

# LETTER TO FRIENDS AROUND THE WORLD

Permanent Forum on Extreme Poverty in the World



International Movement ATD Fourth World  
107, avenue du Général Leclerc - 95480 Pierrelaye - France

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## Editorial

### Calling on others!

The thread that binds together the contributions to this *Letter* is "We". It reflects the determination and need to unite to take action against intolerable exclusion and humiliation. When you are taking action to enable people living in poverty to demonstrate their dignity and their aspiration for freedom, you have to **call on others** for help: *"Our project is certainly ambitious, but we must do something if we want to get this population out of extreme poverty. We also know that we cannot reach our objective alone."*

**Calling on others** means opening up and broadening your approach to include other horizons, other ways of learning, other connections: *"With five young people under 30 years of age, we work hand in hand on a mini-library project in a poor neighborhood. The town hall is giving us furniture, and the National Library, the Portuguese Cultural Center, and Caritas Cape Verde gave us books."* *"We welcome prisoners transferred from traditional prisons. We focus on promoting human qualities and on building self-confidence and self-discipline. There is no need for prison guards; they are replaced by the whole community of prisoners and staff."*

**Calling on others** means wanting to place apparently modest actions at the heart of national and international policies: *"This initiative was incorporated into the national education authority's*

*curriculum for nursery school education."* *"About 60 women of all ages take it in turns to look after 60 children, on a voluntary basis. The school fees are paid each month by the parents... The initiative is supported by Unesco, Unicef and Ficemea."*

**Calling on others** means seeking to adopt an approach looking to the future: *"We like what we do but our project, which has been run intuitively up until now, needs more structure. So I am eager to exchange ideas on this subject so that we can improve the services we offer and ensure that they will continue."* *"I realised that we're part of a people across the world who have the same hopes, the same deprivations, the same suffering, but also the same resistance. I understood that if we wanted to improve our lives, it was necessary for us to get involved as well and receive training."*

**Calling on others** means having the humility to ask those who are excluded for the solution that will lead to an encounter: *"Please, accept that I help you."*

After the campaign entitled "Ending Extreme Poverty, a Road to Peace" (see *Letter to Friends* no. 68), the attached declaration **Striving Together to End Poverty towards Peace** (STEPP) will demonstrate, from one 17th October to the next, that an increasing number of men and women want to be able to count on each other in their search for justice and fraternity. Let's hope more and more people will STEPP up to the challenge and join us.

HUGUETTE REDEGELD  
VICE PRESIDENT

### • "Finding The Way"

"Whenever I see homeless people, I would like to help them, but I always wonder first: How can I do it without hurting them? One day I met an older lady who was sitting at the doorstep of the grocery store at the entry of the Mackay Hospital in Taipei. She didn't have family to turn to for help. At that time I couldn't understand why my simple question: 'Do you have family?' hurt her so much that she burst out in tears.

After that experience I didn't dare to talk or act as freely with people living in difficult situations, because I was

afraid that I would hurt them. After several months of thinking about it, I discovered how to approach them. Today, if I see an older woman, I say to her: *'Auntie, please allow me to help you, because I wish I could do the same for my mother. This situation is not your fault; you don't have a choice. As soon as I saw you, I couldn't help but remember the respect I owe my mother, but unfortunately she has passed away. My heart is full of regrets because now it is too late to show her my respect, as she is no longer with us. Please, accept that I help you, so that it will help me overcome my regrets.'*

Ms. AIZHEN, TAIWAN

- **"A few drops of water for the sweat of our brow"**

"In Togo, access to drinking water is considered relatively good in cities. However, in rural areas, access to clean water and to sanitation services is limited. In these areas, the habitants use river water, traditional wells, ponds and other means to get water.

