands.

In spite of the seemingly efforts made by Ghana to achieve the desired development; ethnic conflicts, chieftaincy disputes and other related atrocities are carried out with impunity in the country. The question is; Are some group of people destined to be violent? Has the criminal justice system (law) of Ghana become a mechanism of control or weapon by the powerful few in the society to keep the relatively powerless at a disadvantage as postulated by the conflict theory?

It is only when we have come to the full understanding of human security, its dynamics in a new Ghana, can we fashion out a pragmatic policies and practices necessary to engender the desired development in the country.

Key concepts: Human security; meaningful conflict resolution; meaningful development; ‘new Ghana’
Introduction

Like most societies around the globe, Ghana is perceived to be a stable country in a volatile region. Considering the political climate of Ghana to other countries in the West African sub-region including Nigeria, Cote d’Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea among others, it will not be out of context to conclude that Ghana is indeed a ‘small heaven’ in a conflict endemic continent.

Having experienced most coup d’états and political summersaults after independence in 1957, the country is now regulated by the Republican Constitution of 1992 [1]. The formation of political parties and the practice of multi-party democracy to some extent have given the citizenry the opportunity to join any political party of choice and the exercise of franchise. The institutionalization of the local government and administrative system (decentralization) coupled with the liberalization of the airwaves has encouraged and broadened the participation of the masses in decision-making in matters that affect their interest.

To ensure the attainment of peace, security, stability and development, Ghana has established various regulatory and adjudicating bodies including the police, the military and the adversarial courts. Besides, other non-violent adjudicating bodies including the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice have been established to ensure that the fundamental human rights of individuals are not trampled upon by any person or body as enshrined in the 1992 Republican Constitution. The philosophy is to ensure that law and order prevail in the country and that no individual or group of individuals takes the law into their own hands so as to plunge the country into chaos. This is considered a healthy practice and tonic for the over-all growth and development of the country. One thing which is certain is that, every society that has ever existed has recognized the need for laws. These laws may be unwritten, but even pre-industrial societies had rules to regulate the conduct of the citizenry [2].

Interestingly, in spite of the seemingly efforts made by the country to maintain peace so as to reap the desired fruits of development, shades of violent acts including destructive chieftaincy disputes, inter and intra-ethnic conflicts, mob violence, prostitution, devastating agitations and armed robbery, politics of insults and greediness among others, have ravaged the supposedly ‘new Ghana’ thereby negating efforts made in moving the country forward in the right direction.

Admittedly, conflict and other barbarous acts are global phenomena and are inherent in human society [3]. The fact remains that the intensity and frequency at which these brutish acts are experienced across the country raises certain fundamental questions about the effectiveness of the strategies used in addressing these social hazards which have policy implication on the development of the country. A mark which is missing in Ghana’s quest to achieve a meaningful conflict resolution and development is rooted in the country’s failure to promote and maintain the desired human security.

Conflicts do not arise without cause, and they do not disappear until the cause is addressed. If the cause of a conflict is not resolved or at least its effects tempered, the conflict effects may grow [4]. Ghana in most instances has succeeded in addressing symptoms but not the wounds of the country. A wrong assumption of the cause of a particular conflict may lead to a still-born resolution. When symptoms instead of causes are addressed, wounds are merely bandaged not healed and they may fester [5].

Surprisingly, while most countries including Ghana are gradually but steadily driven into state of uncertainty and insecurity due to violence associated with unmet social and economic needs as manifested in Darfur in Republic of Southern Sudan, Algeria and Egypt among others, most scholars/intellectuals reputed to be torch-
bearers tend to engage in endless debate about the specificity of concepts instead of coming out with pragmatic policies and guidelines that can creatively address the various social hazards confronting societies, so as to salvage the world from the bondage of destructive conflicts. Like the ancient Israelites [6], most countries around the globe are suffocating to death due to lack of ‘desired knowledge’.

