

International Charter for October 17
World Day for Overcoming Extreme Poverty

Proclaimed by the United Nations as
International Day for the Eradication of Poverty



June 2013

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On October 17, 1987, one hundred thousand people from all backgrounds responded to a call from Joseph Wresinski to come together in Paris to celebrate the first *World Day for Overcoming Extreme Poverty* at the Plaza of Human Rights and Liberties, where the historic Universal Declaration of Human Rights was signed in 1948.

The declaration engraved on the Commemorative Stone unveiled that day recognizes the dire and unacceptable situation faced by people experiencing extreme poverty, violence and hunger around the world. It proclaims that extreme poverty is a violation of human rights and affirms the need for all people to unite to ensure that these rights are respected.

People living in extreme poverty are active defenders of human rights, and the World Day recognizes their daily commitments, undertaken with others, to defend and respect the dignity of every person. The World Day demonstrates that change is possible through the new and enduring meeting opportunities it creates, and the new responsibilities and commitments for eradicating poverty that such meetings encourage and generate.

On December 22, 1992, the General Assembly of the United Nations declared October 17 the *International Day for the Eradication of Poverty*.^[1] Since then, Governments, local authorities, members of civil society and the private sector have recognized the importance of October 17 and

the International Day has become a key rallying point for a growing number of citizens of all backgrounds, and organizations of all kinds, in the fight to eradicate extreme poverty.

In 2006, the United Nations General Assembly welcomed the report of the United Nations General Secretary on the *Observance of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty*.^[2] This report recognizes the importance of the effective participation of persons living in extreme poverty, especially with regard to the conceptualization, development, implementation and evaluation of policies and projects against extreme poverty, and identifies ways to promote the mobilization of all stakeholders in the fight against extreme poverty. In particular, it highlights the need for an approach based on human rights.

Indeed, the International Day places human rights at the very heart of the fight against poverty and thereby affirms the need for the effective recognition, protection and observance of human rights and their indivisibility.

With the growing global recognition of October 17 comes the necessity and responsibility to ensure that the original message, meaning, purpose and intent of the Day are respected and preserved in accordance with the guidelines provided in the following Charter.

THEREFORE, THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR OCTOBER 17 CALLS UPON ALL GOVERNMENTS, CITIZENS AND ORGANIZATIONS TO OBSERVE THIS DAY TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE FOLLOWING GUIDING PRINCIPLES.

I. Respect the Spirit of the Day

1. The Day is a gathering for peace and human dignity in the spirit of the declaration engraved on the commemorative stone in honour of the victims of extreme poverty on Trocadero Square in Paris, France, which reads:

On October 17, 1987, defenders of human rights and citizens of all countries gathered together on this square. They paid tribute to the victims of hunger, ignorance and violence. They expressed their conviction that extreme poverty is not inevitable. They proclaimed their solidarity with those struggling around the world to destroy it.

Wherever men and women are condemned to live in extreme poverty, human rights are violated. To come together to ensure that these rights be respected is our solemn duty.

(Father Joseph Wresinski)

2. The Day provides opportunities to promote meetings that would not normally happen in everyday life, between the poorest and other citizens, around a common desire and commitment to eradicate extreme poverty. It is a time of dialogue and reflection for all who come together, as well as a learning experience for those who are unaware of the situation of people living in poverty.
3. The Day must recognize and respect the equal dignity of everyone. Recognizing that the poorest are often the victims of all forms of violence everywhere in the world, it is a time to refrain from any show of force or violence when we gather together in solidarity with people living in poverty.
4. The Day should include or reflect the commitments and contributions of people fighting extreme poverty on a daily basis. It should include speeches, testimonies and other contributions from the poorest as integral parts of any gathering or initiative. Everyone's contribution must be clearly identified and given equal importance in the dialogue, project, workshop or other initiative that takes place on the Day. The speeches, testimonies and other contributions from the poorest generate and record valuable knowledge that serves as a critical source of knowledge for better understanding and action.
5. The Day is meant to promote and demonstrate mutual understanding, solidarity and the shared responsibility of all individuals and groups from different backgrounds, working in close collaboration with people living in poverty. Therefore, the preparations leading up to the celebration of the Day should be a process that continues throughout the year.
6. The Day symbolizes the daily struggle of those who live in extreme poverty and is the moment when they can freely express their dignity and daily struggle for independence from public or private assistance. For this reason, there should not be any overt acts of charity, expressions of pity or offers to provide or strengthen assistance to people living in poverty.
7. The Day reminds us that the poorest are often forced to live in shame. Therefore, organizers must ensure that all activities undertaken on this occasion as well as all messages, press releases and recorded media (texts, photographs, films, videos, etc.) respect the dignity of people living in poverty who are at the heart of this gathering.

