

# LETTER TO FRIENDS AROUND THE WORLD FORUM ON OVERCOMING EXTREME POVERTY



International Movement ATD Fourth World  
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## IN THIS WORLD, ARE WE SOMEONE FOR OTHER PEOPLE?

*“Many people talk about our problems; many people think that we are a problem, that we have problems. This is not how we see ourselves. Problems are not what define us. What defines us is the questions we ask. And our first question is this: Do we matter for other people in this world? Are our hands, minds, and hearts useful for them?”*

With these words which Joseph Wresinski addressed to young people in 1985, we want, on the eve of 2015, to send you our wishes for peace, health, and courage as you enter into the new year. 2015 will be critical for the international community, since it will set new Sustainable Development Objectives for the years to come. Will these be inspired by the experiences and the intelligence of those who throughout the world are resisting the violence of extreme poverty? Will they recognize the dignity of each and every person as key to leveraging progress and have as an objective to ensure their contribution to the world of tomorrow? The evaluation of the Millennium Development Goals adopted by the United Nations in 2000 opened up an important debate on the choices to be made and the policies to be implemented beyond 2015.

“Leave no one behind” is the ambition expressed in the reports of the Secretary General of the United Nations, repeated in the groups working on the post-2015 agenda, as well as discussed by civil society. If this ambition were to be put into effect, it would introduce a real change in approach. It would finally break with the previous objectives, which aimed at reaching only half of the people living in poverty.

Since 2000, people we have met in different countries have said to us: *“Only half! Then it will never be for us, nor for our families, nor for our neighbours...”* We know that real changes are slow in coming! And so in the coming year, we will continue to support each other in our commitments and in the actions which we undertake day by day, in order for all people without exception to be recognized and involved wherever the present and the future of humanity is being played out.

Isabelle Perrin, Director General  
International Movement ATD Fourth World



## WORDS FROM THE FORUM ON OVERCOMING EXTREME POVERTY TEAM

*“Our hands, our minds, and our hearts are needed to build the world.” The articles in this Letter to Friends Around the World prove that.*

In Argentina, the Food Bank seeks to bring together and reinforce family links. In Tunisia the organisation Victory for Rural Women shows us how the women get together to invent a better future for their village. In Glasgow, Scotland, Bridging the Gap, aims at bringing families closer together by reinforcing their cohesion. For Reuben in Tanzania, solidarity and unity create new possibilities, which is what he is trying to do with the people of his village, building from residents' local knowledge.

October 17 is the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, but in the Central African Republic, the gathering that had been planned could not take place because of the climate of insecurity. *“We would have loved to get together; some people need so much to console and embrace one another, after all the suffering we've experienced and all the people we've lost.”* Despite all this, those who were able to circulate met up ATD's Courtyard in order to strengthen and encourage one another to keep going.

We are also giving some echos from October 17, 2014 events that took place in different parts of the world.

## ● "FAMILY TIME AROUND THE TABLE"

**In 2011 the Buenos Aires Food Bank, Argentina, started a new inter-agency programme called "Family time around the table". The programme targeted the most excluded families, who we hadn't been able to reach up until that point.**

This proposal took two years of preparation because it was necessary to find a new way of working: starting with families and community centres, and not with institutions. "Family time around the table" led us to look for support in places we hadn't previously explored, and this in turn led to meetings and the realisation of the need to work together.

We think about food in its social context: the kitchen table is a space to meet, to speak and to communicate between family members. In cooking their own meal, in setting the table, and in celebrating social ties around a meal, people become more self-confident and get stronger. Children and adults alike grow as these ties are made, and also through the recognition of the dignity of each person. "All 6 of us eat at the house every day, whereas before, at the weekend we didn't eat, and during the week the children just had lunch at the community centre." (Josefina, a mum at the Mothers and Toddlers centre).

## ● IMPROVING THE SITUATION OF RURAL WOMEN

**The 'Victory for rural women' organisation in Tunisia works with rural women. Hayat, who is a member of this organisation, shared a life-story collected as part of a project which looked at these women's lives. This is the life-story of a woman who lives in an isolated mountainous region where life is hard.**

Hayat told us: *During this project, we were welcomed by an old woman, whose wrinkled face illustrated the difficult life she had had, but who also showed great courage and had a radiant smile.*

This woman recounted: "I lost my husband very young, and I found myself with eight children to look after. I had to meet all their needs by myself: their education, their health... To do this, I left the house at 4am every morning and went into the mountains with other women from my village to gather alfalfa. The journey took an hour and a half and all I had to eat was a small piece of bread and a bit of olive oil. When the sun reached its highest point, we turned back and went to sell our produce at the market for a few dinars. Arriving home again, we had to take responsibility for looking after the house, our children and our animals."

