

LETTER TO FRIENDS AROUND THE WORLD FORUM ON OVERCOMING EXTREME POVERTY



International Movement ATD Fourth World
12, rue Pasteur - 95480 Pierrelaye - France

JUNE 2012 – No. 80

"AS THOUGH WE WERE WIPED OFF THE FACE OF THE EARTH"

Extreme poverty is violence - Breaking the silence - Pathways towards peace constitutes both the core and the overriding theme of research undertaken by ATD Fourth World in 25 countries. For three years, people living in extreme poverty and academics worked together to share their knowledge of and their understanding of poverty. Their conclusions are clear: *"poverty means injustice and violence in every meaning of the term"*.

The violence of society ignoring the suffering endured by families from generation to generation. The violence of children, young people and adults being scorned and treated *"as though we were no longer human beings"*. The violence of whole neighbourhoods, villages and communities being excluded from social, economic and environmental life *"as though we were wiped off the face of the earth"*.

The institutional violence brought about by politicians who are content simply to reduce poverty, as is the case with the Millennium Development Goals, instead of applying global policies based on and rooted in human rights for all.

The violence of ignoring the efforts and knowledge of those who strive to overcome the violence of extreme poverty and strive day and night to build peace in their neighbourhoods.

Our research has highlighted how much this essential contribution of the very poorest towards peace in the world remains unrecognised and underestimated.

This is why it is urgent to *"break the silence"*. Not by setting off people against each other, thereby provoking even more violence, but by making it possible for people to come together and think, act and live differently.

The International Day for the Eradication of Poverty is like a large window opening out onto this ongoing project! The theme of next 17 October, inspired by this research, is *"ending the violence of extreme poverty: promoting empowerment and building peace"*.

It is from the centre of this project which is drawing together more and more people with new commitments and new reasoning, that peace is emerging, rather than from the compromises gained in Rio + 20. Beyond all visible and invisible borders, this peace constitutes our planet's most precious resource and common possession. It is our responsibility to hand it down to future generations.

Eugen Brand, Director General
International Movement ATD Fourth World



WORDS FROM THE FORUM ON OVERCOMING POVERTY TEAM

In this issue of Letter to Friends Around the Word, we would like to share with you some of the findings of these three years of research. The following five articles provide an insight into people's contribution to the project and their experience of taking part

A participant from Senegal tells us about the courage that this project has given him. In the Philippines, people are having to resist on a daily basis the violence imposed upon them by their housing conditions. Whilst in Lebanon we take the paths that create peace day after day. We see in Guatemala how a project is able to build trust. Lastly from Spain, we are all invited to act with the poorest so we can change our world in crisis.

This work is not yet finished. Research such as this ought

to be ongoing in our societies. It ought to call into question our projects and our programmes, to guarantee that nobody is forgotten, especially those who have the hardest lives. We must ensure that they are at the heart of a more supportive and fair society.

This is why we count on your contributions to the discussion forum that we are hosting on projects which aim to reach the poorest people and promote their active participation (See "Seen on the website" page 4).

Our next appointment is 17 October, where we will be getting together to break the silence and to get to know one another better. That will give us the strength throughout the year to build the peace upon which our sense of community depends.

● **EXTREME POVERTY IS VIOLENCE – BREAKING THE SILENCE – PATHWAYS TOWARDS PEACE**

Moustapha D., from Senegal, took part in a three year research project undertaken by some of the poorest people on the planet in several languages in different countries across four continents. Those who participated found agreement on many aspects of what people living in poverty are suffering. They were brought together for the international seminar: “Extreme poverty is violence - Breaking the silence - Pathways towards peace.”

After having taking part in several meetings, I have come to understand that there are different types of violence that take place around the world. I thought it was only happening to us in the third world but I've become more aware that in several capitals of the world's most developed countries injustices are happening you wouldn't believe could be possible.