In several villages situated in the Plateau region, the situation is disastrous, particularly concerning health and education. Men and women of good will joined together to create the NGO 'ADHD' (Rural Self-Promotion for Sustainable Human Development). The objective of this organization is to work to end extreme poverty among the population through four activity areas: agriculture, health, education, and the environment. Our strategy for reaching this objective is: providing the population with water by constructing wells, training community health agents, setting up village pharmacies, organizing rural habitants into cooperatives, supervising these cooperatives, planting trees in areas affected by deforestation, and promoting the education of girls, literacy for the rural population and the fight against AIDS. The activities that we have begun are made possible thanks to contributions from association members, donations made by honorary members, and financial support from certain partners who know the Plateau region well.

*Example of how we go about constructing wells:*  
A participative diagnostic enables the population to identify its problems, prioritize and analyze them, search for realistic solutions, and incorporate these solutions into the village's plan of action. Before beginning the construction of a well, two meetings

- **"We keep going each day"**

"Our project [Families from the South and SOS Children] can be summed up as in-depth support of families from sub-Saharan Africa, most of whom arrive here through the unfortunate phenomenon of illegal immigration. The children who were born in Morocco do not have an official status and their parents' lack of means makes the struggle for survival terrible and even impossible. They have no roof over their heads, no access to health care and nourishment, and the children cannot be enrolled at school. On top of these problems, there is a lack of support in public opinion. It needs to be said: racism is still wreaking havoc. With the means that we have, we are trying to base our work on the following main priorities: access to health care, education, nourishment, hygiene, and above all raising awareness among the population and the government to reduce these problems. But there's no reason to give up. We are continuing our noble fight.

Raising awareness among these families is very important too. We must let them know that their 'mistake' was to believe that Europe is a party; they had no reason to dream that it would be. We try to convince them to give up on immigrating. That's why we created a project helping people return home, with the support of volunteer workers. We organize the children's first life instruction classes, like mobile child care centres and operations like bread for all and a roof for all. We keep going each day."

*DIOP M., MOROCCO*

take place with the population. The NGO ADHD organizes the population into groups of workers. People from all social classes in the village participate: the men take care of digging, women and girls transport local materials to the work site (sand, gravel), and elderly people captivate the workers through stories, tales and legends.

Our project is certainly ambitious, but we must do something if we want to get this population out of extreme poverty. We also know that we cannot reach our objective alone. We are counting on everyone's generosity and solidarity."

*FRÉDÉRIC D., TOGO*



- **"We focus on promoting human qualities"**

"I am sending you news of the inauguration of the Social Reintegration Center run by APAC (Association for the Protection of and Assistance to Prisoners) in Santa Luzia. About 200 people attended. It was very moving. It was really the crowning achievement of six years of hard work. And the beginning of many challenging years ahead.

In the APAC centers, we welcome prisoners transferred from traditional prisons. We focus on promoting human qualities and on building self-confidence and self-discipline. There is no need for prison guards; they are replaced by the whole community of prisoners and staff.



We provide professional training courses and psychological accompaniment. The keys to the prison are in the prisoners' hands. The security is ensured by unarmed employees, and internal discipline is ensured by a council made up of prisoners.

There are already 15 APAC centers in the state of Minas Gerais, in Brazil, and another 54 are under construction. The results are excellent: 3% commit a second offence, compared to 85% in the other Brazilian prisons."

