

LETTER TO FRIENDS

AROUND THE WORLD

FORUM ON OVERCOMING EXTREME POVERTY



www.overcomingpoverty.org

International Movement ATD Fourth World
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DRAWING HOPE AND STRENGTH FROM SOLIDARITY

In the incredibly blue sky of October 17, 1987, ATD Fourth World founder Fr. Joseph Wresinski bore witness to the *“poor of all times, fleeing from place to place, despised and disgraced.”*

Today, who are these *“millions and millions of children, women and fathers”*? They are the ones always and forever forced to leave: seeking to make a life elsewhere, walking for weeks or months with their only wealth being what they can carry, which may mean only their children.

They are the ones refused entry, yet who shake the barriers, thereby questioning our humanity and how we want to live together.

They are the ones condemned to live apart: in so-called temporary centres or camps, asylums, unused barracks, and dilapidated housing. They are herded together, as has always been the case for those with no place of their own, in the grey areas of our cities, along rivers banks, at the edge of forests. They are pushed out of sight, out of mind, and at the mercy of a generosity that sometimes forgets its promises.

Today, who are the *“millions of men, women, and children whose hearts are still pounding strong to the beat of the struggle”*? They are the Malagasy mother whose home for years has been a plastic tarp too low to stand beneath. It is she who, in one of our gatherings and after everyone had spoken, raised her hand to say, *“Above all, we must not forget that there are still people who are all alone and who do not know us. It is for them that we are together.”*

They are the fathers and mothers of Great Britain, whose daily struggle for life and dignity is completely ignored. Systematically demeaned, from government billboards to mainstream media, they are labelled as scroungers and freeloaders, considered a drain on resources. To counter such disdain, these families affirm through a multi-media exhibition of which they are the authors, the roles they play

to support the most vulnerable in their communities and defend human rights for all.

They are young people of the Central African Republic who saw the country's flood of violence rip through their own families. They resisted hatred and revenge, instead joining on the tarmac of the Bangui airport refugee camp thousands of children shut out of school. Today these young people continue to facilitate street libraries in the most abandoned places by bringing knowledge and beauty, the tools for finding peace.

Today who are the *“millions of men, women, and children whose courage demands the right to priceless dignity”*? They are the families in a Beirut neighbourhood in Lebanon where thousands of refugees, mostly Syrian, have been taken in. For families already living in this under-resourced neighbourhood, this influx worsens the struggles of daily life. However, those who have had so much difficulty, even finding a place for their own children at school tell us, *“We went through the same despair, the same sleepless nights as they're experiencing. We cannot close the door on them. Even if it's difficult, we can only keep trying to live together peacefully.”*

“I would like to be an ambassador for ATD Fourth World,” said an Eritrean woman welcomed by ATD members in Great Britain. Her words remind us that we gather together because what we want, wherever we may be, and elsewhere as well, is for no human being to be excluded. May we truly leave no one behind. We come together precisely in order to learn from those who, because of their suffering as well as their hope, want most that the world become a better place. It is with them that we can achieve the peace that the world so needs because, beyond bitterness, they draw hope and strength from solidarity.

Isabelle Perrin, Director General
International Movement ATD Fourth World



WORDS FROM THE FORUM ON OVERCOMING EXTREME POVERTY TEAM

This editorial shows us how much people deprived of everything are concerned for others, especially those who have even less than they do. They demonstrate a deep rooted sense of solidarity. In the following four articles, you will discover more accounts of such solidarity.

We regularly receive news through your letters and emails, and are always happy to share this news with you on page

4. Thanks to your contributions in our discussion forum that was launched during COP 21 (2015 Paris Climate Conference), we also know that you are very concerned about climate change.

This time, we would like you to write in sharing what you, and those around you, are doing yourselves to create these moments of solidarity.

● THE 'WALL OF SHAME'

Roma families from Portugal have demolished the 'wall of shame' which has surrounded a very poor area called the 'Pedreiras neighbourhood' for almost 10 years. It separated the largest Roma community in Beja from the rest of the Alentejo society.

