

LETTER TO FRIENDS AROUND THE WORLD FORUM ON OVERCOMING EXTREME POVERTY



International Movement ATD Fourth World
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TALK WITHOUT FEAR AND FINALLY REFLECT TOGETHER

In a world confronted with so many challenges, there is one resource that remains untapped: the know-how of people who are resisting extreme poverty and trying with all their might to protect their children from its effects. Their history of resistance is founded on their sense of dignity. They have inherited it from those who have preceded them throughout the centuries, in the face of constant deprivation and humiliation, treated as though they were no longer human beings. Through this resistance, they have gained an irreplaceable experience and know-how – a know-how that is not recognized by our societies. Instead, the latter continue to ignore that those who struggle under duress to survive day by day in the 'red zones' of this world possess a knowledge that would be useful in identifying the best way forward towards a development that is truly sustainable, a peace that is enjoyed by all, an exchange that is useful in eradicating extreme poverty.

In 1987, Joseph Wresinski declared to UN staff: *"Along the most remote trails and pathways, in the most forsaken urban zones, in places where most of the inhabitants are illiterate, I have always found that people, and even children, knew that the world was on the move, changing, developing. For*

these people, the real heartache was not to be poor and to remain so. Their heartache was that others were participating in the changes, whereas they were excluded, considered as having nothing to contribute."

To overcome the lack of exchange and the resulting ignorance that engenders poverty and deprives humanity from an opportunity for real innovation, it is vital to create spaces where those who never have an opportunity to meet can talk without fear and finally reflect together. This is what you yourselves are trying to do, and this is why you affirm the importance of the World Day for Overcoming Extreme Poverty. The 17th of October offers us an occasion to experiment with the conditions required for encounters in which we can think, act and live differently, with those who are usually left aside.

Through the Forum for Overcoming Extreme Poverty, which creates links between those who, on all five continents, are working to create such unique encounters, we want to share our knowledge, our courage and our ideas, in order for no one to remain alone in this endeavour.

Isabelle Perrin, Director General,
International Movement ATD Fourth World



WORDS FROM THE FORUM ON OVERCOMING EXTREME POVERTY TEAM

The International Leadership Team of the International Movement ATD Fourth World is responsible for coordinating the Movement's work, helping to identify the Movement's overall direction and providing support to the people and groups committed to the daily struggle against extreme poverty.

The Leadership Team has just been renewed. It is now composed of four people: Isabelle Perrin, the Director General, Diana Skelton, Jacqueline Plaisir and Jean Toussaint, Deputy Directors. They represent the experience of the Movement on all continents. Eugen Brand, after many years in this team, will assume other responsibilities within the ATD Fourth World Movement.

For this reason, Isabelle Perrin will now prepare the opening message of the Letter to Friends Around the World, to maintain the link with events from within the Movement: developments which have recently been marked by the 17th

of October, and the ceaseless effort to ensure that no contribution is lost.

One of the aims of the correspondents of the Forum on Overcoming Extreme Poverty is for our societies to benefit from what each of their members has to offer.

Putting this objective into practice by ensuring the participation of each and every person - starting with the poorest – brings about a real change in communities. This is what we see through the experience of the Krom Akpuiwat Phum organisation in Cambodia, which seeks the opinion of the entire community, or the creation of the library at the Thoreau Community Center in the USA. The Milfontes Piano project in Portugal shows how putting to use the talents of each and every one through artistic expression, can ensure that no one is left out. The Tushirikiane Africa group, in Kenya, accompanies, supports and encourages refugees from every country to work together to build a future for themselves.

● STAND TOGETHER TO BUILD THE FUTURE

The Tushirikiane Afrika Association relies on volunteer refugees who take responsibility for welcoming new refugees continuing to arrive by their hundreds, in the Kenyan capital. Some of these volunteers fled their countries more than 15 years ago. In turn, they continually welcome new exiles from the Great Lakes countries:

The volunteers ceaselessly turn their attention to the most vulnerable of the vulnerable, even after sometimes spending years travelling from country to country, and coping with a very precarious existence themselves. It takes courage to live in a rundown area where Mr P lives, in a damp room with no light, like a cellar, with two younger brothers, a teenage cousin and a niece, who looks so nice in her school uniform!

'A', one of the volunteers urges them to have faith: "I was like you. Everybody goes through it. You'll see, it'll get better. You're alive and that is your strength."



Tushirikiane Afrika also makes a great effort to work alongside young people, most of whom have arrived in Nairobi without their families. Uprooted and forced to live in hiding if their applications are rejected by the High Commission for Refugees, they are regularly reminded that they are foreigners without rights. One of them speaks about the efforts he has made to find his way in the world: "I could say that I've tried 10 things and each time, I found nothing. But, I'd rather say that I've done 10 things and that each time, I found that it wasn't right." He finds the strength to pick himself up again through the support that he gives to those who are even worse off than him. "The future of the world is in our hands, in "your" hands and in "mine."

