“The very poor tell us over and over again that a human being’s greatest misfortune is not to be hungry or unable to read, or even to be without work. The greatest misfortune of all is to know that you count for nothing, to the point where even your suffering is ignored.” said Joseph Wresinski, founder of ATD Fourth World.

Last 17 October, we paid tribute to everybody facing the violence of extreme poverty. Marked by deprivation and contempt, many flee from place to place driven by armed conflict, drought, floods, and hunger.

All too often our societies are deprived of the experiences of people whose lives are forged by courage and patience as they seek out pathways that could bridge our divisions, and lead us toward peace.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ms. Louise explains: “With ATD, no one gives us money, but as a movement we find intelligence that helps us get out of poverty. Our goal is to find the person who is the most stuck in poverty. We see him and speak to him, saying, ‘Stand up tall; you have the strength to do it.’ I teach him to carry packages as I do, and we continue by working together. We manage so that no one is left behind.”

Ms. Louise’s struggle for every person’s dignity to be recognised is also happening in other places.

Around the world, thousands of people with first-hand experience of poverty have come together. Joined by public officials, grassroots community workers, and academics, they are merging their knowledge. Their work influenced the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals, in which heads of state made a commitment to ensure that development will “leave no one behind.”

This promise awakens hope and fuels our commitment.

This path to free humanity from poverty is a long one. Joseph Wresinski set us on this path with determination. Like him, we continue to believe that “a new humanity without poverty will see the light of day because we want to make it happen.”

Isabelle Perrin, Director General, International Movement ATD Fourth World

Words from the Forum on Overcoming Extreme Poverty Team

Thanks to you, our Forum correspondents, each issue of the Letter to the Friends Around the World contains such extraordinary humanity! Across the globe and in many different contexts, through simple acts and gestures, we each seek in our own way to express our desire for respect and human dignity.

A desire for respect for those who have very hard lives:
“We need more opportunities for everyone. I do not know how to read but I have other qualities...” “My blue bicycle” is the testimony of a father who, in Spain, tells us how simple acts of solidarity give him a glimmer of hope.

A desire for respect expressed through countless ways of getting involved:
In Indonesia, Norman, a young student, spent time at a village library with a man who, during retirement, chose to do what was lacking most in his life; helping others.

In Morocco, Jeema has also been doing this for years. “My father fought to give me the chance to be granted an education. Today, I want to give back to the children of the city.”

In Louisiana (USA), Gina and members of her FFLIC association refuse to let young people who have been permanently excluded from school turn to activities that could lead them to prison.

This desire for human dignity is what continues to unite us day after day and we publicly express it every year on the 17 October, World Day for Overcoming Extreme Poverty.
● The missing part of life
Norman graduated from the Politeknik ATM Surakarta College in Indonesia. In this story, he bears witness to the voluntary activities of a retired factory worker. As a student, Norman helped with school support for children from disadvantaged communities.

On 8th November last year, we went to Ampel, a village in Central Java to see a waterfall called Semuncar. Before we went to the waterfall, we were welcomed by the villagers and the headman of the village. The headman didn’t charge us a single Rupiah to visit the waterfall. Instead, he asked us to donate a children’s book and took us to the Jendela Merbabu library in the village. When we arrived, children were sitting in a row watching a film together.

Mr. Gunarto, who is in charge of the library, introduced himself. Several years ago he used to be an industrial worker in a factory but felt that there was something missing in his life. When Mount Merapi erupted at the end of 2010, he took part in relief operations for the victims. It made him get involved and from these experiences he found what he had been looking for. This was the answer! When he retired from factory life, he chose to stay and live in the village.

His first initiative to support the villagers was to help promote the Semuncar waterfall. Actually, many international visitors are impressed with the daily activities that go on here. Drawing water from a traditional well, cleaning out the cowshed, farming, visiting caves, hiking on Mount Merapi, eating the village’s traditional food, picking tea leaves, and drinking tea from the leaves.

