



ATD  
FOURTH WORLD

# Contract: Striving Together to End Poverty

A STEP Towards Human Rights and Peace for All

*Contract of commitments by the International Movement  
ATD Fourth World, for 2008-2012<sup>1</sup>,  
made public on the 60th anniversary year  
of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*

October 17th, 2008

Members of ATD (All Together for Dignity) Fourth World—looking at the world from the communities where they are active, whether they live in extreme poverty or are committed alongside those who do—are deeply concerned:

- All countries are torn by an economy in which human well-being has become so neglected that we are seeing hunger riots in the 21st century.
- Knowledge, when it is not sufficiently shared among human beings, becomes disconnected from its ideal as a source of liberation. It has become a constant source of inequality everywhere, with particularly drastic repercussions as concerns access to modern technology and communication.
- So ill-equipped is our human community to welcome all those displaced by climate change, armed conflict, famine, and unemployment, that the results are mistrust, violence, fear and a situation where people are caught outside of any framework of law or rights.

People mired in extreme poverty are the first victims of today's global crises, whether of energy, food and water, climate change, the economy, or social conflict. Some people progress at the expense of others who are left behind. Some enjoy rights at the expense of others whose fundamental rights are ignored. Projects, research and policies that are intended for all people only rarely reach those with no voice in the process, those who are the weakest and most vulnerable. They are not involved nor even consulted in the planning and implementation of alternative approaches, while they are the first to have to resist the brunt of the crises.

In searching for ways to make our world more humane, our communities can no longer do without the experience and thinking of people living in the worst situations of poverty. The issues the world is confronted with are not specific to Africa, Asia, the Americas nor Europe. These are not problems confined to the north or south, nor to the east or west. They are our collective problems. We have no choice but to tackle them together.

We live in a world that is organized in ways that cut off people living in extreme poverty, even while many people bear witness to a search for a common humanity through their daily lives and commitment. Both local projects for solidarity and national and international human rights work show that the world is seeking ways to rethink justice, the balance of material, cultural and spiritual wealth, and our ways of living and creating together.

That is why ATD Fourth World is reaffirming the declaration made by Fr. Joseph Wresinski<sup>2</sup> on October 17, 1987,<sup>3</sup> and that has since been publicly inscribed in 37 locations around the world.

*“Wherever men and women are condemned to live in extreme poverty,  
human rights are violated.  
To come together to ensure that these rights be respected is our solemn duty.”*  
Fr. Joseph Wresinski

<sup>1</sup> This document is based on a two-year evaluation and planning process undertaken by members of ATD Fourth World at a grassroots level in each country, and then at an international working session.

<sup>2</sup> Wresinski (1917-88) was the founder of ATD Fourth World.

<sup>3</sup> In a call to action in Paris at the Plaza of Liberties and Human Rights.

Today, this declaration continues to call on individuals to:

**Come together** with people living in extreme poverty to ensure that all human rights be respected. Like all people, they cannot—alone—fully exercise their right to keep their families together and in so doing to contribute to the well-being of their communities and nations. Being able to exercise fundamental rights, creating links with other people to strive together toward more freedom for all, more responsibility, and more solidarity—this is what is at stake for the whole of our human community.

**Come together** to change our societies' common preconception that people living in poverty are the only ones who need to change. We need to pool our ideas and creativity to take on the challenge of individual and joint change. No one can free themselves; no one can free others. Only together can we free our world from social injustice.

**Come together** to make this declaration heard, to inscribe it in our nations' constitutions and in the charters of our international institutions.

The International Movement ATD Fourth World maintains links with people and associations in 155 countries. It brings together people from all walks of life, starting with people in extreme poverty, through cultural activities and the defence of human rights, and is active in 29 countries on five continents. See online at [www.atd-fourthworld.org](http://www.atd-fourthworld.org)

Striving Together to End Poverty requires a genuine contract based on the daily commitment and participation of each person: young people, children and, above all, those living in situations of extreme poverty and social exclusion.

