

LETTER TO FRIENDS AROUND THE WORLD

FORUM ON OVERCOMING EXTREME POVERTY



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- LETTER N° 100 -

**TOGETHER, WE CAN GIVE OUR WORLD A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE.
LET'S DARE TO TAKE UP THE CHALLENGE!**

By adopting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights after the extreme violence and suffering of the second World War, the world's nations proclaimed their refusal to accept that any person be crushed by other people. They affirmed the basic humanity of all people.

Yet still today, in both north and south, in both east and west, in both urban and rural areas, people living in deep poverty tell us: *"Human rights do not reach us. We are not respected. Our dignity is not recognised. Other people do not see us. It's as if we do not exist."*

"Ever since we were forced to move out of the city, we've been going hungry again. Here there is no work, no school, no health centre, and not even a place to pray. We are hanging on only because we help one another." Some families struggle to survive in flood-prone areas that are polluted and dangerous, surrounded by stagnant water. Working together, these families try to drain ditches and dig out pathways. Every day without fail, they continue their efforts. Like them, others around the world fight back, build solidarity, and create solutions.



In the 2030 Agenda of the United Nations, nations have pledged to *"eradicate poverty in all its forms and dimensions so that no one will be left behind"*. This ambition raises great hopes and gives us great responsibilities. First of all, we must seek out people who, from the depths of poverty, forge unique knowledge about humanity. This knowledge is sorely lacking in debates about our future, yet we need it in order to make the earth a livable place where no one is ever again pushed aside and exiled from the human community. Together, we can give our world a sustainable future. Let's dare to take up the challenge.

Shortly after October 17, 1987, Father Joseph Wresinski wrote: *"To overcome extreme poverty, we must carry the message of October 17th. We must keep the poorest people and their thirst for dignity in our hearts and we must act. We must become men and women who refuse to tolerate extreme poverty, who make a commitment to the most disadvantaged people, giving the best of ourselves to build a world where all people can live knowing that they count for others and that they can serve others."*

Isabelle Pypaert Perrin, Director General

WORDS FROM THE FORUM ON OVERCOMING EXTREME POVERTY TEAM

On 17 October 2018, many of you once again came together to celebrate «The World Day for Overcoming Extreme Poverty» and to make visible the efforts of all those committed to saying no to poverty throughout the year. Through this mobilization, you have told the world that we can all be actors for the change we want to see and that we can shape a world where everyone can grow and develop. As the UN Secretary-General, who was present at the 17 October commemoration at the UN in New York, recalled: *«Poverty is not inevitable. It is [...] the outcome of choices that societies have made. We need policies that create a strong enabling economic environment and that promote access to education, health services, decent work and social protection to everybody.»*

"SOME NEWS FROM OCTOBER 17, 2018 - WORLD

NOBODY CHOOSES TO LIVE IN EXTREME POVERTY

I live in Cameroon. Some friends and I went to the village of Koumenke, that I know well, to commemorate October 17. We toured the village and met young people and parents. The aim was to understand the situation that the population was experiencing as this was the first October 17 event here.

We learned that few children were able to complete primary school. Various conversations with people revealed that one of the reasons for this was a lack of money. This is due to their reliance on subsistence agriculture, which only allows people to feed themselves, barely surviving. In addition, there is a lack of drinking water as the village does not have a regular water supply. The population relies on an old water source which is maintained by the local people, and the same water is used for all household tasks.

With this in mind, we discussed some ideas with a number of women's groups, as follows:

- To become a 'Joint Initiative Group' to set up an agricultural project that makes it possible to improve production by using sustainable approaches;
- To organize periodic water conservation and treatment seminars;
- To raise awareness of the importance of schooling for children; and
- To support the village health centre.

Gbetnkom A, Koumenke, Cameroon



BUILDING A WORLD IN WHICH HUMAN RIGHTS AND DIGNITY ARE RESPECTED

In Dole, France, about a hundred people, children, elected officials and people from different associations gathered to say «No» to poverty. Several testimonies were read during the commemoration at the Stone, including that of Lili who lives on the street and who aspires to a dignified life:

«My name is Lili. I'm approaching my 30th birthday. A good age, you might say! Well, not for everyone, sadly. My journey to reach this age has been fraught with obstacles. In my region for a few years now, I have been shocked to come across certain attitudes towards people who are homeless. Today's society, and those who represent it through various organizations, sometimes says that we are the lowest of the low. But thanks to a member of the association