The seriousness of this subject frightens us but this seminar has untied our tongues. It's time to break the silence and to speak out, especially us who are the most disadvantaged on the planet. What came out of this seminar, I have been talking about for years in my own country but was treated like an outsider for saying so. We need to expose this violence that is aimed at people living in poverty. I have dreamt of saying this one day but when or where to say it?

Throughout this seminar we have been talking with people who I think will be able to make our voices of regret and desperation be heard. Because people who make us suffer this violence, they are the same. I have the guts to say this because I believe that in this world nobody should have the final say.

It's being together that helps us to speak out. This is why the seminar was made up of diverse people, those living in poverty, researchers and academics, and we have been able to speak out with the same voice.

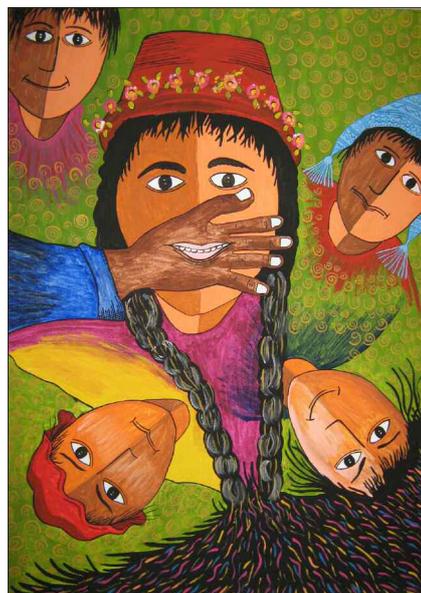
Victims of violence don't have a spokesperson. I want you the academics and researchers who are here with us, to be our partners and our representatives worldwide.

I'll never give up. In my fight against poverty, I'll involve other members of ATD Fourth World and the poorest families from my country in this dynamic process.

MOUSTAPHA D., SENEGAL

*When people live in poverty,
there's a lot that holds them back.
This makes them nervous.
They feel different from others.
It's difficult to find peace.*

(Joachim K., CAR)



“Breaking the silence”

*But when they're surrounded by other human beings like them, they find it calming.
The wealth we can bring is our presence.
That's what's calming. Connecting and exchanging, that is what creates a way towards peace.*

(Joachim K., CAR)

● **DEFENDING AND PROTECTING ONESELF AGAINST VIOLENCE**

For more than 7 years, Anne R. has been present in this shanty-town area of Manilla in the Philippines. She's always known around 20 families here who are living under one of the sides of the bridge near her home, whose houses are threatened with demolition.

During the demolition, initially, it's each man for himself. Everyone tries as best they can to save at least a few planks of wood, or they start to demolish their homes themselves.

When they get advance warning, or when they suspect that a demolition is imminent, they demolish their homes themselves and hide their wood and their belongings before the demolisher's arrive, sometimes in the adjacent field.

Sometimes we see real heroism. Every day, every day, demolisher's come, they take away any wood they find, sometimes burning it. “But it's that”, says Marilou, “or having a nice relocation home, where there's no work or school, and being hungry.”

We meet up with these families every week, and spend time together sharing and praying. We started out with 7 women and now practically all of the families come, including the men.

These daily demolitions prevent them from working, from earning a living. They're also hungry and they get angry. However, they often say how they don't want to get angry and they give examples of occasions when they have refrained from hitting each other.

One of the most important things that helps them is the fact that they are able to express their feelings within a group, as Adolpho explains: “Sharing within our group means a lot to me. I can offload my suffering, and get off my chest what I feel about the demolitions. The presence of the nuns is also a big help to me.”

Once he was mulling over his hatred for a “skinny little boss”; who he wanted to hurt.

At that same moment, I went near him, and that made him realize how much hate he was projecting. He stopped thinking bad thoughts and he felt happier!

They understand the demolisher's dilemma: earn a living or refuse to demolish the homes of families like theirs. “They're just like us; it's their job”, they say. “They're nice – it's the authorities, the mayor who is at fault”. So they've reached an arrangement together. “We take down our homes ourselves every morning, and when the demolisher's come, they take photos to prove that our shacks have gone.” Afterwards they rebuild their shacks.