The position of this paper is that the realization of a meaningful conflict resolution and development in Ghana is embedded in the achievement of human security in the country. The paper is structured into three broad parts. Part one looks at the concepts ‘human security’, ‘meaningful conflict resolution’, ‘meaningful development’ and ‘a new Ghana’ as well as their interconnectedness. Part two focuses on how certain social hazards including politics of insults/intolerance and greediness/political corruption among others (concerns of human security) threaten the stability of the country. Part three captures conclusion/suggestions made as part to promote and maintain human security, a creative conflict resolution approach in the country.

2. Conceptual definitions

This aspect of the work is devoted to the explanation of the key words relating to the topic. In this regard human security, meaningful conflict resolution, meaningful development, and ‘new Ghana’ have been briefly but concisely explained.

2.1 The concept human security

Human security is a hybrid concept from the twain ‘human and ‘security’, which pre-supposes the existence of other forms of security such as state or national security. A fundamental understanding of security is therefore crucial to the understanding of human security.

The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English [7] defines security as ‘the state of being secured; protection against danger or risk or to make safe’.

According to Fischer and Green [8], security implies a stable, relatively predictable environment in which the individual or group may pursue its ends without disruption or harm and without fear of disturbance, or injury. Security in effect is geared towards the safety of persons, property and the environment.

The English term ‘security’ is derived from the Latin ‘securus’ implying a quality of being secured or freedom from fear or anxiety or liberation from uneasiness or a peaceful situation without any risks or threat [9].

In simple terms, a meaningful and sustainable development cannot be achieved in an in-secured environment. Meaningful development and security are therefore two bedfellows. Human quest for security for a meaningful life devoid of danger is as old as society.

In the 1994 Annual Report of the UN, entitled ‘Building Peace and Development’, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the then UN Secretary General indicated that, the definition of security in the altered context of the today’s world is no longer limited to questions of land and weapons but now encompassing economic well-being, environmental sustainability and the protection of human rights [10]. This assertion of security underscores the emphasis on the concept human security which has become a common vocabulary in contemporary times.

Regardless of it contested nature, matters of security in today’s world center on state sovereignty in general and human security (socio-economic well-being of the people) in particular. In Africa in particular and elsewhere around the globe, there appear to be a paradigm shift of security based on the state to the individual. Earlier conception of threat which focuses primarily on military threat of sovereign states is much challenged by
frequent insecurity emanated from socio-economic forces, notably; sustainable income, food, health, recognition and dignity. The 2011 crises in Algeria, Tunisia and Egypt were a manifestation of socio-economic induced violence calling for a thorough look at human security in Africa. As expressed by analysts, the Darfur issue in the then Southern Sudan was virtually about economic deprivation and marginalization.

The Commission on Human Security (CHS) defines human security as the protection of the ‘vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and fulfilment’ [11]. Human security concerns itself with empowerment- aiming at developing the capabilities of individuals and communities (acquisition of power) to make informed choices and in defence of their own class and group interest, as well as the protection of the people, by shielding them from all manner of menace which affect their development. It focuses on good governance, education and healthcare and access to economic opportunities.

The promotion and achievement of Human security has become a key to a meaningful conflict resolution and development in Africa. The UNDP 2005 Report, adapted from Brown, Halle, Moreno and Winkler [12] recognized human security as fundamental to any sustainable development. The report indicated that the nature of wars has changed fundamentally compared to the Cold War period, in that conflict is now much more strongly associated with poverty. It noted that from 1946-1989, low-income countries accounted for just over one third of all conflicts, but during the period 1990-2003, low-income developing countries constituted more than half of all the countries and territories experiencing violence. The Report stated that nearly 40 per cent of the world’s recent conflicts, including several of the bloodiest and longest occur in Africa, impacting severely on the continent’s development. It is therefore not strange, amidst the controversy over the exact meaning of human security, the United Nations Development Programme’s 1994 Human Development Report asserted that, the best path to tackle global insecurity is to ensure ‘freedom from want’ and ‘freedom from fear’ for all persons [13].

There is a close link between the promotion and achievement of human security, conflict resolution and development. Human security is indeed bedrock of any meaningful conflict resolution and development globally, and Africa in particular. In practice, any mechanism which fosters security of the people is considered not only as a tonic but most importantly a live-wire of a country’s development.