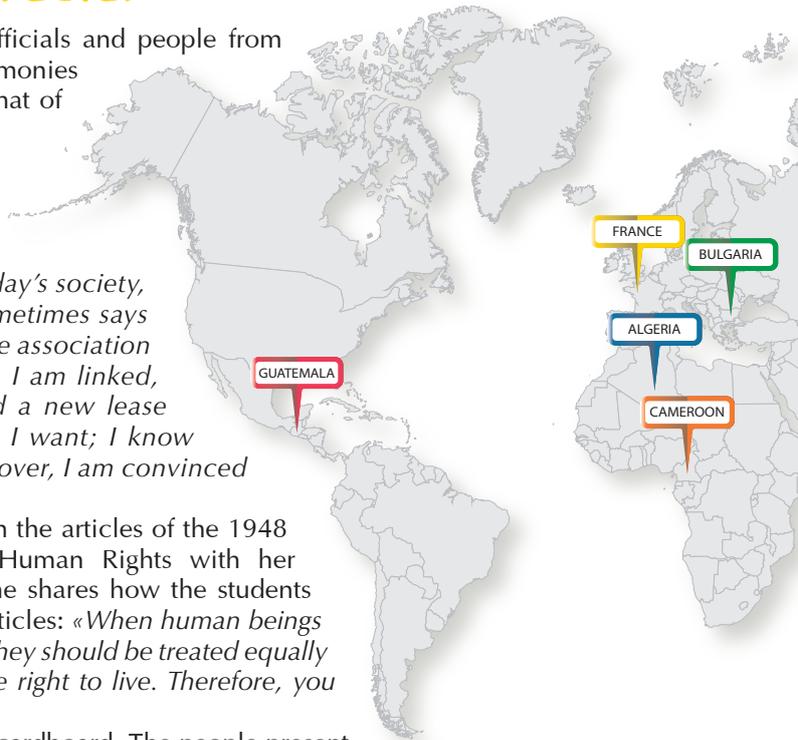
«Open Door», with whom I am linked, I have at last rediscovered a new lease for life...I now know what I want; I know that it is possible and moreover, I am convinced I can achieve it.»

Cathy, a teacher, worked on the articles of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights with her primary school students. She shares how the students responded to some of the articles: *«When human beings are born, they are free, and they should be treated equally in all things». «You have the right to live. Therefore, you*

should be given the means to live in safety and freedom».

A Rights Tree was created with leaves made of wool, fabric and cardboard. The people present wrote powerful messages: with brown leaves representing examples of rights not respected and green leaves representing rights that were close to their hearts.

October 17 Committee, Dole, France



POVERTY AS SEEN BY CHILDREN



Children aged eight to twelve years gathered at the youth centre, «Naciria» to celebrate the launch of a Tapori group. The day began with a visit and discussion around the exhibition, «The Colours of the Letter». The exhibition comprises drawings illustrating the stories of people who struggle daily against poverty and social vulnerability.

Practical activities were provided for children including a drawing competition on the theme of «Poverty in children's eyes» and a mural painting depicting hands on the theme, «Stop poverty».

Then followed the launch of a Tapori group, with the presentation of the Tapori mini-books in Arabic and French. The children took time to look at and read the books. Following this, one of the children asked: "What is a street library?" This prompted the idea of creating a street

library so that all children could access reading.

Association Al Ajawad, Bordj Menaiel, Wilaya de Boumerdes, Algeria

DAY FOR OVERCOMING EXTREME POVERTY"

A SYMBOL OF ENCOUNTER AND EXPRESSION

The event to mark the World Day for Overcoming Extreme Poverty took place in the public garden situated in the heart of the central market and the historical town. The aim was to give people working and living around the market, as well as its customers, the opportunity to express a message. We invited each person to write or draw their message on a coloured sheet of paper in the shape of a tree leaf. These were then hung from the branch of a tree in the centre of the public garden. They symbolized the encounter and expression of people who do not usually have such an opportunity.

Some people said, «What makes us rich is not material things, rather it is family and children». However, one child shared: «When someone is rich, it is because they have a roof over their heads». Another man, who came with his son, said: «I would like others to see me as an ordinary man. What makes me feel poor is when my child wants something I can't buy.»

The event concluded with the words of a 12-year-old girl who, looking at a picture of a group living in a disadvantaged housing neighbourhood in Italy, exclaimed: «They are like us».

Pavilion 19 and ATD Fourth World, Sofia, Bulgaria

***Pavillon 19 engages in art and culture with the children and the parents who live near to this market.**



ALL TOGETHER TOWARDS ZERO POVERTY

A workshop for students was held at the Asian Institute of Technology. A number of topics were discussed, including: "What is extreme poverty from a multidimensional perspective?", "Frugal innovation, social business and the Sustainable Development Goals", and "Resilience and adaptability of people in poverty and the strength of the informal economy".

There followed a presentation by Mrs Khun N., a member of the Thai Street Vendors for Sustainable Development, who said: *"I am from the province, and my parents are poor rice farmers. For me, poverty means having ability, but lacking opportunity. When I finished primary school, I moved to Bangkok to look for a job, and to gain knowledge and experience. If I found work washing dishes or cooking food, I would take it as it allowed me to pay for my lessons. I also started to train in sales: For*

this you need to set a goal, have a particular service in mind, offer consumers quality products, be honest with them, and give them a good service. Today, we still experience hardship, but I want a better life for my children and for them to be able to have an education, good jobs, and to live well." This presentation was followed by discussion among the participants.