Strengthened by the wealth of these commitments, we want to innovate, mobilize, create pilot projects, and initiate partnerships based on **five commitments** for 2008-2012.

## Coming together on a road to peace, beginning with people struggling against extreme poverty

*In Senegal:* A collective action is enabling children from very disadvantaged families who were not declared at birth to be officially registered.

*In Haiti:* A health awareness project is contributing to the creation of a policy for universal access to health care and education, which will rely on both institutional as well as urban and rural community resources.

*In Europe:* The continuing development of the Fourth World People's Universities is enabling people living in poverty and citizens from other backgrounds to meet on a regular basis. They provide a place where participants can think and learn together by drawing first and foremost on the experience of those who battle on a daily basis to have their rights and dignity respected.

Is it possible to live in peace when others—nearby or thousands of miles away—endure social inequalities, family displacement and insecurity, disposing at best of the bare minimum for survival, with no means to break the vicious cycle of injustice and isolation? It is urgent to take a step towards people in extreme poverty and take on the challenge of living, working and learning together in order to build a world of solidarity where each person is respected and their dignity is recognized. These encounters can lead to peace in neighborhoods, villages and countries, and show us a road to the peace that people in poverty carry within themselves and that the world needs to learn about.

**The challenge** is to reinforce and give visibility to the growing group of people who, generation after generation, consider extreme poverty a scandal and work in the spirit of the declaration made on October 17th, the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. This day is an opportunity to come together publicly—locally, nationally and internationally—with all those already acting to rid the world of social injustice, and all those who want to join them.

*Internationally:* Efforts to be present alongside families living in unacceptable conditions due to poverty are being reinforced. Social and cultural pilot projects are being developed to support every family to have the means and resources for family life.

*Internationally:* Links are being strengthened with and between the 3000 correspondents from 100 countries who make up the "Permanent Forum on Extreme Poverty in the World." Its Letter to Friends Around The World is addressed to people and associations acting in their own ways, and in their own personal and professional spheres, for a world without poverty.

## Renewing our work on knowledge and understanding, beginning with the experience of those living in extreme poverty, in order to take on and challenge the major issues in our societies and the world

The determination to free our societies from extreme poverty and exclusion requires an ongoing collective effort with people living in these situations to understand what it is necessary to be and to do so that each person can live as a human being among others. This kind of knowledge recognizes each person with equal dignity. It enables us to live out and build a culture of encounters and to bring people together on the road to peace. The people who endure extreme poverty have a wealth of unmined knowledge. They are the primary actors in building a store of shared knowledge which would be a valuable resource for creating a world based on human rights.

**The challenge** is to merge different forms of knowledge: to recognize and take into account the knowledge gained in resisting poverty on equal footing with other forms of knowledge. In doing so, we can better address the crises of our era and contribute to shaping an economy based on knowledge that prepares a common future for all.

*Internationally:* Training and development are elaborated, whenever possible, within a process which blends the theoretical, practical and experiential knowledge of professionals, others active in social and cultural fields, and people with direct experience of poverty.

*In Thailand:* Partnership training programmes are being developed with artists and young people from deprived neighbourhoods. A research partnership with Unesco will be focusing on how children understand poverty and Human Rights, as part of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

*Internationally:* An active participation in consultations launched by the United Nations Council on Human Rights is contributing to the improvement of the Draft Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights before its possible adoption at the end of 2009. Within this project, it has been recognised that "the implementation of policies and programmes [for the eradication of extreme poverty] without the assistance of people [living in extreme poverty] and their associations constitutes a violation of the right to participate in public affairs."

## Nurturing and making known the ethical choices that guide fundraising and budgeting

The current situation of development work and the struggle against social exclusion calls for leading a high-priority campaign to change the ways we think of funding. The world needs an ethic where every fundraising appeal is an invitation to make a commitment, and where budgetary needs are defined with the participation of the populations concerned. We need projects with ambitious means at the service of ending the exclusion of people in extreme poverty.

**The challenge** is to provoke a debate on the balance of wealth and skills in market economies, public sector economics and among neighbors.