1.2 Meaningful conflict resolution

Conflict resolution presupposes the existence of conflict. Social conflict is as old if not, older than humanity itself. Biblical issues involving Cain and Abel, David and Goliath are typical examples of conflict situations. Conflict has gained much currency in contemporary times. Interestingly, in spite of its notoriety, the concept has no one coherent definition. Many scholars therefore have sought to explain the concept in their own ways. While many perceive conflict as disruptive and destructive in social systems and therefore negative, others view conflict as a positively functional for social systems.

To Coser [14], conflict is a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals. The definition points to the fact that conflict is normally about struggle over values or scarcity. It also indicates a purposeful human action or goal oriented, directed to neutralize, or injure an opponent in an attempt to obtain ones objectives.

According to Kriesberg [15], social conflict means perceived divergent of interest, or a belief that the parties’ current aspirations cannot be achieved simultaneously. This definition relates to the incompatible nature of interest among people.
Forsyth [16] has indicated that, the term conflict comes from the Latin “conflictus” meaning “striking together with force”. Conflict then implies disagreement and friction that occur when actions and beliefs of one or more members of a group are unacceptable and resisted by another.

Conflict is therefore a variance between two parties over a perceived or objective treasured item. Individual decisions and opinions vary. Tensions that underlie such differences in opinions and decisions among people could range from arguments, insults, assault, to the use of small arms for both self-injury and violent attacks and defence against an opponent.

What then is wrong with conflict? Indeed, there is nothing fundamentally wrong with conflict. It is a fact of life and can neither be prevented nor avoided which is even not desirable. Conflict is not deviant, pathological or sick per se, but rather a primary engine which brings change and creativity, progress and development [17]. What is wrong with conflict is the manner in which it is resolved or managed. A false definition of conflict leads to the dysfunctional processes, and an incorrect definition of the cause of a serious conflict lead to the adoption of procedure of management that are inconsistent with the realities of the conflict [18]. It is only when we have discovered the precise nature of the behavioural dimensions which have led to the conflict, that we can determine the politically acceptable and effective process of conflict resolution [19]. How we act or react or both will determine whether a particular conflict, for that matter conflict resolution will be meaningful or otherwise.

Conflict is a complex social phenomenon. It is however not like a dreaded long night that never comes to a morning. In any given conflict situation, people have variety of means in resolving their differences. Conflict resolution aims at turning conflict into positive growth-output; reduce the destructiveness and frequency of conflict as well as teaching people to learn and work as a team for their mutual benefit. Various conflict resolution mechanisms may be used independently or in combination. Notable include the adversarial court system, arbitration, conciliation, mediation, negotiation, peace enforcement, peace-making and peace-keeping. Besides, in Ghana and elsewhere in Africa, indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms including festivals, naming ceremonies, funerals, taboos and joking mate relationships feature prominently in the resolution of conflicts.

A meaningful conflict resolution demands the understanding and address of the triggers of conflict. A meaningful conflict resolution is the one which primarily perceive the parties as owners of the resolution process. If parties to a conflict are not involved in the process, they are hardly likely to approve the product. Agreement becomes much easier if both parties feel ownership of the ideas [20].

It is very imperative to note that, the character and intensity of a particular disagreement and the environment in which it takes place, will largely determine the mechanism(s) that may be adopted.

2.3 Meaningful development

Human society is complex and dynamic. Since creation, society has grown from the era of hunting and gathering, through agricultural production to industrial-manufacturing stage, and the contemporary gathering and use of information and the management of such information technology [21].

It is inconceivable to talk of society without development. The dynamics of development have brought to bear a number of interests and concerns such as quality education, food, sustainable energy supply, quality life, affordable housing, human rights, health, environmental degradation, security and waste management among others. These issues generally pose great challenge to society and often trigger violent conflicts both within and across nations if not carefully managed.
Indeed, we cannot talk of development without change. These variables are fundamental to every human grouping the world over. As society becomes increasingly more complex in organization, the need for rapid development becomes much prominent which in effect could lead to various conflicts due to clash of interests and divergent values of the people.

