

LETTER TO FRIENDS

AROUND THE WORLD

FORUM ON OVERCOMING EXTREME POVERTY



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

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FIVE YEARS LATER

At the beginning of this year, our thoughts turn once more to the Haitian people. Five years after the earthquake, Haiti is in remembrance for the suffering that was caused and rekindling the hope that was dashed.

ATD Fourth World members remind us that in the aftermath of the destruction on the evening of the 12th January 2010, and amidst the chaos of the ensuing weeks, neighbours from all walks of life, of all ages, found themselves on the street, empty handed, broken hearted, sleeping at night on the ground side by side as one. This experience of solidarity brought with it the hope that any rebuilding could be based on a new spirit of togetherness. But gradually, with the means at their disposal, people sought what little "security" remained and retreated to their own courtyards. Finally, those left destitute by the disaster were alone together outdoors, some forced to seek refuge in camps for the displaced.

Later the country found itself awash with a tide of humanitarians and experts, under the control of international aid agencies. There was tremendous hope that this aid would enable the country to get back on its feet, with input from the Haitian people who had a very clear idea of what they wanted for their country. From the outset, Haitians called

less for reconstruction and more for a re-founding of the nation based on unity. Their efforts could have enabled everyone to have had a roof over their head, work, access to health care and free schooling.

Five years later, many Haitians, among them members of ATD Fourth World, express their disappointment. Of course their have been achievements as far as reconstruction is concerned, but not the opportunities that were hoped for. Haitians still aspire to show what is needed: an awareness that nobody should be left out of matters that concern the common good and the well-being of the community, because everyone has a stake in this as well as something to offer. They know that no individual, nor people, can overcome the misery of poverty alone.

Haiti calls for us to demand a new type of partnership, one led by the creativity of a people in their search for unity. We can reject the selfishness of an "everyone for themselves" mentality, which saps our strength and sours our humanity, by reaching out in our countries, our neighbourhoods and our communities. Our world is in desperate need of this attitude in order to bring peace and security for everyone.

Isabelle Perrin, Director General
International Movement ATD Fourth World



WORDS FROM THE FORUM ON OVERCOMING EXTREME POVERTY TEAM

Creating links that allow an exchange of experience is the main aim of the Forum on Overcoming Extreme Poverty. The Forum was the idea of Joseph Wresinski who wanted no-one to have to be alone when facing hardships. For 35 years, the Forum has sought to build relationships with those who are striving to overcome poverty.

Some correspondents have limited means whilst others have more resources, but it's this exchange of experience which gives us all strength. Every correspondent is a wonderful example of what we are trying to convey in the Letter to Friends Around the World.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, Father E. faithfully visits inmates in prison. He also takes young people with him from the training centre where he works, giving them too an insight

into what life is like for prisoners. This is one way of creating a bridge between the inside and outside worlds.

In Portugal, "Ajuda de Mae" (Help for Mum) supports very young pregnant women to pursue their studies, whilst preparing for the arrival of their baby. In Haiti, the "Combite" system is a wonderful example of how working together can help to build the future.

In Mayotte, Méra knows how important it is for him to be in link with people that can support him and who he in turn can also support.

For several months, numerous correspondents in the Democratic Republic of Congo have told us about what they are trying to do in very difficult circumstances, and their determination to work collaboratively to bring about peace.

● YAYO EZA YAYO TE

From Monday to Friday, Father Peter E. supervises young people in a training centre in Mahagi. On Saturday he spends his day at the prison with his “wounded brothers”, sometimes accompanied by some young people from the centre.

Prison is a world full of tears. Here you see a different reality in the life of men who suffer imprisonment. I found men downcast, abandoned, forgotten. I am there to be like a brother, trying to give them a taste for life in happiness and peace, despite the situation that has brought them to prison. To be there, to listen to them and encourage them to accept their situation and see it in a positive light.

The main difficulty in prison is the lack of food and water to drink. The inmates do not eat well. They depend on the generosity of people visiting the prison: their parents, friends or family members. Sometimes the visitors bring food for one of the prisoners. The person who receives this food always shares it with everyone else. Any food that is given to one person belongs to everyone. Someone has written on the dormitory “YAYO EZA YAYO TE” (in Lingala this means “What is for you belongs to all”).

On the piece of land next to the prison where they are not allowed to go, I have laid out a vegetable garden for them, so that they have something to eat. I’ve planted seeds of corn, beans



and onions that a friend gave me. My dream was to share a meal one day with these prisoners. On 8 December this dream became a reality thanks to a friend who gave me money to prepare a meal for them. With some youngsters from the Centre we went to the prison.

