

LETTER TO FRIENDS AROUND THE WORLD FORUM ON OVERCOMING EXTREME POVERTY



International Movement ATD Fourth World
107, avenue du Général Leclerc - 95480 Pierrelaye - France

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BEARERS OF PEACE AROUND THE WORLD

On every continent, and in all our neighbourhoods, men and women refuse to accept the daily reality of violence and strive to create opportunities to meet each other and recognise each other's common humanity. Are they not the first actors for peace? We need to find the courage to break the silence and make known their acts and their struggle to build peace.

When children grow up in extreme poverty, in areas that are the most neglected and forgotten both in the North and the South, their parents tell us that they find themselves in a world "where there is injustice and violence at every turn." Amongst the most visible forms of violence are armed conflicts and gang violence. But talk to children and their families living in these situations and they often speak of more subtle acts of violence. This makes me think of Arsène, a young boy living on a rubbish dump. Walking around in his barefeet, he has cut them and they have now become infected. He has taught himself to walk on the outside of his soles so that his open sores do not touch the dirty ground.

It makes me think, too, of a mother who lives in a neighborhood that will soon be "cleared out". She told us: "We live with the threat of eviction hanging over our heads. It's very hard for my youngest son, who says, 'When I grow up, I'll get a bulldozer and demolish the mayor's house.' I don't want my son to grow up with such hatred. I want him and his friends to grow up with something else in their hearts, and in their minds too. That is why, even with all our worries, I'm happy to support the street library so that it can still come here."

Deep within them, the poorest carry a sense of peace that the world does not see. Together, let us make sure that these bearers of peace around the world are not left in the shadows. The date is set for 17th of October, the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty.

Eugen Brand, Director General,
International Movement ATD Fourth World



● FORUM ON OVERCOMING EXTREME POVERTY

For more than thirty years, the *Permanent Forum on Extreme Poverty Around the World* has sought to collect your experiences and give recognition to your actions, both individual and collective, in the fight against poverty.

The 17th of October, the *International Day for the Eradication of Poverty*, started in 1987 and has been recognised by the United Nations for nearly twenty years. This day is an opportunity to bring together all those who are dedicated to overcoming poverty all year round and those who live with it on a daily basis.

These two axes have now joined together to make the **Forum on Overcoming Extreme Poverty**.

A new website, www.overcomingpoverty.org, has been launched. Our aim is to use the website to share people's experiences, such as those presented in this issue of *Letter to Friends Around the World*: ensuring the education of young people in Ireland; working with women in Nepal; fighting for a decent life for children and young people in Cameroon; and building community spirit through the

Groupe Maman Tabita (GMT) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

You will continue to receive the *Letter to Friends Around the World* either by post or email. We know that in many regions around the world it is still very difficult to have access to the internet and so receiving a letter from friends is very important. The same goes for all our exchanges with the correspondents of the Forum.

This website is also **giving us an appointment, every 17th October** to publicly show those everyday actions that let us know that the eradication of poverty is very much alive.

Finally, the website allows us to strengthen our **direct dialogue** with and between members of the *Forum on Overcoming Extreme Poverty* through themes that will be proposed in the **discussion forums**. Everyone is invited to contribute using their experiences and their knowledge. The *Letter to Friends Around the World* will then reflect these public exchanges.

FORUM ON OVERCOMING EXTREME POVERTY TEAM

● EDUCATION LEADS YOUNG PEOPLE OUT OF POVERTY

Ger O'Connel has been teaching all his life. As a teacher, he realised that there were always young people left behind. He then became Director of The Life Centre in Dublin, a project in favour of early school leavers.

At the Life Center we cater for boys and girls between the ages of twelve and sixteen who have not made the transfer from primary to post primary school. Who have been excluded from school or cannot cope with the mainstream school system. While catering for the young people's personal development, they are prepared for the Junior Certificate and other qualifications.

In my work I have discovered that each person is talented and special. We work closely with parents, social workers, probation officers, schools and other agencies involved in the lives of these young people. Working with these young people poses a lot of questions for us. Why is there such a need for places like the Life Centre? Are we prepared to meet the young people where they're at? Are we prepared to listen to them? Is our educational system flexible enough to meet the broader needs of our children? What becomes of those that fall out of school and does anyone care? Are schools being judged by the number of A's that are achieved? Our kids have many abilities, are we only catering for their academic ones?



I believe that education leads people out of poverty. A holistic system of education gives people a sense of self worth. It restores self confidence and self esteem. We are all gifted. My students are so talented, so unique and yet our school systems have failed them. Young people are walking our streets today because they are not being listened to and they don't seem important. They are made to feel inferior because of their poverty and social background.

To me, ending poverty means to look after the most vulnerable, making sure that they regain their self worth and that they believe in themselves.

GER O., IRELAND

● AN OPEN-MINDED MOTHER CAN BRING HOPE

Rural Women's Network Nepal (RUWON Nepal) is a non-governmental organisation actively working with women, children and young people for their rights and social justice in Nepal. It particularly supports women from excluded and marginalised communities.