The literature available indicates that vigorous study of development as an academic discipline began in the 1940s soon after the destructive World War II. The phenomenal growth of development theory is mainly a post-second world war phenomenon, although the ideas of development and progress featured in an incipient form even in early sociology and anthropology. The concept development has become a household word. Interestingly, it lacks a universally accepted definition.

Martinussen [22] has pointed out that, there is no consensus on what the subject development research covers. The implication is that, each person defines and approaches development according to his understanding and the particular period he finds himself.

Coetzee expresses that, development as a process of change takes place over an extended period of time and cannot be easily defined by means of a clear description [23]. The field of development is considered as an inter-discipline rather than a discipline. The reality is that, there are many theoretical pursuits about development, each theorist wearing the blinders of his subject area.

In the earlier times, development and progress were used synonymously. This understanding was supported by modernization theorists. Development was visualized from economic point of view, implying increase in the productive capacity of the economy over time, which results in, increase in the level of national income. It was perceived primarily in terms of a continuum with ‘traditionalism’ and ‘modernity’ at the two ends of the continuum. The assertion was that, in order for third world countries including Africa to develop or modernize, they needed to change their traditional (indigenous) methods of production and adopt that of the western world. This materialistic conception of development was supported by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, the two key public financial institution of the world economy [24].

The dynamics and complexity of society in no time proved that, economic emancipation alone was not sufficient to justify the term development. The subsequent claims and counter claims by other bodies including the critical structure and dependency theorists were a manifestation of the complicity and the multiplicity nature of development. Till today, development theorists and practitioners are grappling with what really constitute development.

Regardless of the more specific definition, there is a very widespread tendency to associate ‘something positive, something desirable, with development’. This applies no matter whether development refers to society, regions or specific population groups [ibid, 22]. Development is thus geared towards the benefit of the masses.

Whichever indicator that we use, the fact is that, development means change. Change according to the Oxford Advanced Dictionary of Current English is defined as ‘a movement from one place or a stage to another or alteration of a condition’ [25].

Change, whatever form it assumes, affects someone in the process, creating a conflict relation among people. Jeong has stressed that, a new invention, the introduction of a new cultural trait through diffusion, the development of new methods of production or distribution and as such, will have different impact with a social system. Some strata will feel it to be detrimental to their material or ideal interest, whereas others feel their
position strengthens through its introduction [26]. Change always results in power imbalance among people culminating in conflictual relations among people.

From the fore-going discussion, development can be simply viewed as human-centred phenomenon. That is, any activity or change that affects the over-all interest of the masses without posing any immediate or long term danger to life, property and the environment. Development is meaningful if it considers the contributions, the fears, as well as the interests of the beneficiaries rather than being imposed on the people.

It must be admitted that the goals of a particular development whether obvious in the short-term or long-term, or whether subtle, may be perceived differently by different people in the society and has the tendency to generate into conflictual relations. However, it is only when the contributions, fears and the interests of the people (fundamental sources of conflict) are recognized and addressed, can we have a meaningful development. In practice, a meaningful development could be construed as any phenomenon purported to bring any positive change in the lives of the people which is planted and nurtured by the people concerned or in collaboration with any external body or power; which does not endanger the lives of the people and the environment either in the short-term or long-run. All forms of impositions which at least do not recognize the contributions of the beneficiaries and also factor the fears and the interest of the people, could be considered development in disguise but not a ‘meaningful development’.

2.3 ‘New Ghana’

The inscription ‘new Ghana’ could pose difficulty to an ‘ordinary person’ and could only be understood from a microscopic point of view which could be likening to the term insider or emic perspective.