For safety reasons, the wall which is 100 metres long and three metres high was built because of a road carrying heavy goods vehicles on the outskirts of the neighbourhood. But the Roma community did not accept the wall, seeing it as something to segregate and exclude them. Despite a solidarity movement that supported the Roma community, Beja Council refused to do anything, and in 2015 the Roma community decided to demolish the wall. It was not a sudden fit of rage which caused its destruction. More than 300 people from all ages, expressed their outrage persistently year after year by making holes in the concrete with whatever



● REACHING OUT TO THE WHOLE COMMUNITY

In South Africa, Jean E., runs education programmes stretching from early childhood to young people's skill training in townships and very poor areas in the centre of Johannesburg, where there is a massive concentration of poverty and community tensions.

Afrika Tikkun discovered that many communities where they had started early childhood development and after school programmes were confronted with families who had handicapped children. No school was willing to accept them. So the NGO asked Jean to design a programme for them.

She decided to start with a large community based survey because, if you want to make a change, you need to reach out to everyone. If you only stay with people who are handicapped, you will never change the prejudice of others. She discovered that not only were children with disabilities and their families (most often mothers) weren't getting their rights to an education met but they were also rejected by the community. In one large township, fathers of disabled children receive a lot of pressure from their extended families saying "What, we do not have handicapped children in our family, that cannot be your child, you have to leave that woman!"

So, with the parents who first took part in the survey with Jean, they helped to start a community based approach. They worked together seeking out parents with disabled

they had to hand: hammers, bits of metal, stones and pieces of wood. About a month ago, it was down and 'no one feels like they live in a cemetery for the living any more'. 'And now we can even see the town!' exclaimed its residents happily. Bruna G., was delighted: 'We destroyed the wall. It's a great victory,' which marked a turning point in the lives of the Roma who were tired of 'the value judgements made by non-Roma about them'.

Prudencio C., the mediator who is working hard to break down the barriers between Roma and non-Roma, expressed a collective desire: 'We don't want people to think that all we can do is knock down walls'. Therefore a partnership made up of a number of bodies has set up a project to improve living conditions in the neighbourhood. Julio S., one of the young people who lived in the area, encouraged the community to repair the roofs of the houses, before embarking on another task – to paint the 50 houses.

The Council approved funding to buy paint, and the residents decided democratically that blue would be the main colour. Prudencio C. pointed out that 'each house will be painted by the people living in it.' Maria Monica was the first. She took a chair, asked for a paintbrush, and set to painting the front of her house. A few minutes later, her face and clothes were covered in paint. 'It doesn't matter. My house will be prettier!'. But painting with a brush takes a very long time. The first paint-rollers arrived and everything speeded up. Enthusiasm took hold of everyone and, bit by bit, the houses changed colour.

The work will continue throughout the forthcoming weeks and the partners are now embarking on building a car park and planting fruit trees, requests were 'fig, plum, pear and others'. One of the men said he didn't know how to plant trees, we put him in charge of watering them.

CARLOS D., PASTORAL DOS CIGANOS, PORTUGAL



children and designed a dialogue tool to help parents describe their situation:

- How do they feel? - What is the actual situation of the child (stays at home all the time, has treatment, do they go to school?) - What do they know about their children's rights? - What are they doing about their situation?

For each of these questions there are drawings, the woman mimes the feeling and Jean draws it. The drawings are very expressive and with this tool people can say "yes, this is the way I feel, this is what I know, this my child's situation".

Afrika Tikkun redo the survey every year, slowly changing the parent's view of their situation and their way of acting. The NGO also offers a weekly support group. The parents come when they can and say that it has really helped them to hold their heads high again.

Mothers from one of these support groups managed to start a preschool with kids mixed together, some of whom are disabled and some of whom aren't. The women explained that if kids do not grow up together, then of course there will be prejudice and violence. At the beginning the able bodied children were very surprised. But they learn and appreciate this very different setting and watch out for one another.

These mothers, together with Jean, lobbied the education department to have a school for their children. The school, newly opened in the township, has been a huge success for the whole community.

JEAN E., AFRIKA TIKKUN, SOUTH AFRICA

● **ALTERNATIVE AGRICULTURE:
AN ALTERNATIVE FROM POVERTY?**

“Farmers represent two thirds of the poorest across the planet”

Across the Mekong region in South East Asia and in Northern parts of Thailand, 85% of farmers are unable to meet their basic needs on a farming income. Today, Asia’s challenge is not only to farm more organically. The main challenge is to enable farmers to be more self sufficient, independent and sustainable in order to avoid the vicious circle of poverty caused by conventional farming.