Mr. Gunarto could foresee that by developing the waterfall there was also the potential for the village children’s development.

● Let our Kids be Kids
Families and Friends of Louisiana’s Incarcerated Children (FFLIC) is a state-wide, membership based, parent led organization committed to abolishing the school-to-prison pipeline and reforming the juvenile justice system.

15 years ago in New Orleans, parents and families walked in the rain to the juvenile courthouse. They stood up and gave voice to over 2,000 voiceless families in Louisiana, and became the unstoppable force for families across Louisiana known as FFLIC.

Since 2000, we have become infamously known through the halls of the State Capitol and in any meeting room as the “RED SHIRTS”! Through policy advocacy and grassroots activities we continue to support the abolishment of the school to prison pipeline. We have grown our membership and trained over 100 parents who work as agents of change in their communities.

FFLIC has advocated for hundreds of families whose children were and are entrapped in the school to prison pipeline.

This year, as FFLIC celebrates 15 years of accomplishments, there is still much work to do. Ten years ago, Hurricane Katrina ravaged our communities and since then, rebuilding efforts have, unfortunately, increased racism.

Due to the higher cost of living, gentrification, and new school regulations, Black families continue to lose control of what’s happening in their lives. Schools’ “zero tolerance” policies, for example, mainly affect Black youth in our state. Pushed out, they stop attending school and eventually turn to activities which lead them to prison. The deeply entrenched racism and discrimination perpetuated by the education and criminal justice systems in Louisiana destroys thousands of our children’s lives and excludes them from participating in normal civic society.

FFLIC’s mission is to ensure equal life opportunities for all our children, particularly those most at risk of being criminalized. We don’t want them to be tracked into the juvenile justice system because of schools that fail them. We, as parents, can dismantle the school to prison pipeline. Through our campaigns, we build community awareness. We train and empower other parents, youth, and families with the knowledge and skills that will challenge zero tolerance policies.

FFLIC knows that children are not problems, they have problems. We need to revive the value of healthy practices and equality in how we address the challenging behaviour that children sometimes present. We must “Let our Kids be Kids!”

Gina W., United States

1. The process of renewal and rebuilding accompanying the influx of middle classes or affluent people into deteriorating areas that often displaces poorer residents.
**With my blue bicycle**

Necessity forces you to get out of the house, when you have no other choice. I would like to wake up every morning and go to a regular work place. Before I used to work and I enjoyed that lifestyle of security and a regular income every month.

It allowed me to have a more comfortable lifestyle, to eat out with my wife, do the shopping etc, but now with the recession, it’s harder to find work.

I am able to claim a benefit but can’t manage to live on it. I have to go out of the house to find enough money for food, or for things for the house. Collecting scrap metal provides work for a lot of people nowadays. I use my bike as I live quite far away from everything and there is no rubbish dump in my village. If I go with a cart it is very slow. With the bike I manage to do more and to get home to spend time with my children.

This lifestyle is very hard, as some days I can find enough to allow us to buy things for the house, milk or meat, etc, but other days, I earn 3 Euros, and have no money to take home.

It’s hard physical work and tiring, working with the metal, but I put up with it. It’s difficult to live like this, with little means, and not harming anyone.

Some days it’s so desperate that you don’t feel like living any more. Because you’re really in desperate situation and you don’t find anything.

There are people who insult you and who antagonise you, it makes it more difficult and makes life harder.

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**The struggle for hope to bring about change**

Coming from a town marked by the closure of the coal mines, Jemaa shares the story of her Cooperation and Development Association. ‘CODEV’ set out to improve the living conditions of women and children.

My father fought to give me the chance of an education. Today, I want to give that chance to the children from the town.

When the coal mining started, the town of Jerada in Morocco was an economic centre for the region. Many families migrated to the area to become the workforce in the mines. These closed in 2001 and many families found themselves without work. Some ex-miners, women, young people and children continued to mine in secret. Many died in the mines, others died of silicosis.