Even though RUWON is a young organisation, it has already implemented a number of projects in different parts of the country. They work mainly in the Kathmandu Valley and the Sindhuli district, in the eastern part of Nepal. One of its projects is the Women's Literacy School.



Women in the area attend various classes in the Nepali language, English, mathematics and dance every week at a local primary school.

Dhruba who teaches in the literacy school is also one of the founders of RUWON. He could have been a successful professor but instead chose to devote himself to the education of Nepalese women. His decision can be traced back to the influence of his mother. Dhruba said that *"I could have never achieved my study and career without her support."*

His mother, a villager woman, is only able to write her name. She has encouraged her son to teach women how to read and write. After obtaining a master's degree in education, Dhruba founded a school specialising in improving the personal skills and leadership techniques of women.

While Dhruba's father never encouraged him to teach women in the village for free, his mother implanted in him the belief that *"education brings changes."* Besides financial support, this uneducated woman has contributed to her son's career in her own special way.

Dhruba is willing to promote education and the idea that *"education improves lives"* amongst the Nepalese mothers. He believes that mothers are the best teachers for their children because they play an important role. An open-minded mother can bring hope to a whole new generation of Nepalese children.

DHRUBA G., RUWON NEPAL

● **ENSURING A DIGNIFIED LIFE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

MAEJT (African children and young workers movement) devotes itself to improving working conditions for those children in difficult situations, while making them active players in their own lives in order to exercise their rights.

This is the story about a group of young Ivorian girls who were placed as maids in homes and were forced to do hard labour. They didn't eat, they never played. One day, when they had gathered together, they decided to do something to claim their freedom, while remaining housemaids. In this way many other groups of children and young workers were set up. They began to take decisions about their lives. They organised themselves, no longer to lament, but to talk or share stories about their work, to pay subscriptions to solve their problems, and to create other activities generating shared income. This is how MAEJT came about.

Social action is a commitment which represents the desire to go towards others and with others. In a word this is solidarity, so characteristic of Africa. One of Africa's greatest assets is the number of children in each family. But to

feed, educate, teach and care for them requires a considerable income and very well developed solidarity. Due to the standard of living in African countries, children and young people are exposed to difficulties every day, which they find difficult to overcome to build a brighter future. Social action cannot be improvised. It is usually part of a planned activity, an organisation that is structured in collaboration with administrative bodies, public or private organisations and users. This is the approach that MAEJT adopts to provide help for these underprivileged children and young people, bearing in mind the applicable laws banning child labour, with the constant concern to give them the future and the life that they deserve.

"I couldn't read or write, but thanks to the literacy campaigns organised by AEJT-CAM, now I can read and write. I'm even the secretary of the Barrow-boys group at the Essos market."

Wilfred, 13 years old

"I work at the breeze-block factory and I am a child and young worker who knows his rights. As a result, my boss cannot exploit me."

Morrel, 15 years old

NADÈGE M., MAEJT, CAMEROON

● **ANY DEVELOPMENT REQUIRES AN AWARENESS... WE MUST WORK HARD WITHOUT EXPECTING HELP**

The purpose of the Groupe Mamans Tabita (GMT) is to promote and protect the rights of Congolese women, especially in rural areas. It is an association of Congolese women aiming to help them fight against all types of social, economic, political and cultural barriers that prevent them from enjoying better living conditions. They organise themselves in villages to take charge of their own affairs, according to the needs in each case.

The women's group is the forum for discussion and local action. It brings together members of a village to analyse the situation, suggest solutions and implement appropriate action to improve living conditions and take charge of their lives. As well as meetings in villages and awareness-raising concerning HIV and AIDS, the following activities were carried out in 2010:

Agriculture remains our main concern, because most of our members live in rural areas. The women's group encourages each member to grow local agricultural produce. The Bandundu GMT has not found a solution to transport all the collected produce to the city of Kinshasa. Members are frequently obliged to sell produce at very low prices in local areas, thereby creating the endless cycle of women's poverty without any possibility of becoming self-supporting.

Eight local women's groups make home-made cleaning products, disinfectants, soaps. Fifty-two make bread in saucepans due to a lack of traditional or modern ovens.

A few years ago we organised a major operation like the proverbial ants to create a local saving scheme. We succeeded in setting up a savings and credit cooperative, wi-

thout any external support. Today this cooperative is very successful.

We want to continue all these activities and launch economic development and social housing projects. We also want so support women so that they become involved in the electoral process taking place in our country to revise the electoral roll, and to train them as election observers.

It is our duty to raise awareness and help women to work to improve daily living conditions. We are women who believe that any development requires an awareness that we must work hard without expecting help.