Another says: (...) I'm Congolese because that's where I was born. But I've lived all of my life in other countries. I've been through a lot but I'm alive. My whole life has been a struggle for survival, without parents. (...) I've been told about an orphanage where life is very hard for the children there. I wanted to be with those children. But my friends discouraged me: "You don't get paid!" But I feel good when I'm with the children and happy that I am in their lives and they are in mine. You can support others in your own way without money. I always ask myself: "Am I good at what I'm doing?"

The volunteers of Tushirikiane Afrika witness daily peace being built among people whose communities and countries are sometimes locked in bitter conflicts. They refuse to allow themselves to be prisoners of the past: "What does it matter which religion or ethnic group we belong to or what our nationality is, whether Congolese, Burundian or Rwandan? We are all exiles and we should stand together to build the future."

TUSHIRIKIANE AFRIKA, KENYA

● STAND UP FOR JUSTICE

In Cambodia, KAWP (Krom Akphiwat Phum) works with local communities and associations formed by village people. In addition to strengthening the organizational abilities of these associations, KAWP assists them to work with the new commune council. Emphasis is placed on the involvement of very poor people in decision making, and resources are set aside for them to manage alone.

The Community Based Organization (CBO) in Spean Village took a clear stand on an issue that has threatened the solidarity of the community.

In early January 2012, the whole village underwent a wealth ranking in accordance with a government measure aimed at identifying the poorest and most vulnerable villagers eligible for aid. The wealth ranking was conducted in secrecy by a small number of people working under the control of local authorities.

When the results of the wealth ranking were made public, the report was subjected to much criticism, including allegations of misconduct by the assessors and the undue influence of local authorities. In total, 9 families living in absolute poverty were not included in the list, whereas 8 more privileged households were instead selected to receive assistance.

With strong encouragement from villagers and staff of Krom Akphiwat Phum, the CBO leaders approached the Village Leader and Commune Chief and explained the case, comparing data of the wealth ranking survey with information collected by the CBO.

Following several negotiations, the local authorities ultimately accepted the appeal of the poorest families and once again conducted an economic survey with the participation of CBO leaders.

The final outcome proved to be fair and satisfactory to all villagers: in addition to the 9 poorest families added to the list, it was determined that the 8 better-off families also remained entitled to aid.

KAWP, CAMBODIA

● THE MILFONTES PIANOS

In an isolated region where the population lives off seasonal work and where cultural and leisure activities are few and far between, FABRIQUE DES ARTS DIVERTA is bringing people together. Through a belief in each person's talents, they build a social dynamic which goes far beyond a mere pastime. This is where the pianos come in.

DIVERTA started with just one borrowed piano. As a second one was needed, the teacher, Karin, remembered that in her native Sweden, many people wanted to get rid of their piano so they could buy a better one. DIVERTA contacted a Swedish piano transport firm and managed to acquire eleven pianos at a much lower price than in Portugal. As a bonus four of them were free. The biggest cost was the transportation but after knocking at many doors they managed to finance it. Now more and more people are taking up music in Milfontes!

The basic idea of DIVERTA is to create ways where everyone can give and receive. Its headquarters is a Centre where everybody can put into practice the ideas they wish to share. As well as a choir and musical activities, there are workshops for sketching and painting, English, Portuguese as a foreign language (for immigrants), furniture restoration, counselling sessions, relaxation for children, poetry cafés and many others.

DIVERTA has found that by really getting to know people, and having fun together, you can discover their needs and talents. The ideas for projects come from both participants and organisers.

One of our main projects is the Vegetable Garden Fair, where people come to exchange or sell the produce of their vegetable garden, as well as jam, biscuits and even beer (all homemade). Here too, intercultural dialogue brings many pleasant surprises, as people from countries near and far share new flavours and experiences. It is also a good way to overcome isolation.

Right now it is the musical education and piano classes which have become very popular in the towns and villages of this region, where isolation prevents development and social integration.

As someone recounted, *"When the piano arrived in the village, villagers spontaneously organised a weekly musical get-together, 'an evening around the piano.' Everyone joins in to the best of their ability, those who are learning the piano play, people sing, others play traditional stringed instruments. It's a party every time! This piano has greatly contributed to social cohesion and cultural integration."*

RUI A., PORTUGAL



● A LIBRARY OPEN DOORS TO THE WORLD

The library at the Thoreau Community Center is the only public library within a 30-mile radius in the Eastern Navajo Agency. Little by little, it can become an excellent complement to the State Library's Rural Bookmobile, which stops in the area once a month.

*"A library is not a luxury but one of the necessities of life."
- Henry Ward Beecher*

One scene is an otherwise average documentary sticks clearly in my mind as a moment of such basic and universal humanity that you're left speechless. A journalist travelling around the US drives through the Navajo Nation. He meets a young mother living in a seemingly isolated area with her family, without electricity or running water, unemployed and lacking opportunities to change her situation. He asks, *"What do you most need in your community?"* The young woman sighs a most dignified, knowledgeable, weary sigh and says, *"a library."*

Today the Thoreau Community Center is offering just that. Its goal is *"to inspire hope, joy and progress"* in an area marked by the loss of youth through suicide. It does so daily, through computer training courses, Native flute classes, free internet access, and the after-school program for youth, to name a few. And what better way to inspire hope, joy, and progress than through the free flow of knowledge, ideas, and experience that books can provide? A mere three months ago, youth could browse through some 30 books; today they have 3,000 titles to choose from. Three thousand books through which to escape, travel, question, feel, learn, and be inspired.

