Commemorated since 1987 as the World Day for Overcoming Extreme Poverty and recognised by the United Nations in 1992, the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty promotes dialogue and understanding between people living in poverty, their communities and society at large. In his historic *Call to Action*, Father Joseph Wresinski, founder of ATD Fourth World and initiator of this World Day, declared that “Wherever men and women are condemned to live in extreme poverty, human rights are violated.” Poverty is not only about adequate income of meeting basic needs, it is about being able to live a life in dignity and enjoy basic human rights and freedoms. This vision is reflected in the UN Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights which are intended to ensure that public policies reach persons living in extreme poverty, respect and uphold their rights and address the significant social, cultural, economic and structural obstacles to their enjoyment of human rights.

In view of the “greatest cascade of crises in our lifetimes” recently outlined by the UN Secretary General at the General Assembly’s 76th session, this founding vision for October 17 is more urgent than ever. People living in extreme poverty are the ones most exposed, least resourced and suffer the most from the cascade of crises and the past year in particular from the double sentence of the climate emergency and the pandemic.

 Appropriately, the chosen theme for 2021 commemoration is “Building Forward Together: Ending Persistent Poverty, Respecting all People and our Planet”. As we embark on the post-COVID recovery and getting back on track with the Sustainable Development Goals, many are talking of “building back better,” but the message from the worldwide consultation with the Permanent Forum on Extreme Poverty, a global network of people and organisations working to overcome poverty, conducted by the International Committee for October 17 made clear that people living in extreme poverty do not want a return to the past nor to build back to what it was before. They do not want a return to the endemic structural disadvantages and inequalities.

Instead, people living in poverty propose to embrace this “moment of transformation”, dare to think and act differently, and build forward. Building forward means transforming our relationship with nature, dismantling structures of discrimination that disadvantage people in poverty and building on the moral and legal framework of human rights that places human dignity at the heart of policy and action. Building forward means not only that no one is left behind but that people living in poverty are actively encouraged and supported to be in the front, engaging in informed and meaningful participation in decision making processes that directly affect their lives. In building forward, we need to let ourselves be enriched by the wealth of wisdom, energy and resourcefulness that people living in poverty can contribute to our communities, our societies and ultimately to our planet.

On October 17 people experiencing extreme poverty will be breaking the silence of poverty and speaking out against the pain of exclusion, discrimination, injustice and violence. We will have the chance to honour their courage, their resilience and join hands with the most vulnerable and the furthest behind to pledge our commitment to end persistent poverty, respecting all people and our planet. In this “age of possibilities”, building an inclusive world at peace with the planet is surely achievable. Let us all strive for it!

Aye Aye Win - President, International Committee for October 17