And so life for these women was a daily battle to earn a living and bring up their children.

We work to strengthen the families' and mums' group. The members of this group take part in all the meetings and look out for those who are absent: "Her two children are in hospital with bronchitis – we should go and see her and see how she's doing." (A mum from the Zamora Lomas Centre.) "We are going to start painting the nursery in the centre, but we should all be there so that it's not always the same people who participate." (A mum from the Conin Centre).

Some of them have started studying again: "I'd like to finish secondary school. Now when I get good results and see that I'm progressing, I realise that I can do it, that we all can. I now have the right words to defend my point of view, and everyone can see that I've changed." (Laura, a mum from the Zamora Lomas Centre).

The activities are put forward by the families. They organise different workshops between themselves and the centres.

The programme aims to strengthen family cohesion through mealtimes, through gaining new skills, in building links, in reinforcing self-esteem, and letting local people take the initiative.

MARISA G. FOOD BANK FOUNDATION AND  
CECILIA L. LOSANO FOUNDATION, ARGENTINA



Today, this lady finds herself old and alone: her sons have gone in search of a job. The only daughter who has stayed with her never went to school and her husband has had to leave the village in order to earn a living.

History is repeating itself with her daughter who has to leave the house at dawn to go and work in the fields for a pittance. This means that the old lady has to look after her grandchildren who aren't more than five years old.

This project is the first stage in understanding the needs of these women and assessing their capabilities. They have been working for several years in neighbouring regions, often in difficult conditions. They have acquired a know-how and much experience. Many would like to work in their village in activities such as animal breeding, agriculture, crafts, or business.

In this way, history will not repeat itself from generation to generation.

HAYAT, TUNISIA



● **COMMUNITIES CAN BE STRENGTHENED BY BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER**

***Bridging the Gap is a charity based in the Gorbals area of Glasgow with over 15 years experience of working with people from different backgrounds and cultures. They want to support families, create inclusive communities and inspire young people.***

To give children the best possible start in life we support parents by providing places for their children to meet, play and learn. Our pre-baby and toddler groups are called Rowdy Rascals. We also offer free family communication courses.

Bridging the Gap passionately believes that you can build and strengthen communities by bringing people together. At our weekly drop-in called Big Thursdays, people are guaranteed a warm welcome and fun activities. These include a men's group, children's 'Big Messy Play' and singing time. You will also find a fruit and vegetable shop and lively discussion groups. An open lunch is provided where people take turns to cook their own cultural dishes.

With local primary schools, we created an Understanding Each Other programme so children can have a better understanding of asylum issues. Through games and quizzes that help to raise awareness,



the children also have the opportunity to meet asylum seekers and hear their own personal stories.

Our schools transition programme works with young people with a particular focus on easing the transition between primary and secondary schools. Young people from the local high schools, support the primary school children to be more confident and flourish. It also gives the secondary school pupils a sense of responsibility and provides opportunities for personal development.

Bridging the Gap aims to work across divides that are apparent in the community by providing opportunities for young people to discover common ground. It works towards talking about some of the tensions that exist amongst young people, including sectarianism.

Recently during a Big Thursday, a discussion group spoke about future themes for 17 October and someone said "How can we get the whole community involved in overcoming poverty? Education on social justice at a young age gives the next generation a bigger voice." Bridging the Gap regularly help to celebrate the day around the commemorative stone in George Square.

TRICIA M., SCOTLAND



● **WITH SOLIDARITY AND UNITY ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE**

***In Tanzania, a member of ATD Fourth World decided to experiment in a different way. When Reuben M. first left his village for the capital, he worked hard as a badly paid unskilled labourer, but he escaped this fate when he invented a lottery machine.***

Although this earned him money, he didn't think it was a good thing to make money off the backs of others, so he decided to return to his village, return to his family's profession of blacksmith, and establish a training centre for young people with his brother's Kisangani Smith Group, where they learn their trade as blacksmiths forging tools for local farmers.

Blacksmiths are sensitive to the destruction of the forest because they are big users of charcoal. For this reason, Reuben and his group started a reforestation project in 1998, with the aim of creating their own supply of wood. Six hundred and fifty acres of trees have been replanted to date, and some members of the group are cultivating different species of plants in a nursery, caring for a little stream and changing its

course in order to construct a natural irrigation system for the nursery.

No experts or engineers have come to share their knowledge with the group. The members of Kisangani Smith Group base their work on experience born of observation. This work led them to think about bringing hydroelectricity to their blacksmith forge—but also eventually to the three surrounding villages. Starting with a little waterfall they created a water main to drive a turbine. Out of a forge set up to train young people, a community development project was born.

