

LETTER TO FRIENDS AROUND THE WORLD FORUM ON OVERCOMING EXTREME POVERTY



International Movement ATD Fourth World
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"CREATING SPACES FOR LEARNING TOGETHER"

When people living in poverty are deprived of the opportunity to meet people from the opposite end of the social spectrum, extreme poverty is the result. It is therefore vital that we all seek to forge such opportunities so that we can all benefit from the experience and the knowledge of the most disadvantaged. Failing to do so, and thus falling short of the human ideal of living side by side in justice and in peace, constitutes a violence done to our own humanity.

Getting to know and understand each other can be a source of profound joy for all those willing to engage in a true meeting of minds. Given that we all work at different speeds, real respect means many things: it means not finishing the phrase of someone who has trouble doing so; it means not cutting someone's thoughts midstream; it means not trying to rewrite an idea that may appear at first to be confused; it means not being afraid to embrace the uncomfortable silences that are part and parcel of thinking things through and understanding.

And yet today so many families, as in the past, are torn apart, displaced, forced to move on and treated as strangers in their own country. And yet today so many families disappear from the face of the earth without any recognition of their intelligence, their efforts, their pains, their hopes and their fears. In response, we must fight for projects and programmes that bring families back together and link different generations so that children can learn of, better understand and better appreciate the daily struggles of their parents.

Just as a crop harvested in times of plenty is stored for times of famine, so we have a duty to safeguard the stories of those who stand tall in the face of the violence inflicted by extreme poverty. We must redouble our efforts to work with those whose voice is seldom heard so that future generations can draw strength and inspiration from them and continue to strive for justice and peace.

Eugen Brand, Director General
International Movement ATD Fourth World

WORDS FROM THE FORUM ON OVERCOMING EXTREME POVERTY TEAM

In our frenetic world which seems to have turned its back on human dignity, citizens take a stand, come together, and take action in the spirit of the appeal launched on 17 October by Fr Joseph Wresinski, the founder of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty.

This appeal for globalisation which respects human dignity, globalisation which is not driven by profit but by the equitable distribution of the earth's assets, and which values the richness of diversity.

In this Letter to Friends Around the World, we discover the commitment of James S. in India to ensure that children have a home and learn a trade; the commitment of Luisa F.

to stand by the forgotten people who live alongside the Amazon in Brazil; the commitment of Syed Mehmood, a young Pakistani who ensures that children have access to education; the commitment of Toussaint Banacema S who is passionate about supporting children and students; and the commitment of Mrs de Vos van Steenwijk whom Fr Joseph asked to become the Ambassador of the people of the Fourth World.

The challenge is to highlight and make visible those people who defend human rights, the peace-builders. We must encourage everyone to question themselves about their responsibility to ensure that the contribution that very poor people make to peace-building is understood, in a world that does not know peace.

● **GIVING TODAY FOR THE GENERATION OF TOMORROW**

Syed Mehmood K. is 19 years old. He has been a volunteer for the Pakistan Red Crescent Society for the last three years. Member of the Local Emergency Response Team, he is also a trained YABC (Youth as Agents of Behaviour of Change) peer educator in his National Society.

With YABC we are working on an education project. One part has been successfully accomplished. We went to fields, villages and schools and we saw child labour and small kids playing in the streets. We asked them their reasons for that and we came to know different answers like poverty, no wage earner in their homes.

We volunteers were so desperate to help them, and YES we did it. We selected a group of the most vulnerable children and we made a commitment with them. If they went to school, we would get them pencils, notebooks and uniforms. Our project was called "Education for all." We were able to provide all of these school accessories to approximately 40 kids and we feel very proud of it. Education is very important and a right for everyone in this world. Educated people will think positively and will be part of the great efforts to change society in a positive way. Our second part of this project will continue for more vulnerable people.

My story: I was 15 and a half years old when I was inspired towards volunteering. On the 8th of October 2005, a giant earthquake with a magnitude of 7.6 blew up our city and other cities in Pakistan. This was an unforgettable moment in my life. My house was completely destroyed and my parents and siblings were injured and under the house. I ran from school crying all the way home. On the way, I saw blood, dead bodies and injured casualties everywhere.

