

LETTER TO FRIENDS AROUND THE WORLD FORUM ON OVERCOMING EXTREME POVERTY



International Movement ATD Fourth World
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EACH CHILD REPRESENTS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE WORLD

In the heart of parents who live every day in conditions of exclusion and severe poverty, lies the hope for a world where each person has their place. To create a future where suffering and constant deprivation will no longer exist, they devote themselves body and soul to their children's education, to make sure they do not abandon their studies.

Yet often, all that remains from their memories of school is the bitter taste of disappointment and the pain of humiliation. Madame Lenoir still dares not talk to teachers, "because when I arrive they stop talking" she tells us "and when at last they say something, they are always negative about my children." Abdou keeps his head down when his teacher asks him "What does your father do?". "Nothing" he answers because he knows that working on the land is looked down upon. David arrived an hour early at the school gates on the first day of term, so impatient to learn. Three months later he was no longer attending school. Meanwhile, Emma continues to go to school, but is scared other children will make fun of her because of the mud that sticks to her shoes when she leaves her neighbourhood.

No child can learn if they have feelings of shame and rejection.

So teachers are rejecting stigmatisation and discrimination and are innovating. Many correspondents in the Forum on Overcoming Extreme Poverty are taking action and working

with schools within their communities. Similarly, ATD Fourth World is working to create spaces where meetings and discussions can take place between education professionals and parents who have a difficult life, so that together they can develop the best possible learning environment for their children.

In May, UNESCO organised the World Conference on Education For All in the Sultanate of Oman. The purpose of this meeting was to define a new post-2015 Education For All plan. This event brought together 300 participants, including a large number of ministers, experts and certain representatives of non-governmental organisations, including the ATD Fourth World Movement. Most of the people attending the conference have been working for years to try to improve access to school for the most excluded children. Proposals were developed for implementation. We discussed them so that our schools can be transformed, foster a culture of cooperation between pupils, and enable parents to be seen as the leading partners to guarantee quality education for all.

Together, we continue to believe that each child represents an opportunity for the world, and that we have a duty to give that child a school where they can learn with confidence.

Isabelle Perrin, Director General
International Movement ATD Fourth World



WORDS FROM THE FORUM ON OVERCOMING EXTREME POVERTY TEAM

'Each child represents an opportunity for the world' – how could you not agree with this phrase? However, enabling each child to learn with confidence is a huge challenge. Through his own experience of extreme poverty, the founder of ATD Fourth World, Joseph Wresinski, reminded us that 'Knowledge is to understand who you are and what you are experiencing, in order to share it with others. It's to create experiences from which you don't emerge humiliated, but proud'.

From each of the expressions of commitment in this *Letter to Friends Around the World*, we can learn about education, whether it be for children, young people or adults.

In India, *Conserve India* aims to enable adults to gain training and for their children to learn in a school established in the heart of the workplace. In Burundi, the *Action for a United World* project

reminds us that it is not possible to go to school when you aren't officially registered, and that having to move from place to place without access to basic necessities like water means that the children have to queue for hours for water. Life in the *Thoreau Community* is a constant challenge: it's through commitment from specific people that obstacles can be overcome and that young people can develop their talents despite despair. Finally, in Brazil, we can discover that we have something to learn from everyone, including those like José who live in the street, despite the fear of strangers who surround them.

On the last page, we pay tribute to Marco Ugarte from Peru, whose life of commitment to fighting against poverty teaches us that it is through the mobilisation of everyone, through co-operation, that the challenge of education can be met.

● **IT WAS NIGHT, AND IT WAS RAINING...**

Rosário is a lawyer and uses all her skills to help people from very poor neighbourhoods and slums of Belo Horizonte. She fights against arbitrary evictions and the many forms of violence that they endure.

I walked down the street, under the balconies to shelter myself from the rain. He was there; every day I see him, I watch him. I admire him...

As someone who is not involved in the "important things" of our capitalist world - "big business deals", "big competitions" - he simply stays there under the same balcony, and feeds the birds. I'll call him José.