The announcement of our arrival changed everything for them on that day. It was a great celebration. One of the youngsters had a bag of salted fish (*makayabo*). One of the prisoners reacted to this, saying “*Atambisi*” (even fish!). Many of them had not eaten *makayabo* for a long time. They jumped for joy when they saw the fish. They began to prepare it themselves with the youngsters. For the youngsters who didn’t know anything about the prison this was a real discovery.

For all of us this was a special day, a Christmas party in the prison. We played music, football, we played cards. When they sang they expressed their *magnificat*, full of joy and gratitude for this day. One of them said to me “Father, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. We have just spent two days without any food, we didn’t expect to eat today, we really didn’t expect to eat, once more thank you.” I thought of my generous friend, and these young people. Together we had helped give life to the world, and reduce poverty somewhere.

FR. PETER E.,
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO



● "AJUDA DE MÃE – HELP FOR MUM"

Young mothers and pregnant teenagers in very precarious living conditions avoid having to give up school thanks to the “Ajuda de Mãe” organisation (Help for Mum), a teaching and support project where participants also learn to abide by rules and acquire working habits.

This project is a partnership with a Lisbon secondary school, and is for “any young mothers who have left school or may have to leave school because of their baby”, explains the president. She adds “Very often they want to leave school because they are ashamed of being pregnant. And then it’s difficult to find them again to get them to finish the school year. After that they can stay for the following years, or go to a normal school while their baby is looked after in a daycare centre. During the first month after giving birth, the young mothers can take lessons at home. Afterwards they return to the “Ajuda de Mãe” school and can leave their baby in the institution’s daycare centre. During classes, the mothers may be called on to breastfeed their child. The exam pass rate of our pupils is 85%!”.

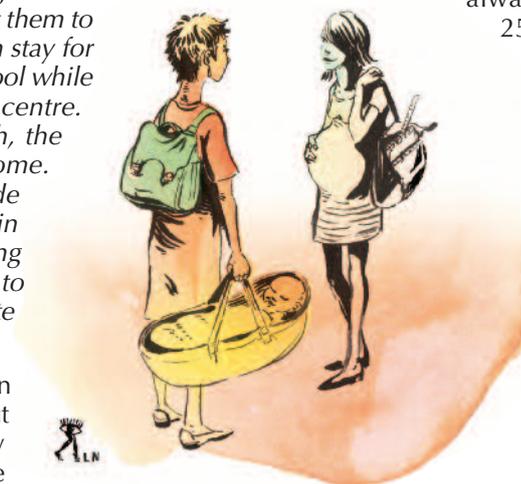
At “Ajuda de Mãe” the mothers also learn to prepare for the birth. Joana told us about this at the end of a class explaining how to bathe a newborn baby. When she

discovered she was pregnant at the age of 19 Joana was very frightened because she “knew she didn’t have enough money”. When her pregnancy was discovered she was dismissed from her job. With no family and no job, what could she do? Fortunately someone told her about “Ajuda de Mãe” and a week later she was accepted in the institution’s centre for adult mothers. Here she receives the support she needs. “I was all alone, she says, I only had the baby’s father to help me, but he lives a long way away and doesn’t have any money either”.

“Ajuda de Mãe” runs three centres, which are always full, with a total capacity for 25 mothers. In addition, last year the institution was in contact with roughly 1,300 families, and the same number during the previous year. “Ajuda de Mãe” supports roughly 150 families per month, and distributes nappies, milk, baby food and many other things.

Once the most urgent needs have been met, the families “are more available to undergo vocational training, in the hope of finding a job once more.”

SUSANA S., PORTUGAL



● **COMBITE: A WONDERFUL EXAMPLE OF SOLIDARITY IN ACTION**

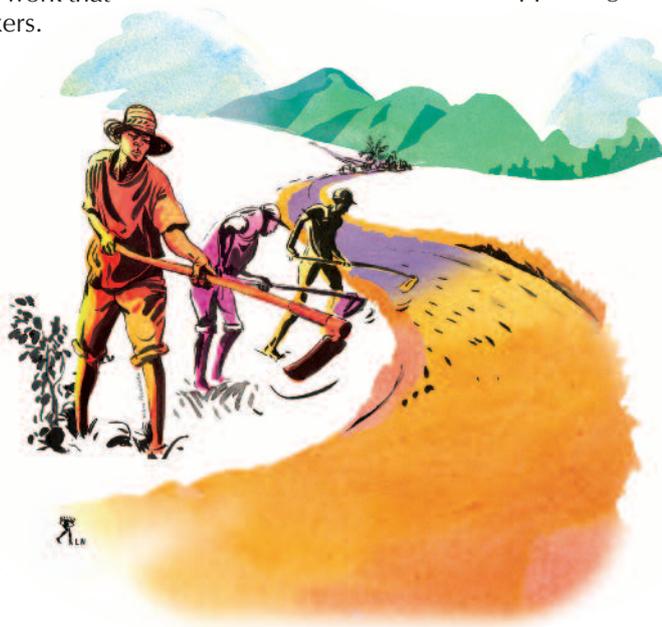
Haiti is a country where the majority of the population makes a living from farming. With soil erosion and climate change, the land is less and less productive and farmers are getting poorer and poorer. In response, a type of solidarity called Combite is practised.