For example, Phonh is a young 27 year old farmer originally from Laos. Thanks to sponsorship, he studies in Vietnam at the HEPA School (Human Ecology Practical Area). Young people from his village gave him information about this school. It is a mountainous village where inhabitants practice subsistence farming. His parents own 3 hectares of land. He saw chemical inputs for the first time in 2006, when his uncle brought herbicides back to his village. In the same year, people visited his village promoting intensification methods and gave free chemical fertilizers to the farmers. From that time onwards, chemical inputs use increased in his area and farmer have found themselves in chronic debt.

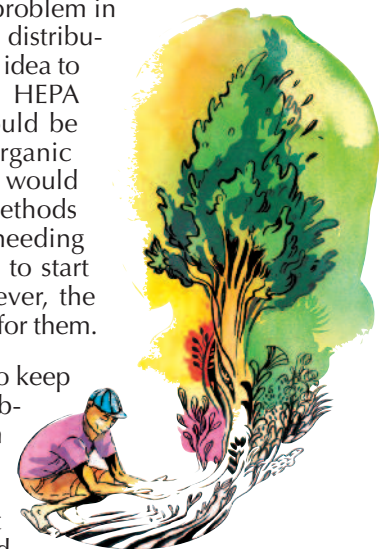
Today, foreign companies have managed to gain a foothold in the village through their rubber plantations, which rely on high levels of chemical inputs. These companies grab all the village land by buying it from farmers who then become farm workers on what was once their own land. Phonh doesn’t want to work in factories or in construction. Even if organic agriculture is still a challenge, he wants to

try it. For him, the main problem in his region is the lack of distribution networks. He has an idea to create a group with his HEPA school friends which could be part of the Towards Organic Asia Network. The group would try to develop new methods such as permaculture, needing no inputs or investments to start up their activities. However, the marketing is still an issue for them.

Today, farmers still have to keep an eye out for land grabbing. Becoming a farm worker on your parents inherited land is an insecure situation. If a harvest is not as good as expected, if the pesticides are sprayed at the wrong moment, if the foreign company does not need workers any more, then people are without income and fall in debt.

This is the next challenge to enable everyone, including the poorest, to have access to good quality food within their country’s infrastructures. This requires connecting the channels of production and distribution, thereby implementing a local network which public institutions could be interested in too.

EXTRACT OF ARTICLE BY THANAPOL K. AND PAULINE L.,
TOWARDS ORGANIC ASIA NETWORK, THAILAND



● **BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS ON MUTUAL TRUST**

In Hungary, the Real Pearl Foundation’s primary focus is art education, talent development, family community development programmes, and institutional cooperation; amongst authorities, schools, hospitals and NGOs.

We work in Told, one of the most disadvantaged regions of the country, where the majority of our students live in deep poverty, most of whom are of Roma ethnicity. It is very important that Roma and non-Roma, poor and better-off students learn and work together.

Our community development work is concentrated in one of the small villages within our support network. There are 350 people living there and only 7 are employed. The houses are in very poor condition, there is no water in the homes, there is no sanitation system in the village and the gas network only reaches the main street. Geographical segregation, lack of access to public services, low levels of education and the state of the local economy leave little hope for these people to find a job and their place in society.

It’s why we have been doing our complex community development program for over five years and the results of our work are apparent. We have managed to build a relationship based on mutual trust; the parents of our students understand that we are also keen to build a future for their children. Some examples of our projects are a home and community garden programme, a scholarship-scheme and the pay-as-you-go electricity meter programme.



We also set up a biomass-briquette manufacturing project from locally sourced agricultural waste to provide heating fuel. This is an alternative to expensive wood as well as reducing the burning of inappropriate synthetic materials.

Our foundation aims to encourage families to become self-sufficient and find ways of creating jobs locally. We want to break the stereotypes of people living in deep poverty by proving that they can and want to change their circumstances if opportunities are given to them.

We created a “social website” through which we sell handicrafts made by local Roma and non-Roma women who embroider children’s art work onto products such as mobile phone cases, pillows and handbags. The women earn a small wage for every piece they complete. This project and the website is called “Suno” which means dream in Romani language.

Oni is part of this community and was chosen by the organisation to be one of their 6 key workers. She explains, “Aunt Nora trusts me in everything (even with money) and this gives me self confidence. A gipsy is looked down upon, by everyone, not trustworthy, like this. And Nora trusts us! And this whole project is based on trust.”