The event was made possible thanks to partnerships between ATD Fourth World, Thammasat University, Asian Institute of Technology, Yunus Center and the Network of Thai Street Vendors for Sustainable Development. **Bangkok, Thailand**



RETHINKING THE FIGHT AGAINST POVERTY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

This title was the theme of the second Joseph Wresinski Forum for Latin America and the Caribbean, which was held in Guatemala City. For five days, close on 50 people from nine countries worked together. We concluded the forum by reflecting on how our countries and communities can identify future commitments in the struggle against poverty, while imagining ways to further build a union among human rights defenders

Testimonies of some participants:

Inga Ruiz V, United States: *«When the discussion led us to ask ourselves what human rights are, I understood that beyond the concept, raising our voices for a dignified life for all could contribute to the disappearance of the indifference that has caused a large part of the world's population to be left behind. However, it is not enough to talk; it is essential to seek to be heard.»*

Fernando Monteiro dos S., from Brazil: *«It was a great meeting; very important for us, and fruitful. On my return, I spoke with a group of educators involved in training in our village and with more than 40 indigenous leaders from the State of Pernambuco. I told them what it was like in Guatemala, and I shared with them some of my reflections on the meeting.»*

ATD Fourth World, Guatemala



TESTIMONIES - 17 OCTOBER 2018

MEET MORE OFTEN AND SUPPORT EACH OTHER

The community of the village of Kyabondo discussed the question: «How do we resist poverty in our village?»

«To fight poverty, we must unite and support the efforts of the people. Together we can support each other. It is also important to work with the local authority.»

«We have an abundance of plantain banana produce, but we lack the means to transport it to the market place. If we could sell all these bananas successfully, we would not be living in such misery. A trading centre should be created to sell agricultural products at a reasonable price.»

«We want initiatives such as carpentry activities and sewing workshops to help the young people of the village to take charge of their own lives. We have a plot of land where we could build or install a small trading centre, but we lack the means.»

Jean K., Action Network for Peace and Community Development, Kyabondo, Democratic Republic of Congo

HOW TO MARK OCTOBER 17 IN A COUNTRY WHERE I AM PASSING THROUGH, AND WHERE NO ONE KNOWS ABOUT THIS DAY?

I had heard that a group of people suffering with chronic diseases were organising a walk. I know very well what chronic disease means in terms of losing one's health and never being the same again, as well as the anguish experienced by a poor patient lacking medical treatment. Despite this challenge, you need to be strong so that you and your family avoid falling into poverty.

About 150 people gathered on the day of the walk. We were all there together - Muslims and Christians, Jordanians and refugees from Syria or Iraq, the elderly and younger people, and even children. I was able to speak with several people and asked them: «What motivated you to come and participate in this walk?»

I was told: «Walking together with others is stimulating; we encourage each other».

On this, the World Day for Overcoming Extreme Poverty, I experienced the walk as a form of communion. All these poor people were affirming their determination to do what they could afford to do without money - that is to walk in unity. In walking together, we can break free of feeling confined in one self, in one's own home, and of the feeling of discouragement and helplessness. A group of women from a suburb of Amman told me that they go out every day to walk together. And then it can become a joy, a celebration, like this wonderful walk where everyone meets. It is a step, steps...in the rejection of poverty.

Therese. R, Amman, Jordan



IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE STAND UP FOR OUR RIGHTS AND VOICE OUR NEEDS

For me, poverty is about neglected areas that are not taken care of, or where there are no resources for families such as libraries, good schools and good stores. In the stores here, most of the groceries are out of date. The store owners think that we're content to

live this way because they think we do not have a voice, but that is not the case. People living in poverty have this fear that if they open their mouths, then action will be taken against them, so nobody says

anything. So, we're going to continue to have stores like these unless people living in poverty let their voices be heard, so that others stop taking advantage of them. In places where sidewalks are cracked and infrastructure is broken, it's important that we stand up for our rights and that we voice our needs.

We have to make noise. I don't mean being loud, being violent, cursing people, or belittling people. I mean going to meet people. Because just having a piece of paper is not going to work; you have to go down there and stay in their face and keep staying in their face. Everyone should have the right to speak and to say how they feel about what is going on in their life. It's a human right to be heard and to listen to

someone - to communicate with one another.

Stacy W., at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, USA



IF YOU WANT TO CHANGE THIS REALITY, WHAT DO YOU DO?

What we all want is to get out of poverty, right? I come from the countryside and what hurts me most is when people talk badly about us, criticize us and don't listen to us. My motivation for going to university is to change the way my parents, brothers and sisters and my community are judged, so that others do not speak ill of us.

A classmate in college spoke badly of me when she said to me, «You don't know anything about that». She thought that because I come from the countryside, I don't know a lot, but I know that this is just prejudice. What is true is that when a person is educated, he or she knows where he or she stands in life.

I read in a book: «People base themselves mainly on economics, believing that with money they will be rich, but this is a mistake, because the most important thing is education». I ask myself: «What is the point of having money if I am not in solidarity with others?» Individualism can lead us down the wrong path. We must think collectively, support each other, and cooperate because we are stronger when we are united.

One day, my teacher said to me: «If you want to change this reality, what are you doing about it?» I replied: «To be a good citizen and help others; and then I am sure that these people will then help someone else».

Yudith, Cusco, Peru

The Forum on Overcoming Extreme Poverty is part of ATD Fourth World International but those who join it, do maintain their own status and identity.

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