The very next day I saw that the National and International Red Crescent Society and other organisations were there to help us. People dug up my house to get my family out. Who were they? They were human beings who were helping others without thinking of their own benefit. Their cause was to help us with one reason: "Save, protect and help".

I was totally inspired and joined them to evacuate people from their homes. Since then, I volunteer and I have had training that has enabled me be more efficient to help people more effectively. All of this has touched my heart and I work as a volunteer whenever and wherever I get the chance. I am proud of it.

"Volunteers are non-paid not because they are worthless, its because they are priceless."

SYED MEHMOOD K.- RED CRESCENT OF DU PAKISTAN



● **SPEAK TO CHILDREN ABOUT THE FUTURE**

As a young boy, James S. has experienced what it means to live on the streets of India. By creating the association Nanban - which means "friend" in Tamil - he wants to give children and young people facing extreme poverty and who are living on the street on another opportunity in their life. But above all being able to take early action in order support children "at risk" and also their parents. Here is the article published in the Deccan Chronicle by Mr Nizar Ahamed.

Bewildered, defenseless and impoverished – children who have lost their parents probably don't have much of a future to talk about. It is not only orphans. Children who run away from home because of a variety of problems also face a terrible and uncertain future.

Organisations like the Nanban Trust help and rehabilitate these children, says S. Tamil Selvam, the Trust's program coordinator. "Children who have lost their parents or those running away from home because they are tortured by parents, or because they are unable to cope with the pressure of studies, can be found on the streets of Madurai – some even come here from other cities. Many of them can be found working in hotels because they can get food and a place to stay; other places are the railway station and bus stand. We round up these children and talk to them – try to solve their problems and hand them over to their parents. In case they have no support, we send them to the government-run Child Welfare Committee, which takes care of them and their education."

Rishab (16) of Rajasthan ran away from torture. "I ran away from my home when I was 13 years old because my father used to beat me whenever he consumed alcohol. I just left my place and came here without any specific idea. I saw a



few people making statues on the road, went up to them and asked whether they would take me with them – they were also from Rajasthan. They gave me a place to stay and food to eat."

Khali Hassain (14) is from Hyderabad. "I don't have parents. I was living on the platform when a person there asked me to work for him selling "panipuri". I agreed and we came to Madurai. I sell "panipuri" in front of schools. When I see the school children, I feel so bad and I get moody at times. I can only curse fate, for compelling me to work and earn my own living."

JAMES S. – NANBAN - INDIA

● ENCOUNTERS TO "THE RHYTHM OF A CANOE"

Fr Christopher Six was a friend of ATD Fourth World for many years. He set off to join the Amazon region in 2005 to help integrate the Mobile Team into the Manaus region. He unfortunately died last year, but others continue his work. Luisa F. has become our correspondent and she gives us her testimony.

"What is the Mobile Team? It is a team of religious and lay people, men and women who travel throughout the Amazon region. We share the lives of people who live alongside the Amazon River: indigenous rural labourers and marginalized city-dwellers. We have been doing this for 12 years, weaving new networks, adding to new local projects. We work from three centres in the Manaus region: at Tabatinga, on the border of Columbia, Peru and Brazil; and at Roraima on the border of Venezuela, Guyana and Brazil.

The team's work is based on the "rhythm of the canoe": we paddle, we navigate, and we travel with people who live on the riverbanks, with their hopes and their limitations. Together with them we go forward, we stop and sometimes we go backwards, but we are always moving. With them: not in front, not behind, but side by side, in companionship, in solidarity, and listening to them, motivated by their resilience and their boldness.

We seek to be *close to the most marginalized*, in particular the destitute urban population. But we also commit ourselves to visit villages, sharing the lives of the inhabitants, supporting the women's movement, training leaders and taking on the challenge of promoting the native culture. As well as this, we get involved in the research made by the riverside tribes to affirm their ethnic origin. The commitment of Fr Christopher had already opened the horizons of these people in enabling their recognition as a distinct ethnic group.

The teams also maintain a 'register of memories' which keeps a record of daily actions and events; the members also register their own thoughts and experiences. We would like to write an unofficial history as told by these people, which demonstrates their feelings and their strength of character."