*In the Philippines:* The "Creative HEARTS" campaign is being initiated. It aims to create and sell artistic works produced through the collaboration of artists and people living in severe poverty. The profits will go to ATD Fourth World whilst the project will also develop the country's network of supporters. An introductory programme to computing is being put into place with young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods.



*In France:* The enforcement of rights and the associated legal recourses will continue to be pursued when intolerable situations of poverty require it. The effectiveness of the Right to Housing on Demand law<sup>1</sup>, enacted in 2007, is the challenge now being taken up, in particular through the creation of Committees for Upholding Rights, initiated with various partners.

<sup>1</sup> This law allows homeless or ill-housed persons to seek legal redress, first through a mediation process, then through the courts if necessary.

Following on from the Call to Action, the mobilisation in defense of human rights continues with the Call to Action: Striving Together to End Poverty, which everyone is invited to sign online at [www.oct17.org](http://www.oct17.org).

## Supporting young people in their projects, particularly those young people who have the least freedom

*In Burkina Faso:* Young people on the street will continue to be supported in their willingness to learn and to get back in touch with their families.

*In Europe:* During the European Year for Combating Poverty and Exclusion in 2010, we will stress the importance of creating common projects which bring together young people with very different lives and experiences.

Young people carry the worries, challenges and hopes of today and tomorrow. Many thirst for change and social justice. Some know nothing more of the planet than their neighborhood or village. Their dreams can turn into anger when no one believes in them. Other young people have opportunities to learn and question the imbalance in economic growth that enriches a few by taking from many and by consuming the planet's resources

**The challenge** is for young people from all backgrounds to get to know one another and to look together for meaning in their lives, harnessing their energy for building a more fair society. They await the trust and involvement of adults who can give them the means to accomplish this.

## Sharing culture, art, beauty and creative expression for the development of each person and population

*In several African countries:* Young people and adults are pursuing their involvement in skills and knowledge-sharing projects, and in joint community projects.

*In several Latin American countries:* Educational initiatives are being carried out. In Peru and Guatemala, school partnerships are aiming to achieve quality education through a dialogue between the state, teachers, children and their parents.

Many forms of culture have become consumer goods, sold or distributed with what are often good intentions, but usually on a one-way street. We need reciprocal creativity to enrich our diversity. Because art can change the way people see the world, putting an end to poverty requires the creative expressions of people in extreme poverty and artists, as well as collective art to express that we belong to a single human race.

**The challenge** is to offer the best of culture and knowledge to those who have the least access to humanity's cultural heritage. It is also to respond to families in deep poverty who call out for the right to learn, be cultivated and express themselves as others do, at the same time as getting training and employment to succeed in life.

*In the USA:* An international session on art and creativity will take place, demonstrating that access to culture in all its forms enables people from very different social backgrounds to come together. This will be done through exploring the very varied forms of artistic expression present in the Appalachians, and especially through the participation of the poorest in this expression (music, patchwork, instrument making, sculpture etc.).

*In Madagascar:* A pilot project is being set up in partnership with local business to provide access for young people and adults to new technologies, decent work, and computer training. A Malagasy literacy software programme is being created. And a traditional crafts cooperative, that pays its workers and sells their products within a fair trade relationship, is being set up. This project, like others, demonstrates that economics can serve to restore dignity, not the reverse.

*“Recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.”*

Preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948

# STRIVING TOGETHER TO END POVERTY

"WHEREVER MEN AND WOMEN ARE CONDEMNED TO LIVE IN EXTREME POVERTY, HUMAN RIGHTS ARE VIOLATED.

TO COME TOGETHER TO ENSURE THAT THESE RIGHTS BE RESPECTED IS OUR SOLEMN DUTY."

Father Joseph Wresinski

I agree with this declaration - engraved on the Trocadero Plaza of Human Rights\* (Paris, France) on October 17, 1987 - and feel part of this growing social movement to overcome persistent poverty that brings together human rights defenders from all countries.

\* Site where the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was signed on December 10, 1948.