Indeed the geographical boundaries of Ghana, the black complexion nature of the people, the National Anthem, the Coat of Arms and the Ghana Cedi, which are the embodiment of the unification and identity of the country, among others, have remained unchanged since independence. However, a critical look at the country points to the fact that contemporary Ghana is not the same Ghana known in the immediate post-independent era. Ghana is now a democratic country having its own elected president and members of parliament with a definite term of office. The growth of the country from barely 6 million in the 1960s to about 24.6 million as captured by the 2010 Population and Housing Census [27]; the exploration, production and export of oil since 2010 which is viewed as a wheel anticipated to transform the country into a middle-income economy by 2020; the urbanized nature of the country and its attendants social vices; the menace of annual floods in most locations of the country [28]; frequent outbreaks of fires coupled with the easy access to means/weapons of violence or destruction, and swift means of communication and transport which facilitate criminal escape and mobilization of people, and the continuous agitations and demonstrations by the masses attest to the fact that Ghana indeed is ‘new’.

The destruction of life and property by fire including the Central Market of Kumasi, the Loading Gantry of the Tema Oil Refinery, Sodom and Gomorrah in Accra and the 10-Storey Ministry of Foreign Affairs Building in 2010; the gun battled between the Ghana Police Service and armed robbers which resulted in the death of eight armed robbers on the spot in the night of Monday 13th July 2009 at Anwiankwanta on the Kumasi-Bekwai road in the Ashanti Region among others [29; 30], have disfigured the one time enviable country of peace. These and other related acts call for a new approach to development, conflict resolution and security in the ‘new Ghana’.

3. Threat to human security in Ghana

This part briefly espouses some social hazards which if not properly managed could negatively affect the human security in Ghana thereby tearing apart the country’s quest for a meaningful development. Notable include politics of insults, greediness, marginalization and human rights abuse. These acts and practices among
others are not only toxic and diabolical but most importantly triggers of insecurity and they must be eschewed from the social system if Ghana is serious about promoting and sustaining its human security.

An interview with 30 respondents, who were accidentally and purposively, sampled involving university students, businessmen/women and other citizens from the Ashanti, Upper West Region and Brong Ahafo Regions of Ghana between May and July 2011, revealed that, most Ghanaians have lost the sense of decorum and respect and have become self-centred. The information gathered revealed that human rights abuse and marginalization are forms of behaviour that tend to tear apart the country in its peace building attempt. As overwhelming 70% of the respondents were of much concern about politics of insults and political corruption, for want of space, only these two phenomena are discussed.

### 3.1 Politics of insults/intolerance

In the Ghanaian political context, a political opponent is largely considered as a sub-human who needs no recognition and sympathy. Mutual respect, a basic ingredient of human security is virtually out of the vocabulary of most people both young and old including parliamentarians. According to Nelson-Jones [31], respect from the Latin ‘respicere’ means ‘to look at’. That is, looking at others as they are and prize their unique individuality.

If Nelson-Jones assertion of respect is to go by, then Ghanaians with their abusive political language and intolerance are mainly beating the drums of violence. For a former president of Ghana, John Rawlings to ironically referring to a fellow president John Agyekum Kufour as ‘Ata Ayi’ (a notorious armed robber in Ghana), was not only unfortunate as lamented by Abrefa Damoa [32] but sums up how politics of insults have deeply rooted in the Ghanaian political culture.

The political landscape of Ghana has become theatre of most vitriolic insults and intolerance which do nothing good for the new country but rather a recipe of chaos. Such politics of insults amidst violence led the 2012 NPP Presidential Candidate Nana Akuffu Addo to remark that ‘All die be die’, which has become a major slogan among people of political divides in recent times [33]. Even though, a section of the Ghanaian populace have condemned such unguarded pronouncement as unfortunate, the reality is that it is a reflection of the deadly path chosen by Ghanaians especially politicians and their cronies which ought to be reversed to save the country from any catastrophe.

### 1.3 Greediness/political corruption

When agreement is established based on forced adherence, guilt and sympathy may creep into the process. Besides, victims could have been created who will surely return in another form at later stage [34]. Ghanaians are made to believe that the country is in path to success and must therefore tighten their belts. Ironically, high public officials including parliamentarians continue to live ‘fat’ and ‘cheese’ lives, an anathema to sustainable human security and development.