ANNE R., PHILIPPINES

● BUILDING TRUST

Guillermo D. shares his thoughts and experiences from his first years of being involved with ATD Fourth World in Guatemala. Today, he continues his commitment with ATD in Peru.

During our activities with the children, we created a mural in a neighbourhood of Guatemala City; this place is called the red zone, the danger zone. The first thing we did with them was to paint the wall white so the following day we would be able to paint in colour. When we arrived the next day, the white wall had been painted on and we saw a black picture.

The design was nice and there were letters that said "Welcome" but the black colour didn't give any life to the picture. Initially, we thought about painting over it but on reflection, we decided to leave it with the idea of going out and finding the young people who had done it, so we could invite them to add some colour.

We began painting with the children making sure we didn't touch the picture done by the youths. Whilst we were painting a young guy came over and began watching what we were doing. We started talking to him and asked him if he knew who had done the design in black. He said he didn't know anything.

He kept on watching and at the end he came up to us and said: *"It was the leader of my gang who did this picture."* We told him to tell his leader that we could give them coloured paint so they could paint their design in colour.

It's incredible how in a flash, we had all these young people with us, those who came from this "gang."

So in the end we all painted the picture and the young people also helped us to paint with the children. There were even those who carried the children on their shoulders so that they were able to paint the pictures at the top.

We became friends with these young people and every time we come to this area they say hello to us.

With this example, I wanted to say that when things are hard, we must think about the way we should handle the issue, how can we let the other person know that all we want is to move forward together.

We must look for ways that allow everyone to feel proud of what they have done.

To build trust, care must be taken; you cannot trust more in one person than another, you must show that you have the same trust in everyone

GUILLERMO D., GUATEMALA

● WE ARE ALL HUMAN BEINGS

Shandra is a member of Beitouna, a centre that was created thanks to the initiative of some people from a neighbourhood in the North of Beirut. Here she shares her experience of how, she is trying to build peace all around her.

I've gone through many difficulties, for example I worked in a country where they didn't call me by my first name and treated me like a "servant." They didn't see me as a fellow human being but I always spoke to them politely in return. It's because of this suffering that I am sensitive to others.

Once, in a house near my workplace, I saw a young Sri Lankan girl who was sleeping outside in the Winter on the balcony of the house where she was employed as a housekeeper. Why?, I asked the lady whose house I worked at. She told me that the owner of this house was a bad woman, that nobody liked her and that I shouldn't go to her house. After many attempts, I was able to enter this woman's house. I discovered that the girl was sleeping on the balcony because she'd had some blood tests taken and whilst waiting for the results, her employer had put her out onto the terrace.

I took this girl away with me, leaving the woman with my passport and residence permit. For three days I taught this girl some words in Arabic, styled her hair, gave her some make up and then I went with her to get her test results from the hospital.

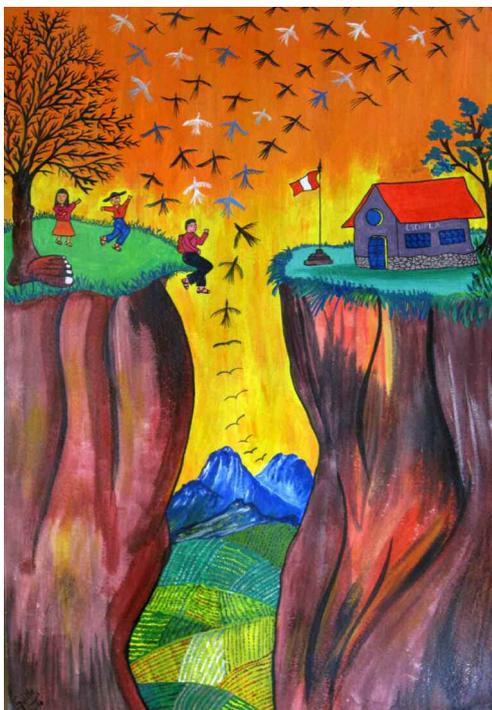
I then took her back to the house and her employer wanted to give me money. I told her that for me a person was far more important than money. She was ashamed and from that moment on she became a lot kinder to the girl and we became friends.