YVONNE K., GMT COORDINATOR, DRC



• The tremor felt in Tokyo, which is located more than a hundred kilometers away from the centre of the earthquake, was with such power and length that I have never experienced before. It was like being on the airplane going through very turbulent air. The damage in the north eastern part of the Main Island is just beyond imagination. I am sure we will overcome this difficulty, but it will take time in view of the scale of destruction. Meanwhile, the expression of solidarity and friendship in your messages is the source of strong encouragement for us.



Professor. Y., Japan

• The forces which are rocking the country have overtaken us, but all that we can do is to hold fast together Certain people tell me to leave, but I can't. The people with disabilities need me, as I need them. We must always look for ways of building community. The only response when faced with the situation that we find ourselves in is to hold fast together. We still have our garden. We are going to eat the vegetables from the garden, after that we'll eat the leaves, afterwards the roots, after that we'll see together.

Koffi G., Ivory Coast

• Tell our friends that we are doing what Father Joseph taught us: we are standing firm. You must tell them that even if they can't do what they'd like to for us because of our circumstances, it is as if they have done so.

Mr A., Ivory Coast



• In the Letter to Friends Around the World No. 72 (October 2009), a correspondent of the Permanent Forum described the resourcefulness of the people of Dandara who had built their own houses and landscaped the grounds of their own camp. Lately, however they have had days of great distress because they have been threatened with eviction along with the camps of Camilo Torres and Irmã Dorothy. A large and dynamic support has been created around them. We have just received with joy the following letter:

Thanks to countless actions protesting the evictions, and thanks to the spirit of international solidarity with the 3 communities of Dandara, Camilo Torres and Irmã Dorothy, the President of the Federative Republic of Brazil, Dilma Rousseff came to Belo Horizonte. She agreed to receive two representatives from the Community Support Committee. She met with them for 25 minutes and gave assurances of political and economic support to ensure that the disputes be resolved fairly and peacefully. She has promised money from the Federal Government to go towards urban redevelopment and to make improvements to the 1,100 houses already built there.

Looking at the photos, the President said: "We can see that there are organised neighborhoods. They just need to be improved and it is important not to get rid of the houses that have already been built."

Dilma Rousseff promised to go and see the State Governor and to tell him what she has already agreed to do with these communities. A timetable of meetings has already been established with the different organisations of the Federal Government that could be involved. The President reiterated that everything must be done to prevent these evictions.

On that same afternoon, the State Governor of Minas Gerais saw the same representatives of the Community Support Committee and has confirmed his commitment to President Dilma Rousseff.

He agreed with her that they cannot make everyone homeless.

Thank you everybody!

Fabio S., Brazil

• Many people are endeavoring that their children will be able to start their new school year in April with smiles on their faces. Whilst adults are still coming to terms with their loss, the carefree laughs from children are a light of hope. We will need to provide them with long term mental health care. I am concerned for their inner minds, and whether they are strong enough to confront the real aftermath of the earthquake. We have been hit hard and have lost many from this unprecedented disaster. However, we have gained a lot from it too. So many people around the world have given us courage and strength. I think each and every Japanese person should face and accept it as if they were surrounding themselves in order to create a new and much better Japan.

Kayoko K., Japan



• Thank you with all my heart for the Letter to Friends n° 76; I think that the loveliest headline that I ever read was "The Joy of Having a Library." That is exactly how I feel joy myself. The day after the earthquake, a church in New Brighton gave away hot BBQ sausages outside their offices. Soon donations of food and water began to arrive. Within three days, more than 2000 people were coming for cartons of food and water. ... Helpers from Australia came to look after those who were deaf and communicated to them in sign language the essential information that they needed to know. New Brighton people do not want to forget these great days of kindness, generosity and encouragement.

Reg M., New Zealand

You too can share your observations and experiences through the website: www.overcomingpoverty.org or by email to permanent.forum@atd-fourthworld.org

The "Forum on Overcoming Extreme Poverty" is a network of committed people who want to develop friendship and exchange knowledge about what poor and very poor people teach us, i.e. people who suffer from multiple disadvantages in the areas of education, housing, employment, health and culture; those who are criticised and rejected the most. This forum invites people to join a worldwide movement to overcome extreme poverty, to rebuild communities with people living in extreme poverty, inspired by their lives. This movement expresses itself in the Letter to Friends Around the World, which publishes the texts written by its correspondents three times a year, in French, English, Spanish and Portuguese. The Permanent Forum is run by the International Movement ATD Fourth World, an international NGO whose headquarters are in Pierrelaye, France. Those who join the Forum do so in their own right, and do not have to become members of ATD Fourth World.

Our e-mail address is: permanent.forum@atd-fourthworld.org Internet: www.overcomingpoverty.org Subscription \$8/8€ per annum - Support subscription: \$10/10€ per annum.

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**HÉLÈNE PERDREAU'S
COMMITMENT IS TO
ILLUSTRATE THE TEXTS
OF THE LETTER
ON A FREE-TIME BASIS**

PAGE SETUP:
LYDIE ROUFFET