José lives in the street. We chat now and again and his words reveal a great wisdom, with something almost divine. He smiles, he says little, his sentences are short ... On that day, I could not resist and I asked him if I could take a photo of the scene that I had seen so often: birds coming to eat out of his hand. I thought of Francis of Assisi and so many people, brothers and sisters of nature and of every human being... I lingered a long while, with no desire to leave... And I thought to myself: there are people who take street people to be bandits and say that they are violent, as did the Journal of the State of Minas not so long ago.

They say they scare people... but deep in my heart, I ask myself: What is it that frightens people the most? Is it scenes like this of a person who lives in the street? Or rather, the total lack of any ethical sense and of any humanity as reflected in that newspaper article?

Thank you, José, for these encounters, which are helping me to grow in my love and tenderness. On those days, I return home a different person.

ROSÁRIO C., BRAZIL



● **A SAFE AND POSITIVE PLACE ON THE RESERVATION**

Juliana K. moved to the small town of Thoreau, New Mexico, to teach math in a rural school bordering the Navajo Nation. Very quickly her eyes were opened to the harsh reality of reservation life.

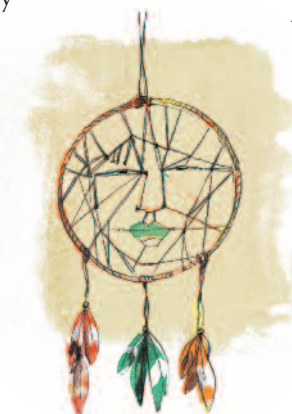
Fifteen teenagers in my community committed suicide and there were over 90 recorded attempts. That's more than one per week.

Within the 30 mile radius that Thoreau Middle School serves, there are no supermarkets. There are no libraries. More than 60% of the adult population lacks a high school diploma or its equivalent.

The problem we face is that the effects of poverty and historical oppression lead young people to a state of hopelessness, where they see suicide as the way out of their problems.

Let me show you another side of this community. You need to see the tradition, strength, and beauty that peeks out from behind this poverty-ridden setting that we cannot give up on.

The school basketball teams have incredible spirit. Several of my former students were champions. They definitely know more than I could ever learn about training horses and herding sheep. Their traditions run deep.



I began talking with parents, fellow teachers, community members, and government officials about creating an enduring, sustainable center for youth. I called the County Manager to ask about an abandoned building, and shortly after, we had our first supporter. The idea of a Community Center was born, because it became apparent that there is no "one cause" to suicide and there is no "one answer" to solving it and preventing a future crisis.

I moved out of my apartment, and into the Community Center building. Next step: funding and continued support from the community. McKinley County continued to help us. We built a trail, painted the building, picked up trash, removed unsafe left-over playground equipment, and built enduring relationships. With the building repairs completed, we moved onto our Grand Opening.

After completing homework, young people participate in a range of activities. We also have been able to establish a community garden, lending library and internet laboratory.

While we are grateful that there have been zero youth suicides since we opened our doors, this is not enough. We will continue pushing towards our mission "to inspire hope, joy, and progress" until the poverty fades, and the true Thoreau shines brilliantly clear.

JULIANA K., NEW MEXICO, UNITED STATES
(THE COMPLETE ARTICLE IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST AND ON THE WEBSITE)

● **MARAMVYAJ CAMP FOR DISPLACED PEOPLE**

Action for a United World (Azione per un Mondo Unito - AMU) is an Italian NGO that runs development, training and education projects both in Italy and in developing countries. Founded in 1986, it is committed to sustainable cooperation by respecting the social, cultural, and economic local realities.

Action for a United World have started a new project for 350 displaced families in Burundi. Obtaining legal documents is the first step for these people to step out of the shadows and become fully-fledged citizens. Stefano C., is responsible for the project section of AMU. Recently he visited some of the main areas of Burundi that have been reached by their projects.