At our centre 'Beitouna', we don't distinguish between religions or nationalities, we live together in peace. Here, we have the belief that if you approach others, or go towards others, they in turn will understand that they can approach you. We must convey peace, come together and extinguish the flames of violence.

SHANDRA K., LEBANON

*When we remain alone,
it's hard to get by.
When we meet with others,
it enables us to keep going.*

(Joachim K., CAR)



"Education."

● **WEALTH COMES FROM LISTENING TO THOSE WHO WALK THE PATHS OF POVERTY**

Javier is the parish priest of San Carlos Borromeo, a church located in Entrevías in Spain. He is also a member of the "neighbourhood coordination." Living alongside the poor, he is convinced that with them we can change the world we live in.

I feel more and more that when there are serious crises, not just economic ones but also the one we are currently dealing with in Spain, there is more research going on about the "Other," especially when that other is poor. This may be very interesting and all, but in the end we don't know how all this information, beyond the specific knowledge and programs of each researcher, will lift people out of poverty.

Some of us have the privilege to live among the poor. I think that quite often the world of the poor is left bare for all to see. Face to face with legal staff, social workers, volunteers and the priest, the poor are always telling their life story, whose journey would very often put us to shame if we were to express it publicly. We, on the other hand, are able to speak of positive things – we've got to where we are thanks to a series of opportunities as well as familial, social, economic and cultural conditions. However, if I were to wait for a revolution, it would come from the bottom up. Thus it would seem to me that the wealth of our societies comes from listening to those who walk the paths of poverty. They are the ones who should be telling us how they want to be, how they feel, how they see us. I encourage those at the university to promote doctoral dissertations about trying to find out how the poor perceive those who do research on them, or those who are alongside them. Therefore I think that if a revolution is possible, it comes not only from being united with them, but also from them telling us what they want.

All of us have to fight our own battles, wherever we may be, but these battles must have global repercussions if this world is to move forward through change.

JAVIER B., SPAIN



"Hope."

LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

Last week I was moved by what a 72 year old mother that I visit regularly said. She told me: "My son, the mere fact that you look me in the face, you know my name, as you sit here in my house restores my significance in the neighbourhood." These lovely words have inspired this thought: it's not outward things that give dignity to the poor, rather it is ourselves, our time, our outlook ... So go dispel certain attitudes that our Governments have made into folklore. Aid is being distributed without looking at people in the face, without knowing their name, in short it's like we are feeding an animal. The fight against poverty also calls for the humanisation of our attitudes.

Blaise N. - Cameroon

Every year on the beach at Sidi Wassay the town organises a 60 day festival during the summer. It's the most 'calming' place in the world, where you can meet all kinds of human beings: rich, poor, Muslim, Christian, Jewish ... without any distinction.

Said A. - Morocco

SEEN ON THE WEBSITE

Redefining the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) after 2015

Why this project ?

- ✓ 2015: Deadline for the MDGs.
- ✓ The eight Goals are inadequate to eradicate extreme poverty.
- ✓ 2011: UN resolution calling for the exchanging of experiences in the struggle against inequality.
- ✓ 2013: In September, the UN will decide upon new goals for 2015 and beyond.



With the discussion forum we want:

- ✓ To find out about and make known initiatives encouraging everyone to participate in ensuring that human rights are respected without exception.

Tell us about an initiative that is aimed at the poorest populations and promotes their active participation (in a few paragraphs).

Our discussions will form the basis of the proposals that we want to convey to the United Nations, helping us to set new goals in moving towards a world without poverty.

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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THESE PAINTINGS WERE DONE BY **GUILLERMO DIAZ**. THEY HAVE BEEN INSPIRED FROM HIS EXPERIENCES WITH PEOPLE LIVING IN POVERTY FROM CUSCO (PERU).

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