II. Objective of the Day

8. To gather together citizens and institutions, public and private, to express their rejection of extreme poverty through, but not limited to, the following means:

meeting, talking and interacting with people in poverty;

demonstrating solidarity with people in poverty, including those who are absent or fear to participate;

expressing why and how to reach the poorest people throughout the year, especially those absent because they are too crushed by poverty;

educating and mobilizing all stakeholders — men, women, children, young and old. In this regard, it is important to educate children and youth in human rights and the fight against poverty by mobilizing the educational system, media and movements of children and young people. To give them the opportunity to express their refusal that other children or young people are rejected and left out of everybody future;

inviting philosophical, spiritual and religious bodies to share how they are trying to reach the poorest by focusing on them in their projects and activities;

enabling every citizen participating either individually or through an organization, to express its solidarity and to renew its commitment to unite in a common struggle, by doing a gesture significant in the culture of his country and respecting the spirit of Day;

giving an international dimension to the celebration of the Day by reading texts from people who live in poverty in other countries, showing their relationship beyond borders. This can be done by seeking the cooperation and support of representatives of the international community; and

raising public visibility to the Day through the mutually respectful participation of representatives of government agencies, non-governmental organizations, civil society groups, media and the private sector.

III. Proposed guidelines to achieve these objectives

9. Celebrate the Day in places that recall and highlight the often ignored history of the poorest or that honour and respect the victims of poverty. This could be, for example, at the Trocadero Commemorative Stone and its replicas across the world or in places of significance for each country, such as places where very poor families have lived.

10. Honour the victims of extreme poverty by reaffirming the link between poverty and human rights, by reading the text of the Commemorative Stone [3] and the *I bear witness to you* [4] and by observing a moment of silence following the reading of these texts.

11. Recall the history of the Day, in particular its origins as an initiative of the poorest, in all documents, invitations and calls to gather, and fully recognize the role of all organizations and people involved in this project.

12. Link the Day to the realities at the local level, and promote links to the realities at the international level through the use of common tools and the mutual sharing of contributions.

IV. Misuse of the Day

13. This Day is not meant to be used as an opportunity to promote elected officials, political parties, public or private organizations, personalities, policies, programmes, initiatives and public or personal causes other than those directly related to the Day. Therefore, the Day should not be used as a

forum for people with political, administrative or associative responsibilities, even if they are encouraged to generate policy changes;

platform or venue to claims or personal publicity, or for public or private organizations to publicize, disseminate or claim what they do for the poorest;

place where people living in poverty come to display their situation of distress in front of others; or

forum for associations or organizations, without the equal participation of the poorest.

V. Framework of Organizing Committees

14. The Organizing Committees may be created at the local and national levels and it is not a requirement that these Committees be legally recognized associations or organizations nor are they required to operate within a legally recognized association or organization.

15. In keeping with the spirit of the Day, local and national committees should be composed of individuals and groups from all backgrounds who come together to organize the celebration on October 17. Their members are invited to work together throughout the year.

16. Organizing Committees should be free committees with no membership fees or other contributions. Each member participates within the limits of their available financial, human and other material resources.

17. Committees should undertake to uphold the principles and abide by the guidelines provided in the *International Charter for October 17*. Each member should be encouraged to sign this *Charter* as a demonstration of their personal commitment to uphold the general principles to respect the deep meaning of the October 17 celebration.

18. To the extent possible, after taking into account their local and national conditions, Organizing Committees should strive to relate and connect their celebration with the international theme of the Day.

VI. Recording and sharing of knowledge and experiences

19. All Organizing Committees are invited to exchange information with and submit questions and suggestions to the International Committee for October 17, in order to promote international links and mutual support among themselves.

20. All Organizing Committees are also invited to submit a report on their celebration each year, together with relevant texts, photos, videos and articles. Where possible, Committees are also invited to submit an annual report on their activities.

21. All Organizing Committees are further invited to utilize the website devoted to October 17 which provides news and information on events and celebrations which are being organized around the world. This site, which is maintained by the International Committee, provides free access to tools as well as documents and other resources on the history of the *World Day for Overcoming Extreme Poverty*. This site is also meant to promote, support and facilitate connections and interactions among the many diverse people, groups and organizations who work every day to overcome extreme poverty.

Notes

- [1] United Nations General Assembly, 93rd Plenary Meeting. "Resolution 47/196. Observance of an international day for the eradication of poverty" (A/RES/47/196). 22 December 1992.
- [2] United Nations, "Report of the Secretary-General on observance of the international day for the eradication of poverty" (A/61/308). 5 September 2006.
- [3] The text can be found at <http://overcomingpoverty.org/article/commemorative-stone>
- [4] The text can be found at <http://overcomingpoverty.org/article/i-bear-witness-to-you>

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