He recounts:

“In the rural areas of Bujumbura, in the Commune of Mutimbuzi, there is a camp for displaced people called ‘Maramvyaj’ where one of our projects that provides assistance to families is underway. The displaced families have been forced to move twice in the course of a month, settling first in an area on the outskirts of Bujumbura - a swamp - then on land near the airport in the Commune of Butirere. The new settlement, however, is farther from the city and more difficult to reach.

When I arrived a session was being held beneath a large tent. A young woman was collecting personal information so that families and children could be registered in the Commune and have access to health and educational services.

This registration process is rather complicated because the people came under the authority of two previous communes. So each individual had to be checked again in order to see if they had been registered previously or not, and then changes made to their documents. This is all done manually and is therefore very tedious and time-consuming.

As for the water situation, there is only one public distribution point, with only one fountain, about half a kilometre from the settlement. The queues begin early in the morning at around three o’clock and go on for many hours. We spoke with the mayor and learned that a feasibility study is underway on a project for the entire north region of the city, which would provide adequate pipe diameter and flow rate, and a tank for collecting water right next to the area. However, while waiting for the project to be finished, we will examine other possible short-term solutions that will alleviate at least some of the difficulties faced by the local population in providing water for itself.”

BURUNDI

(SOURCE: ACTION FOR A UNITED WORLD ONLINE)



● **ART MADE FROM WASTE**

Conserve India was founded in 1998 as a way to reduce Delhi’s growing waste problem, and as a method of poverty alleviation by empowering rag pickers through employment and social capital.

Conserve India started as a fledgling recycling project but quickly adapted to confront the biggest challenge it was facing; what to do with the thousands of plastic bags that could not be composted or recycled locally.

After much experimentation, the Conserve team hit upon the idea of not recycling, but up-cycling, by washing, drying, and pressing the bags into sheets. Handmade Recycled Plastic (HRP) was born and designs for handbags, wallets, shoes and belts quickly came flooding in. The challenge was obvious: Use high fashion to support better lives for the poorest and a cleaner environment for all.

Today, Conserve India employs and trains people from Delhi’s most disadvantaged communities. Once the waste bags are turned into products, they are sold for profits which are spent on welfare programs. Conserve India ensures that their employees are paid a fair wage and are given access to education and health care. We offer training to our workers to promote job mobility within our organization, from manufacturing to working in the head office.

Due to the lack of social capital made available to this community, Conserve India has established a school for the children of the employees. 75 children attend the school and it is run by subsidised school fees and donations. Beyond training and education, we also provide healthcare



to our employees and their children through a mobile van that delivers much needed medical supplies and services.

In order to continue funding our programs for our employees, Conserve India held an art exhibition that explored the juxtaposing themes of art, waste, the environment, and its collaboration. The profits from selling the artwork went towards funding welfare programs.

ANITA A., INDIA

On June 8, 2014, Marco Ugarte died peacefully in his home in Cusco, Peru. Convinced of the wealth within his people, he sought to more deeply understand his Andean culture and use it as a lever to upset the weight of extreme poverty.



“We have lost a friend, a brother, an elder. Marco was among those who stayed the course, right to the end. Sparing no effort, he held fast until his final days, tirelessly sharing his three passions: his family, his people, and the ATD Fourth World Movement.

Marco’s commitment was rooted in his experiences as a child and youth, that made extreme poverty intolerable to him; he too often witnessed injustice. It was in this search that he discovered the neglected, rural community of Cuyo Grande, and from there linked himself to those struggling every day to be recognized in their dignity. As a university professor, he guided his students to embrace this same principle. Outraged by the suffering that extreme poverty creates, he was also courageously involved in the political struggle for social justice in his country.

Marco always sought to take things further; he could never settle for political victories that did nothing to beat back persistent poverty. Meeting Father Joseph Wresinski in 1987 was a pivotal point in his life. From then on, he never stopped promoting Wresinski’s thinking and actions, and providing ways for others to become involved and committed. This led Marco to founding ATD Fourth World in his native Peru.