Signature

Date

Last Name:

First Name:

Address/P.O. Box:

City/Town:

Post/Zip Code:  Country:

(if applicable)

E-mail:

Telephone\*:  Occupation\*:

Your address will not be shared, exchanged or sold.

*\*optional*

I would like to:

- Distribute this declaration. Please send me \_\_\_\_ copies.
- Receive information on how I can do more.
- Support this declaration financially.
- I do **not** want my name, occupation, city/town, and country to appear on the site: [www.oct17.org](http://www.oct17.org)  
(All other information remains confidential.)

## Comment

Please tell us what has motivated you to sign this declaration, so that it may encourage all those who struggle against extreme poverty. (optional)

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I do **not** want this comment posted on [www.oct17.org](http://www.oct17.org)

# STRIVING TOGETHER TO END POVERTY

## A STEP Towards Human Rights and Peace for All

On October 17, 1987, this declaration (see reverse side) - engraved on the Plaza of Human Rights and Liberties (Paris, France) - inaugurated the first World Day to Overcome Extreme Poverty, recognized by the United Nations as the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty in 1992.

In 2006-2007, over 150,000 people signed the "Call to Action" through the campaign "Ending Extreme Poverty, a Road to Peace", thus revealing a social movement of diverse individuals and groups around the world who agree that extreme poverty is a violation of human rights, and who want to come together to ensure that these rights be respected.

This social movement has led to an ongoing mobilization to strive together to end poverty, an essential step towards human rights and peace for all.

Each year, October 17th will be an opportunity to make public - locally, nationally, and internationally - the growing number of people around the world who agree with this declaration and who work in their own way towards its realization.

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If you signed the Call to Action, it is not necessary to sign this declaration because your voice has already been counted. However, please do distribute it as widely as possible! It can be signed on-line at [www.oct17.org](http://www.oct17.org) or sent by post to: October 17th Team, ATD Fourth World, 107 Avenue du Général Leclerc, 95480 Pierrelaye, France.

Let's STEP up to the challenge together!

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*"Thousands of people have united with those living in extreme poverty, and together they struggle silently to end it. It's time for the world to know that we need the poorest people too."*

*"Nobody knows the potential of a society of individuals who are really equal in rights, but I believe that its creation would be an extraordinary step in the right direction!"*

*"[I believe] that the advancement of a human being should be seen as the fulfillment of his or her potential. Let's bury the gap between the rich and the poor."*

*"[We must] consider the poorest people as the first to take action, as human beings and not as objects of charity."*

*"If I don't start to fight against poverty myself, why will my neighbor do it? I can't demand that the state work with the poorest people if I don't start to do it at my own level."*

*"We are perhaps not directly to blame for the exclusion of millions of human beings, but we can become the agents of their inclusion."*

*"The sea bed consists of millions of little grains; without their unity the sea would not be as it is. We must unite our forces."*