For Reuben it's clear that the project must include everyone in the village and that each one of them must benefit from it. This dynamic rests on an essential foundation: the capacity to bring people together in one project, then drawing on their technical creativity and local knowledge. Reuben reflects, "with solidarity and unity we can manage to make anything possible."

THIS IS AN EXCERPT FROM ATD FOURTH WORLD'S ELECTRONIC PUBLICATION, ARTISANS OF PEACE OVERCOMING POVERTY, VOLUME 1, downloadable at <http://ebook.atd-fourthworld.org/>

## LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

• Since the age of six, Beatriz Martins, who lives in Sao Paulo, Brazil, has been outraged and saddened to see poorly dressed children begging near the lighthouse. Her father's explanation of unavoidable social inequalities never satisfied her. In 2006, she started setting aside sweets and cakes that she collected with the help of her friends and neighbours and was able to help 600 people for Christmas. Bia, as she is affectionately known, tried it again the following year. This time she also added other holidays: the return to school, Easter, Mother's Day, the Day of the Child, and Christmas of course. Through her efforts she made many dreams come true. The project now has a name, "Bia's View".

Fernando F., Revista Audácia, Portugal – Brazil

(Today, at 13 years old, Bia is growing up alongside her NGO which aims to launch a new project of professional courses in gastronomy, photography, video, publishing etc. "Our main goal is to teach people how to fish, not to give them fish... and it is through education, training and employment that we will achieve our goals".

From the website: [www.audacia.org/v2/article/pequenos-gestos](http://www.audacia.org/v2/article/pequenos-gestos)

• I am the president of an association that works to eradicate poverty through education and employment in Mauritania for the past two years. I hope, with this letter, to develop and strengthen links with you.

Sidi W.E., Mauritania.

• **NEW YORK, AT THE UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS** – A delegation from ATD Fourth World met with Ban Ki-moon, the Secretary General, who declared that poverty eradication was 'a **fundamental obligation**.' The report « Challenge 2015 », which summarizes the results of ATD's evaluation of the Millennium Development Goals, was presented to him.

• **GUATEMALA** – Photo exhibition and presentation of the illustrated text "*Illusion and reality – The story beyond the rubbish bins and the glue.*" The inauguration took place on 10 October in the Casa Cervantes, with people living and working on the street the main actors in the event. Publishing the document was seen as a way to pay homage to all of the people who live and work in the street, and who have had to struggle their entire lives, the victims of violence and extreme poverty. The document was presented to the institutions and organisations who were present. Professor Josue Peren closed the event with a musical moment on the piano.

• **PHILIPPINES** - On the 17 October in Manila, experiences and messages were conveyed through speaking, music, dance, drawing, arts and crafts, and writing. Participants used many different ways to express their conviction that it is only by sharing time, thoughts and ideas as well as by doing something together, whatever one's own status in society, that extreme poverty will one day be no more. Ate Nina shared to the public parts of the text from the **International Committee for October 17**: "*People living in poverty know from experience that it is only when we work together that we are able to transform our lives and communities in order to build a more sustainable and equitable world for everyone. Without genuine social inclusion, nothing will change.*"

SEEN ON THE WEBSITE

17 OCTOBER 2014

More than 280 events organised in 45 countries

Find out more: <http://overcomingpoverty.org/oct17/2014/all-countries>



• **DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO** – Celebration of the Day with students on **Bakongo Island**. We went to this Island in the middle of the Congo River, to the East of Kinshasa, to distribute notebooks to 50 children living in poverty - the children in the Bakongo River primary school - and to tell them about the activities undertaken by other children in the world to fight against poverty, and their perceptions of this struggle. These children, whose parents live from traditional methods of fishing and farming, cannot go to school like other children because they are trapped by the River. The school is run by a volunteer teacher who donates his time to teaching the children how to read and write. When the water level is high, the school previously had to close, because all of the rooms became flooded. The parents and children, pleased with this educational initiative in their village (huts made of sticks covered with straw and tarpaulin), **decided to build some makeshift classrooms on stilts**. They hope that education will enable their children to little by little build a better future and take initiatives that will lift them out of poverty. (From the NGO CADF.)

You can also share your observations and your experiences on the website: [www.overcomingpoverty.org](http://www.overcomingpoverty.org) or by email: [overcomingpoverty@atd-fourthworld.org](mailto: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](mailto:overcomingpoverty@atd-fourthworld.org) Internet: [www.overcomingpoverty.org](http://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 89 - December 2014

ILLUSTRATIONS FROM  
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