Combite is a form of solidarity where a group of people decide to get together and carry out work that one person could not do alone. There are two possibilities: one can be an associate or a worker. Everybody takes turns to work together for one another. The person who receives the Combite of the day does not necessarily work that day but must provide food for the workers.

Combite is used to do many things like ploughing the land, collecting the harvest, building roads or houses, and supporting household's where someone has died.

They sing and dance in order to encourage one another in their work....what better way is there than to enjoy friendship? Even the Haitian capital saw spontaneous acts of Combite during the clear up after the earthquake.

Close to my birthplace, Combite enabled a whole village to emerge from isolation. The villagers could not



do much with their crops due to the fact it took over two hours to walk to the nearest road. One day the villagers got together to reflect on their situation, and someone suggested Combite as the way to gain access to the road. The idea was well received by the whole community. Everybody accepted to work and share whatever food they had as a member of the Combite. After 2 month's of hard graft, they managed to build a beaten-earth road that was large enough to give access to lorries and secure the transportation of the harvest.

With Combite, work can not only be achieved in record time but all aspects of community action become apparent; people do things together in a spirit of collectivity. It's a means of supporting one another and meeting

everyone's needs when you have very little to live on. Without this practise, Haitian farming would yield even less since most farmers aren't able to both pay workers and buy seeds at the same time. It's a concrete example of the «tèt ansamm» (heads together) attitude to getting out of difficulty by choosing to act together.

SAINT JEAN L., HAITI



● **I REMAIN HOPEFUL**

My name is Méra. I come from the island of Anjouan, in the Comoro Islands. I have a wife and three children. I arrived in Mayotte in 1994 when I was 20 years old. I came to Mayotte to find a better life. I have not yet found it, but I remain hopeful.

As I don't have a work permit, I can't find a real job. I do a little here and there because I know a lot of people. I don't like sitting doing nothing on my own, so I go to talk to people – anyone – no matter where they're from. Since I know lots of people, I know that so-and-so knows how to make panels from plaited coconut fibre, and I can put them together. I don't hide my situation; I tell people and they can then think of me when there is an odd job to do.

The other Comoriens ask me how I know so many people. I tell them that you need to talk. I go to the mosque every day and I ask God to show me the right path.

I live in a banga, a one-roomed house made out of corrugated iron, which I built on a piece of land which was lent to me. Although when it rains a lot, the path is difficult as there is lots of mud.

I buy bundles of second-hand clothes to sell in the neighbourhood. I sell to people who can't go to the market. Yet it is difficult because they often don't pay me. If I see someone with torn clothes, I prefer to give them some clothes even if they don't ask for any. I give them in secret as it's not good to give them out in the middle of people, as others don't see it in a good way. They want you

to give them the same thing or for the person who received something to give it away, even if they have less need.



Religion says 'if you give a little, you will receive a lot'. If I find something to eat, I share it as it's not good to eat on your own. If I find bananas in the countryside, I give them out. For me, it's important to say hello and to laugh with people.