NORA L.R., FOUNDER, HUNGARY

SEEN ON THE WEBSITE

AN UNPRECEDENTED GLOBAL WAKE-UP CALL BUT VIGILANCE IS NEEDED FOR THE MOST VULNERABLE PEOPLE

The Paris Climate Agreement reached at COP 21 marks a major step forward in the fight against climate change.



Here are some comments that you have been sharing in the Discussion Forum:

> "Just a few years ago, a farmer in Cameroon was able to tell you with certainty that the rainy season begins in August and ends in November and the dry season runs from mid November to mid March. Nowadays, we are forever waiting for the rains." *Blaise N., Cameroon*

> "I'm in Berlin to exchange information on the Panama Canal and the threats this creates for the population and the climate. I will write in more detail on my return." *Saul O., Fundación del Río, Nicaragua*

> "The poorest populations in Bangladesh are those most affected by the effects of climate disruption. As a matter of fact, rural populations, and most notably poor coastal populations, unwittingly find themselves on the front line when flooding or deadly cyclones arise. Coastal erosion and salt water intrusion further marginalize rural families who see their productive agricultural lands disappear.

But far from being passive victims, many Bangladeshi people try to set up survival strategies or adaptation strategies against climate change. Those who can afford it migrate to cities or to the capital Dhaka (where many of them will have to crowd into urban slums), or to neighbouring India." *Monica J., France/Bangladesh*

> Several people have lost their belongings because of the recent rains in our country. It is raining every day. The fields are flooded and the plantations are inundated with rainwater. Climate change is harming the poorest. The flooding has caused thirty deaths in the town of Kinshasa and some twenty families have been made homeless. The facilities of the local water company (REGISDESO) in the municipality of N'djili have been disrupted by the rains. For at least three days, customers had neither water nor electricity in a large part of the capital Kinshasa. Climate change is a reality that forces political leaders to take immediate decisions before they can count on aid from the international community." *Patrice M., ASCOVI, Democratic Republic of Congo*

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 93 - February 2016.

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

PAGE SETUP: LYDIE ROUFFET

LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

• Hello dear brothers and sisters from ATD Fourth World whom we have not forgotten. The 17 October poster in Arabic and its sister one in French are on display in the AL OUAHA reception area. Hassan is running the rural gîte whereas I work more on the agricultural side of things so I can encourage Hassan to organise contacts, functions, and receptions. I pass onto you his good wishes. The site is a haven of peace, support and much sharing. A tarmac road is 150 m away. We welcome the elderly, young people, and groups from different countries. Ask me any questions you have. With our fraternal greetings of friendship.

Hassan T. and Hamid D., Morocco

• The situation at the camp for Congolese refugees in N. (north Tanzania) has been affected by the massive arrival of refugees from Burundi. This has led the authorities to suddenly close down school classes before the usual date. As a result all the schools in the camp have stopped teaching in order to house the Burundian refugees in the classrooms. Our organization FOMAP, took the decision to start a protectorate or extra class programme for the youngest children to keep them occupied during this period. The teachers are all members of our organization and volunteered to do this work unpaid for three consecutive months. These children's parents have greatly appreciated this initiative.

M. -A., Fomap, Tanzania

• Hello. I am really very happy to have received and read the latest edition of your newsletter with its valuable words and advice. I have always wanted to provide assistance, but am not strong enough. So now that I've committed myself to participating in solidarity actions, with your help I will succeed. It's a great pleasure for me even though you are not present in my country, with this Forum everything is possible.

Djasna F., Chad

• Our experience has taught us that you can multiply and distribute, even if you don't have very much. Two examples: a patient with a huge ulcer, sent home from the hospital, was looked after by a member of the LHSSD for twelve months, until they had recovered and were able to return to their village. And thanks to our association it was possible to look after a woman with tuberculosis who stayed with a member of her family for 48 days without obtaining an appointment for a consultation, underwent examinations and was cared for until she recovered.

Florêncio B., President of the LHSSD, São Tomé



In the context of the Climate Agreement's implementation, ATD Fourth World calls for

- Particular attention to be paid to the poorest 20% to ensure that no one is left behind. In other words, the results of an action can be judged beneficial only if they benefit every socio-economic category, including the most vulnerable.
- Tackling climate change together with people in poverty and as part of an effort to eradicate extreme poverty.
- Ensure that funds reach the most vulnerable.
- The establishment of social protection floors.
- Ensuring that people in poverty are able to benefit from training and job creation in the context of a just transition to a green economy