CODEV was created in 2006. After a survey in a disadvantaged neighbourhood which revealed the key need for literacy, the first classrooms came into being.

The association also supported the creation of Income Generating Projects for women. ‘The first actions were aimed at young women who worked with me in a plastics factory which closed in 2005. Motivated, they created a co-operative to produce couscous and other dried wheat products.’

The women’s experience demonstrated the need to look after the children, the main victims of the mine closures, poverty, and violence and often they’d had no education. The teachers like Fayza went to find them in isolated villages. ‘I got around on my moped and went to the camp several miles away, running an unusual risk for a young woman in these very traditional regions. To have somewhere to meet, we did up an abandoned shipping container, painting and decorating it. After a while, I established trust with the children, and when my moped broke down, they accompanied me home.’ ‘We organise outings but these are limited due to lack of funding. I think of a child who went on an outing to the sea and thought it was a swimming pool: that made me cry.’

In 2015, women and girls from the mines told of the changes in their lives due to the literacy programme and further education. This experience will be repeated in 2016 with the children.

JEMAA, CODEV ASSOCIATION, MOROCCO

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1. Lung disease brought on by inhalation of dust particles.
Letters from our Readers

● We are a group of young people. We are working to fight poverty in our country of Sudan. Our action consists of setting up small projects around breeding, agriculture and small businesses. Our slogan is: "From necessity to productivity." We would like to join your network "the Forum on Overcoming Extreme Poverty" in order to benefit from the experiences of others and share our experience.

Dr. Mohammed A., Sudan

● I am preparing for the celebration of 17 October and would like to ask you to send to my congregation - the Sisters of Our Lady of Namur - a copy of the Letter to Friends Around the World.

Sr. Sandra P., Nicaragua

I will do my best so that the Mayor and the Catholic parish begin a campaign that will identify the families in our municipality who are experiencing extreme poverty. Many thanks for your help and for this year’s theme.

Reg M., New Zealand

17 October 2016

More than 260 events have been organised in 54 countries, find out more on the website: (http://overcomingpoverty.org/oct17/2016/all-countries)

Argentina, Australia,
Bangladesh,
Belgium, Benin,
Bolivia, Brazil,
Bulgaria,
Burkina Faso,
Burundi, Cameroon,
Canada,
Central African Republic,
Chad, Colombia,
Democratic Republic of the Congo,
Dominican Republic,
Finland, France,
Germany, Guadeloupe,
Guatemala, Haiti,
Honduras, Hungary,
India, Ireland, Italy,
Ivory Coast, Kenya,
Lebanon,
Luxembourg,
Madagascar,
Morocco,
Mauritius, Mexico,
Nepal, Netherlands,
Palestinian Territories,
Peru, Philippines,
Poland, Portugal,
Reunion, Senegal,
Spain, Switzerland,
Taiwan, Tanzania,
Thailand, Togo,
United Kingdom,
United States,
Zambia.

In Burkina Faso, a 17 October commemoration took place in the Delwendé centre which has for several years welcomed people who have been banned from their village, often because they have been accused of witchcraft. Due to flooding, this centre was moved to a village east of the capital, leading to the loss of a network (work and social links) that people had been able to create there.

The commemoration consisted of a parade, theatre piece, music, collective work, speeches and testimonies. All of this was said with the strength, courage and the resilience of people living in extreme poverty who are often humiliated. We made reference to what Mr Ban Ki-moon, General Secretary of the United Nations reminded us of in his message for 17 October 2016: “Poverty is both a cause and consequence of marginalization and social exclusion. To fulfill the promise of the 2030 Agenda to leave no one behind, we must address the humiliation and exclusion of people living in poverty.” The moral of the theatre piece played at the Delwendé centre also reminded us that: we can all be humiliated if we’re not careful and we can also fight against exclusion if we want to”.

You can read more testimonies and 17 October reports on our website: http://overcomingpoverty.org/article/17-october-2016-reports

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 Pamelaye, France. Those who join the Forum do so in their own right, and do not have to become members of ATD Fourth World.

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