For Marco, the link between the Andean culture, which values reciprocity, and Wresinski’s philosophy, which recognizes each person as an actor, however deep in poverty one may be, was the cornerstone to build on: “*In developing ATD Fourth World [in Peru] and allowing Wresinski’s thinking to take root, we made reciprocity the element which centered our relationship with the families and with the community*” explained Marco.

As Volunteer Corps members, Marco and his wife Rosario put their energy and enthusiasm into training others, passing on to new generations what it means to meet, know, and take action with people in extreme poverty. When they moved to Mexico, their first concern was to meet people in the academic world in order to promote the message of coming together for human rights, inscribed on the Commemorative Stone in Honor of the Victims of Extreme Poverty. While in Mexico, Marco also shared his experience with ATD members in the region, as a Regional Delegate for Latin America and the Caribbean.

We are grateful to Marco for everything he has left us: for the strength of his commitment, for what he taught us.”

LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

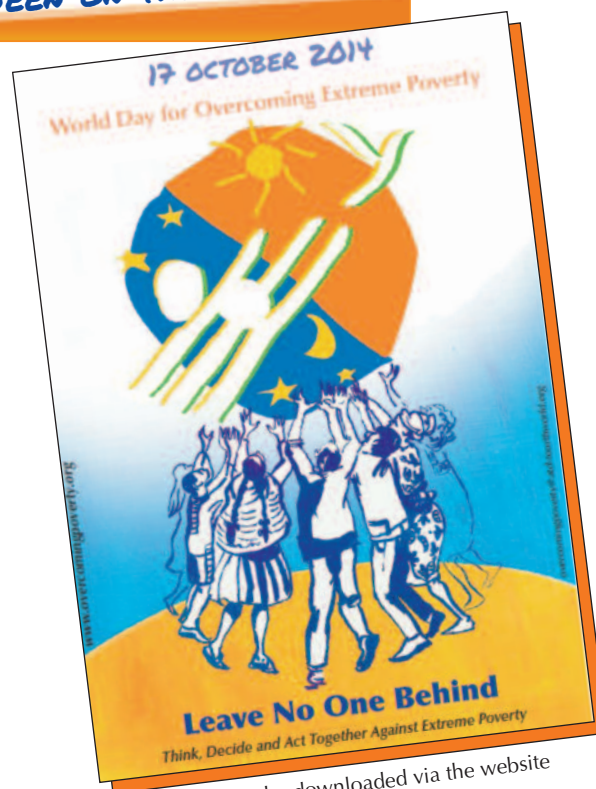
- We wanted to let you know that we have registered a community organisation called Imayianat Integrated Rehabilitation Centre for the Deaf. Imayianat is a Maasai term meaning blessing. An event was recently organised because we have suffered discrimination for a long time and wish to have awareness and respect of the hearing community. They look down at us yet we are able bodied. Soon we will be implementing disability awareness campaigns. We are going to make reflective jackets for cyclists with disability slogans and distribute them free of charge.

Charles N., Kenya

- For 2 weeks, I used a boat to visit indigenous villagers along the river. We went to visit an Indian community – the Kokamas – where the people are our friends. We spent several days chatting with them and they told us how much they wanted to work together to improve their lives; they wanted us to stay near to them. It’s lovely to see a people who are united and who hope for better days. Next we went to visit an agricultural workplace several hours walk away in the forest, and we spent a morning producing acai ‘wine’ (non-fermented), a very nutritious drink made from the fruit of a palm tree. The hardest thing is to climb the palm tree, which is very narrow and at least 15 metres high, in order to cut the heavy berries which have to be brought down without dropping them, otherwise the fruit rots. But they have a big celebration afterwards when they drink the wine.

Paco A., Brazil

SEEN ON THE WEBSITE



Poster can be downloaded via the website or order it from us.
(<http://overcomingpoverty.org/toolbox/mobilisation>)

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 88 - September 2014

ILLUSTRATIONS FROM
HELENE PERDREAU,
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SUPPORTER OF THE
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