The library has come together like a modern day stone soup. Book drives have been organized in the area. Dozens of individuals, libraries, thrift stores and institutions have donated books. Cushions have been sewn to provide a comfortable place for library patrons to sit. Volunteers have given time to sort through, repair and label the books. Area librarians have provided valuable advice and support. Residents have contributed their own gas and vehicle use to pick up donations.

Such dedication and effort on the part of so many individuals could seem excessive if you consider a library a simple *"luxury;"* but if you see a library as *"one of the necessities of life,"* then this initiative takes on new meaning, as an ambitious collective effort to provide an under-resourced community – and particularly its youth – with an open doorway to the many forms of knowledge and wealth the world has to offer.

KAREN S., UNITED STATES

LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

• The state of the world is a source of sorrow, and so is that of Brazil. The situation of indigenous people is a source of sorrow, so too is that of the indigenous people of Brazil.

The Belo Monte dam is an example of heartlessness which is making humanity suffer so much, an example of general madness which is eradicating life. Here, in the North Eastern region, there are several catastrophic dams and several projects to construct more catastrophes. In the Thydewa Association, we are going

to write a new book: 'Indians as seen by Indians: a memoir'. It will be memoirs from 8 people from different ethnic backgrounds who will reflect upon their lives.

Sebastian, Brazil

• I am a family education teacher in a high school in a little town in Morocco. I want to help my students who live in poverty and who are not able to continue their studies. These students leave school generally due to lack of money or because the school is far away from where they live.

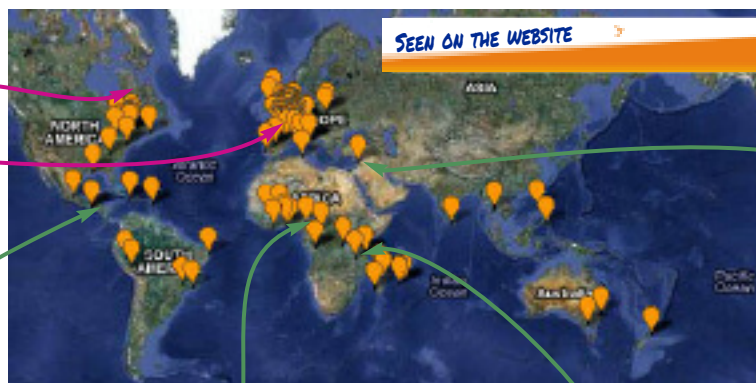
As well as the financial obstacles and the distance, there is also the problem of the actual education within the schools. What happens is that poor families send their children to public schools where there are an average of 45 pupils per class, and a mediocre level of education. There are pupils who barely know how to read and write in their first year at high school. I also know pupils who walk 8km each day to go to their nearest school.

I ask you, how can these children study in such conditions ? *Samira R., Morocco*

17 OCTOBER 2012

To our knowledge, 236 events took place in 39 countries to mark the World Day for Overcoming Extreme Poverty. Here is the map of these events.

3 replicas of the Commemorative Stone in memory of the victims of extreme poverty were inaugurated, in Repentigny (Canada), in Dole (France) and in Vilvoorde (Belgium).



• With activities in 19 countries and more than 5000 people involved, TECHO wished to commemorate the International Day for the Eradication of Extreme Poverty. 'It is not enough to see poverty, you have to know it.' This is the slogan which was used to mobilise the whole continent. TECHO is an organisation which is present in Latin America and in the Caribbean and is trying to overcome the poverty experienced by thousands of people living in slums through joint action between the population and young volunteers.

Techo, Guatemala

• We had a really interesting celebration here, bringing together lots of people in difficult situations who shared their stories and gave hope to one another. We tried to translate the message of the day through writing songs. To love all people means to bring them peace, joy, comfort. The day finished joyfully and with a meal together. *Antoine B., Benin*

• This morning we celebrated the 17 October with our friends from Uwaba, a small organisation which defends the interests of cyclists, who generally are very poor people (street vendors on bicycles and tricycles, people with disabilities on adapted trikes...). We share a lot of values with them, in particular the way of enabling very poor people to express themselves and to speak out about situations which concern them.

ATD Fourth World Team, Tanzania

• We prepared the 17 October celebrations with great care, and we chose to mark the day on 20 October because it was easier to bring people together on a Saturday. We worked like mad for the 2 weeks beforehand... and then, yesterday, the explosion in Beirut created huge turmoil throughout the whole country and today was a national day of mourning. It was impossible to hold a celebration. We have therefore had to postpone. The country is in shock. This event is very serious and does not bode well. This is our reality, the road towards peace is a long one ! We are going to see if we can hold our celebration next weekend.

Therese R., Lebanon (Beitouna)

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