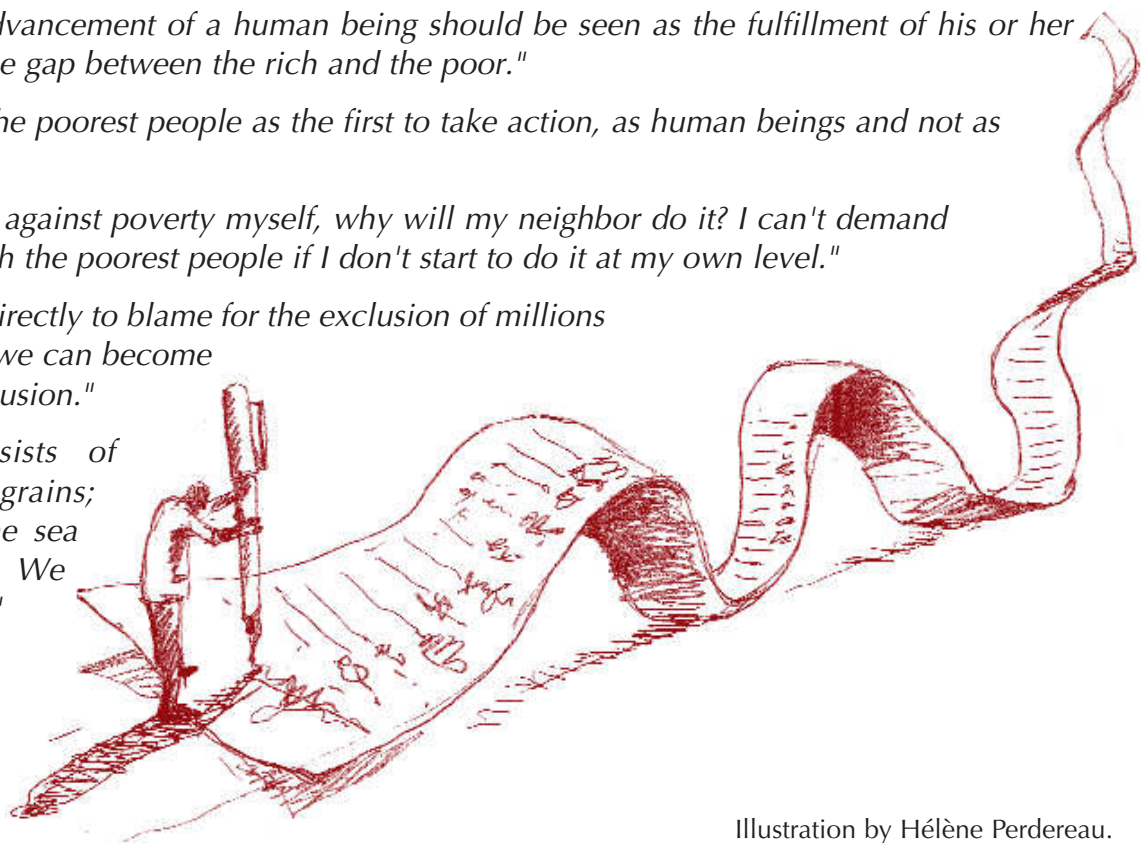


Illustration by H el ene Perdereau.

## Text of the General Assembly of the International Movement ATD Fourth World

All human beings, regardless of their place in society, are equal in dignity, which must be respected, not violated by anyone for any reason. Equal dignity is the basis for fundamental rights especially the right to freedom of expression, to live as a family, to housing, to health care, and to work. Those who live in extreme poverty are the first victims of the violation of human rights.

Keenly aware of the world's long history of human suffering and hope, Father Joseph Wresinski, born in extreme poverty himself, founded the International Movement ATD Fourth World in 1957 with families from the homeless camp of Noisy-le-Grand (France) and others who joined them. His belief that "Every person is a chance for humanity" is a source of inspiration for many people all over the world.

Injustice, powerlessness, shame, humiliation, and exclusion as experienced by those living in extreme poverty must not be tolerated. Our priority is to reach out to the poorest and most ignored people, be alongside them, and create links with them and between them. Ensuring that those with the hardest life are at the heart of all projects and listening to the dreams and aspirations they have for themselves and their children, we can reach a mutual understanding. When the most excluded people can contribute their knowledge and experience to society as equals, extreme poverty will be overcome.

ATD Fourth World welcomes everyone. It unites people whatever their origin, social status, culture or beliefs to fight against poverty. In building trust, solidarity and friendship, all have a place to realize their full and best potential. Working together and learning from each other, everyone is free to express themselves without being judged. The Movement develops partnerships at all levels of society.

It was founded with the conviction that people have created the conditions for extreme poverty and social exclusion. Therefore, a long-term commitment is needed to ensure that no one is left behind. Embracing such a responsibility is a source of pride for everyone.

As long as the power of money is the primary value, the world will be menaced by poverty and violence. If humanity is our primary value, the world will be transformed and we can all enjoy peace. October 17, the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, inaugurated by ATD Fourth World in 1987 and recognized by the United Nations since 1992, annually presents this on-going challenge:

*"Wherever men and women are condemned to live in extreme poverty, Human Rights are violated. To come together to ensure that these rights be respected is our solemn duty."*

Father Joseph Wresinski