MÉRA, MAYOTTE

LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

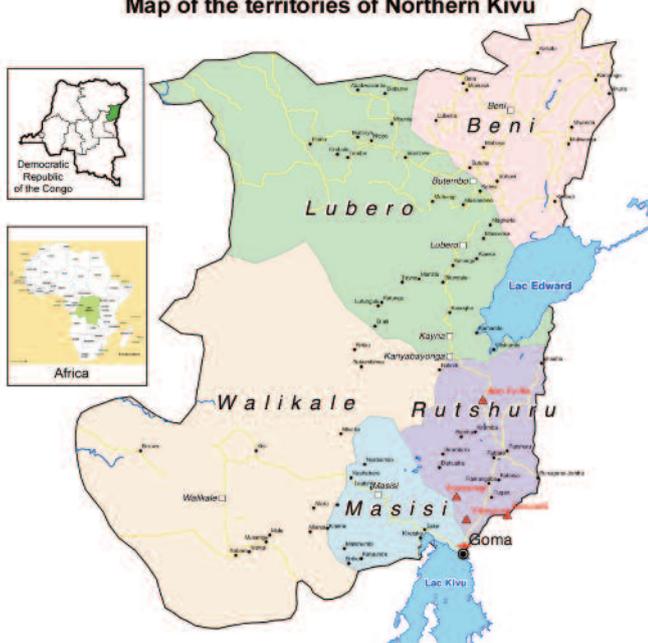
- We had a wonderful peace celebration on 10 December 2014. There were more than 50 young people who participated in this meeting. After a brief introduction, speakers deliberated on how to reach internally for peace and how to stay calm during times of turbulence. We learnt how soft music can heal the mind. We then spoke about networking for peace locally and globally. Our meeting concluded with a dinner for all. *M.R. Hubert, Shabnam Resources, India*
- I had news about what was happening in the Democratic Republic of Congo through National Geographic. People live in poverty despite the wealth of the

country. There is nothing more unjust than the social inequalities that require international aid to overcome them. Thank you for your letter. I know that it is only if we are united in our efforts that we will advance towards a better future for humanity. *P. Antonio P., Port Lavaca, Texas*

- Thank you for continuing to think of us. I have held the ATD Fourth World Movement in high esteem since the Mediterranean Seminar in 2005. This Seminar allowed me to feel that we weren't isolated. This is what makes me keep going. *Abdelhamid D., Morocco*

SEEN ON THE WEBSITE

Map of the territories of Northern Kivu



- We are not competitors but rather partners who compete to reach a common goal, that of relieving poverty into which our communities are plunged. Working together makes us stronger. *Rcid Kmj.*

- The Programme to Support the Fight Against Extreme Poverty (PAMI) carries out a project called DDR - Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reinsertion - for the protection of separated and non accompanied children affected by the conflicts (in the town of Goma and the neighbouring territories). *PAMI N.B.*

- We are in the process of putting in place a strategy to enhance cooperation and coordination between national and local NGOs. We don't have a voice, but if we work with others, something is possible. It's not about creating a new structure, but about sharing information, talking, building capacity. *Biferd Rutshuru Jonas H.*

Many correspondents working in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo are telling us what they are doing on the ground, particularly with women and children, in the climate of insecurity in which people are living.

- After the massacres in Beni, to avoid people taking 'justice' into their own hands and to prevent the recruitment of young people to be the main perpetrators of violence, CSF (Hearts without Borders) launched a peace campaign to help young people adopt non-violent means...for peaceful cohesion and social cohesion. 6000 people have been sensitized to the importance of social cohesion. *CSF M.,N.*

- "The eastern regions of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have been the worst hit in the cross-border conflicts of the past 10 years. In February 2013, the DRC and 10 other African countries signed a peace agreement, thus hoping to help stabilise the provinces of Northern and Southern Kivu. Rich in coltan, gold and tin, and bordered by Rwanda and Uganda, foreign soldiers, rebels and State forces have been struggling for years to take possession of its resources." *Baron N.*

- We launched a CADF (Partnerships for Family Support) project with a medical centre in Goma and a first-aid post in Bwermana, where we receive women who are rape victims, and orphans with often severe malnutrition... Since we receive no outside funding, we mobilised local communities around the idea of self-financing through community gardens. We negotiated with the local authorities, and they gave us some agricultural land. *Dieudy M. CADF*

- At the moment, we have created a small team of 5 people in the stone quarry where I work. We do everything together and at the end of the day, we share the proceeds from the sale of our gravel. Honestly, my daily income has increased compared to what I used to earn when I worked by myself. *Angèle K., Group of Families in Solidarity from Burhiba/Bukavu.*

- Rapid Assistance to Disaster Victims (ARVC) denounces violations of human rights, inter-community conflicts, and the precarious situation of vulnerable people. It promotes environmental protection and non-violent conflict resolution. *ARVC R.*

You can also share your observations and your experiences on the website: www.overcomingpoverty.org or by email: overcomingpoverty@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: overcomingpoverty@atd-fourthworld.org Internet: www.overcomingpoverty.org Subscription \$8/8€ per annum - Support subscription: \$10/10€ per annum. © International Movement ATD Fourth World - Printed by ATD Fourth World - Méry-sur-Oise - No 90 - March 2015.

ILLUSTRATIONS FROM
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A LONG TIME FRIEND AND
SUPPORTER OF THE
INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENT
ATD FOURTH WORLD

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