The Ghanaian society has become majority ‘have not’ and ‘minority haves’. Greediness and corruption have eaten deeply into the social fabric of the society. The social system is shrouded with secrecy. Public officials who preach accountability, transparency, justice and probity are themselves not willing to be transparent about their own activities. While many people working in turbulent conditions received and average monthly-killer salaries of about Ghc 200 to 1,500 Ghana Cedis (about US$130 to US$1000 dollars as at 2008) and pension sums of GHe8,000 to 30,000 Ghana Cedis (about US$5,050 to $19,500 dollars) after thirty to forty years of active service, parliamentarians in air-conditioned offices hurriedly passed a bill in 2008 awarding themselves an
astronomic ex-gratia of about GHc80,000 Ghana Cedis (about $52,000 dollars) for four-year service without the knowledge of the masses that create the wealth out of their sweat [35]. The immediate public outcry against this development spoke volume for itself. Bribery of public officials, kickback in public procurement and embezzlement of public funds has eaten so much into the fabric of the country. According to the 2010, Corruption Perception Index by Transparency International (TI), Ghana ranked 62 globally out of 178 countries sampled for the study, and 7 continentally with a score of 4.1 out of a ‘very clean score’ of 10 [36].

The above information indicates that Ghana has made a good inroad into corrupt practices. However, the score of 4.1 which is below the average scale of 5 is a manifestation that, the country needs to do much in its anti-corruption crusade. The payment of huge sums of money by public officials to individuals and collective groups for works not done and the Committee for Joint Action (CJA) calling of the Chief Justice to investigate into the corrupt practices engulfed the Judicial Service of Ghana [37], if anything to go by, epitomizes the social condition in which Ghanaians find themselves. Gyimah-Boadi writes that corruption has deep roots in contemporary African and Ghana society, culture and politics, and that, it distorts economic development by rewarding the dishonest rather than the most competent [38].

Sustainable human security and development demand transparency and equity. The greedy conduct and practices of most high public officials could only be likening to ‘the Pigs’ in the ‘Animal Farm’ signifying that ‘some people are more important than others’. This counter-productive behaviour is gradually but steadily leading the country into suicide. If there is any lesson to be learnt, then the 2011 political turmoil sparked by the ordinary Egyptians over the conduct of the ousted President Hosni Mubarak is a point of reference. As reported, while about 40% of the country’s population lives below or near the poverty line of US$2 dollars a day, according to the World Bank, Mubarak and his family were alleged to have pocketed about US$70 billion dollars [39].

4. Conclusion and recommendation

The enemies of Ghana’s human security and development are not ‘without’ but ‘within’. This calls for creative and pragmatic policy and efforts if human security is to be promoted and maintained in Ghana. On the basis of the lessons learnt from the triggers of insecurity in the country, notably politics of insults/political intolerance and greediness/political corruption, the following measures are suggested:

- The Electoral Commission of Ghana (EC) should be legally empowered to withdraw the candidacy of politicians whose pronouncements are considered seeds of destruction
- There should be a regulatory framework that could enable the courts to sanction any person affiliated to any political party who uses abusive words on political opponents
- The media should be legally empowered to act responsively and play their watchdog role in the society without any favour from any person of whatsoever status
- Traditional authorities (chiefs) should be legally empowered to play their hitherto independent role of mobilizing resources and the organization of their subjects for community development. This will enable them to play an instrumental but neutral role by pointing out any corrupt practices involving any public official as most chiefs are now openly seen to be allying themselves with political parties due to lack of financial power
- The masses should be well educated through community radio sensitization programs, open forum/discussions, drama performance, music and informed debate on the television and the radio in order to appreciate the ‘servant’ role of public officials. This will lessen the undue financial burden placed on public officials who are seen as ‘lords’ by the citizens which invariably push many into corrupt practice
- Policies on declaration of assets by high public officials should be rigorously enforced
Human security studies should be part of the curricula of various academic institutions in the country. This will impress upon pupils and students who are considered the future leaders of the country to understand the need for the promotion of human security and the management of the triggers of insecurity in the country.

Public officials who embezzle public funds should be made to face the laws of the country and where necessary assets acquired through foul means should be confiscated to the state.

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