LUIZA F.,
AMAZON REGION,
BRAZIL

● FIGHTING AGAINST POVERTY IS MY PASSION

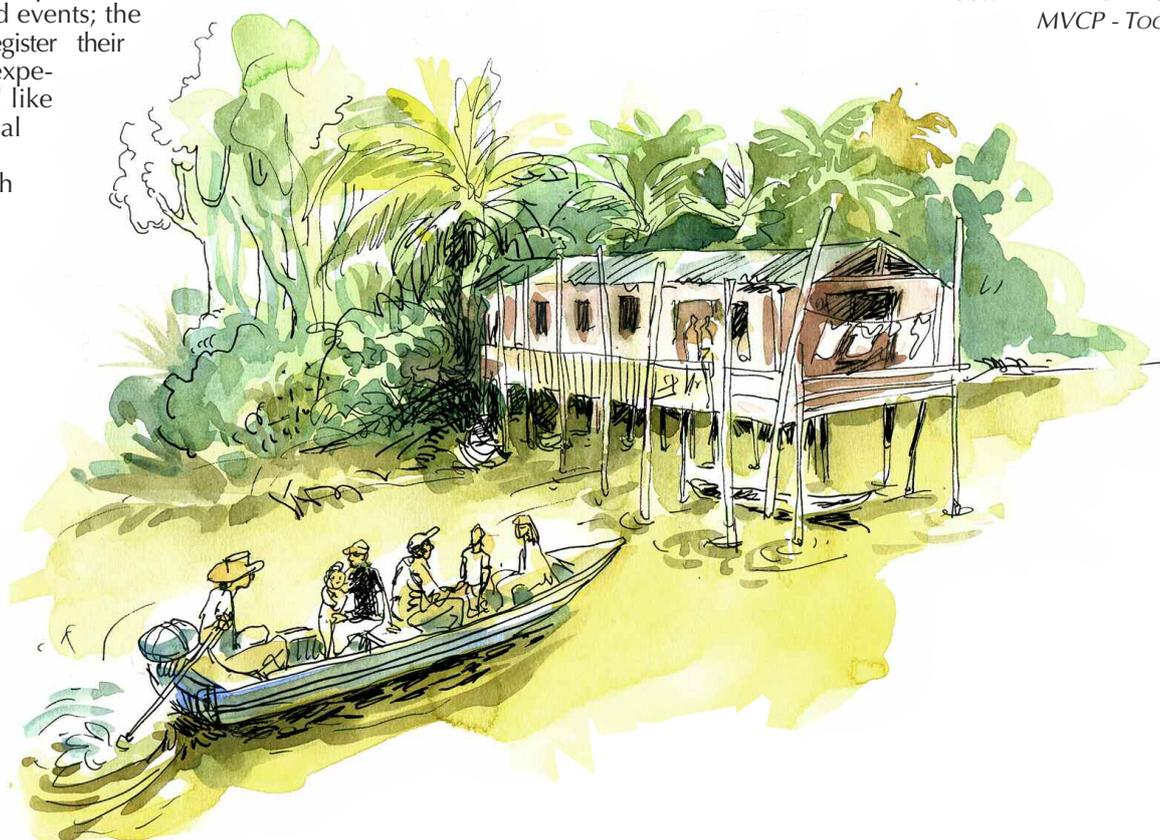
Mr Toussaint Banacema S. grew up in difficult living conditions and became aware of the need to fight for change. Convinced that poverty can be overcome through education, he is involved with the association Mission Volunteers Against Poverty, which supports disadvantaged children, the vulnerable, and rural communities.

Lots of people are indifferent to the cries for help that we send out and we end up receiving only moral support. But that does not discourage me. Despite the meager amount of means at our disposal, every year we somehow manage to bring hope to children by enabling them to return to their benches in school. There were 90 children in Lome, 50 at Noste and 55 in Kara that were able to receive school supplies, uniforms and school fees etc. This year, we approached some churches in Lome to collect money but we were bitterly disappointed.

I feel passionately about the fight against poverty and my commitment to the children and students. It is also my vocation, and I am convinced that it is the mission that I have received from God. It's what gives me the courage and strength to continue. It's hard to remain indifferent when you know the consequences for these children in later life. They need to receive an education that will enable them to become the capable people of tomorrow, and which will allow them to reach their destiny and to get on in life. I enjoy seeing them having fun but it's also sad when you realise the difficulties they will face in life. They are unaware and unconcerned by the future. I see this especially with children who have lost both their parents and who are now in our care.

The challenges are enormous but when you are as committed and as sure of your vision as we are, then you can't give up. Helping people to get out of poverty has become all important and given my life a purpose.

TOUSSAINT BANACEMA S.,
MVCP - TOGO



Mrs Alwine de Vos van Steenwijk passed away peacefully on the 24th of January. She had given her strength without hesitation to build the ATD Fourth World Movement.

At the end of the 50s, when Mrs de Vos was a diplomat in Paris for her country, the Netherlands, she heard about Fr. Joseph Wresinski and his fight alongside the families in the emergency housing camp of Noisy-Le-Grand. Shocked and challenged by the originality of this struggle, she decided to take the dusty dirt track to the camp. While waiting to be received, Fr. Joseph suggested that she helps sort the parcels that people dropped off for the families in the camp. How could she sort out clothes when so many were torn and left unwashed? When night fell, Fr. Joseph found Alwine crying in the coatroom. "Why are you crying?" "I realize how my own community can humiliate people in poverty. They believe they are useful by sending mismatched shoes." "If you want to be useful, help me to set up a research institute."



Thus Madame de Vos laid the foundations of a "Social Research Office" so that the world of science will take into account the experiences and thinking of families in extreme poverty. It gave a new credibility to the struggle of the Movement. It is still developing today within the framework of the International Joseph Wresinski Center (www.joseph-wresinski.org).

Fr. Joseph asked Alwine de Vos to become the Ambassador for the Fourth World People with the ambition to climb the steps of the United Nations and become a new partner in the international public life. She built contacts all over the world. She participated in the foundation of the Permanent Forum on Extreme Poverty in the World, now the Forum on Overcoming Extreme Poverty, writing the editorials of the Letter to Friends Around the World for 14 years.

After Fr. Joseph died, she devoted all her energy to having the actions and thinking of Wresinski known and recognized so they become sources of inspiration in political, scientific and cultural spheres as well in his own Church.

The theatrical production that she led for many years, with actors, professional directors and with families confronted with exclusion which leads to the injustice of extreme poverty, opened and inspired the hearts and minds of many audiences of all backgrounds

The memory of Alwine remains alive amongst us.

LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

Dear friends of ATD Fourth World,

It is never too late to remember the person who was so dear and so close to the poorest all over the world. I am thinking of: Mrs. Alwine de Vos Van Steenwijk.

Although the news of Mrs. Alwine's death was late in reaching us, we cannot help but to have a prayerful thought for her, for she was a mother to us and to our association, *Companions in family development*. Since 1994, it was thanks to her encouragement and frequent advice through our correspondence that we were able to understand and put into place in our association the foundations for our fight against extreme poverty. We are and will remain forever grateful to her.

The passing of Mrs. Alwine is certainly a great loss to the world, but her commitment to human values and the fierce battle she led for the dignity of all those who are forgotten by the world remain as outstanding lessons and an unforgettable example.

May the soul of Mrs. Alwine de Vos van Steenwijk rest in peace.

Dieudy M. K.,
Democratic Republic of the Congo

SEEN ON THE WEBSITE

"Contrary to the common prejudices against children living on the street, they in fact need the support that can come only from a society that changes the way that it perceives them, for their situation is independent of their will."
Komivi Essinam K. – Togo

"The problem is that we value the accumulation of wealth; this frantic race exhausts much of mankind, as well as destroying the planet. The accumulation of resources ends up making the world unlivable for all of us, both rich and poor."
Theus – Germany

"Because they lack the daily minimum necessities and any prospect for the future, people living in extreme poverty weakens those who are its victims. Social exclusion and the stigmatisation that often results - to their detriment - leads to them being viewed as the authors of violence, against which society must protect itself. In order to eradicate extreme poverty, and by extension, the violence that it represents and that it generates, the international community has adopted an approach based on human rights."
Gaston N. – Cameroon

You can also share your observations and your experiences on the website: www.overcomingpoverty.org or by email: 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 Forum on Overcoming Extreme Poverty 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 PERDEREAU'S
COMMITMENT IS TO
ILLUSTRATE THE TEXTS
OF THE LETTER
ON A FREE-TIME BASIS

PAGE SETUP:
LYDIE ROUFFET