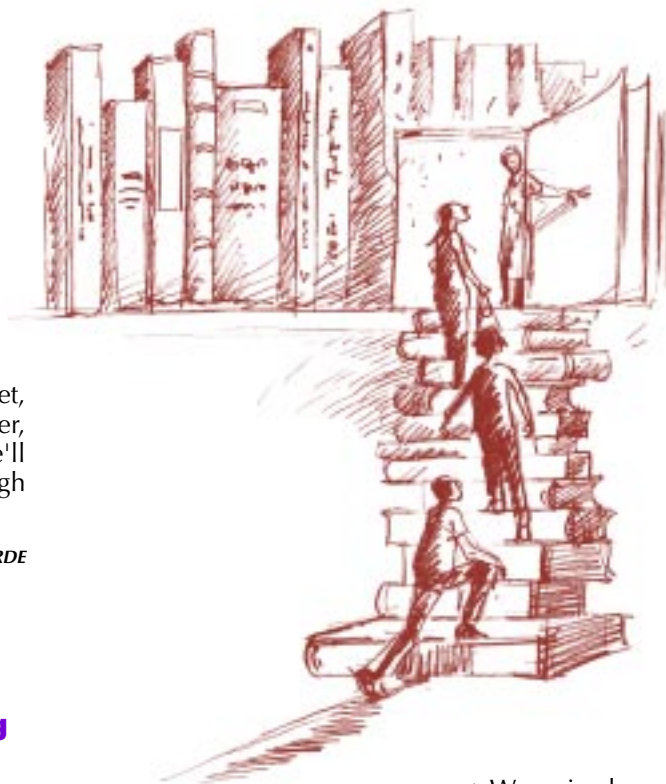
*FÁBIO A., BRAZIL*

• **"Education is the cornerstone of development"**

"For me, the most extreme poverty is neither material nor financial; it is mental. And each of us should work to eradicate it. That's what I try to do in the field that interests me the most: education. With five young people under 30 years of age, we work hand in hand on a mini-library project in a poor neighborhood of Tarrafal (coastal city). Our objective is to give the most disadvantaged people better access to information.

The town hall is giving us furniture, which is not ready yet, and the National Library, the Portuguese Cultural Center, and Caritas Cape Verde gave us books. We hope that we'll be able to open it to the public and to middle and high school students soon."

ANTÓNIO C., CAPE VERDE



• **"We are guided by the thirst for learning that our courageous students show"**

"Your message gives us encouragement to continue our work. It is wonderful to have gathered 160,000 signatures. I am sure that the human quality of the comments given is immeasurable. A long chain of love."

*With these words, a man from the Commonwealth of Dominica begins the comment he wrote when he signed the Call to Action (see Letter No. 68). He continues:*

"With a team of local volunteers, I run activities promoting education and culture. Extreme poverty does exist in Dominica. In the last few years, there have been more and more 'homeless' people in the streets of the capital, Roseau. It's a phenomenon that goes hand in hand with economic development, particularly tourism, which encourages the most fragile people to hold their hand out instead of taking themselves in hand. Roseau has become a picturesque port of call for cruise ships, with its local merchants, restaurants and...its beggars.

So we decided to take action to strengthen the social ties weakened by the modern world. Since September 2007, we have been organizing free film showings in villages. Everyone meets up there. They talk, laugh and spend time together. The African Film Festival, organized jointly with the French Alliance, was a big success. *'The poorest people are the ones who need to dream the most.'*

We have also noticed that illiteracy is a cause of increasing poverty here. Too many Dominicans don't know how to read and write correctly. The 30 to 50-year-olds are particularly affected by a lack of education. How many times have I heard my brothers and sisters call themselves 'stupid' because they don't know how to read or write? So, with some local support, I started an education program last September for adults in the Grand Fond village, in the Southeast of the island. The whole village was invited to get involved:

- ⇒ Announcements were made in the different churches in the village. The children made signs.
- ⇒ Teachers and students were recruited by the village residents, some of whom went door-to-door to explain the project to each family.
- ⇒ Classrooms (and electricity) were made available by the town council.

- ⇒ We raised awareness among illiterate parents; they are unable to check on and help their children with their studies = vicious cycle of exclusion from generation to generation.
- ⇒ Four elementary school teachers accepted to volunteer as instructors.
- ⇒ The 35 students are responsible for the up-keep of the classrooms and for handling the material (class keys, chalk, books, notebooks...)
- ⇒ The youngest student is 16 years old and the eldest is 78.

Today, we hold seven classes a week with four levels of instruction. We work on reading and writing of course, but also on math, handling money, geography and history. We are guided by the thirst for learning that our courageous students show.

We like what we do, but our project, which has been run intuitively up until now, needs more structure. So I am eager to exchange ideas on this subject so that we can improve the services we offer and ensure that they will continue. Perhaps you know how I can become part of international anti-poverty networks that focus on culture and education."

NICOLAS O., COMMONWEALTH OF DOMINICA



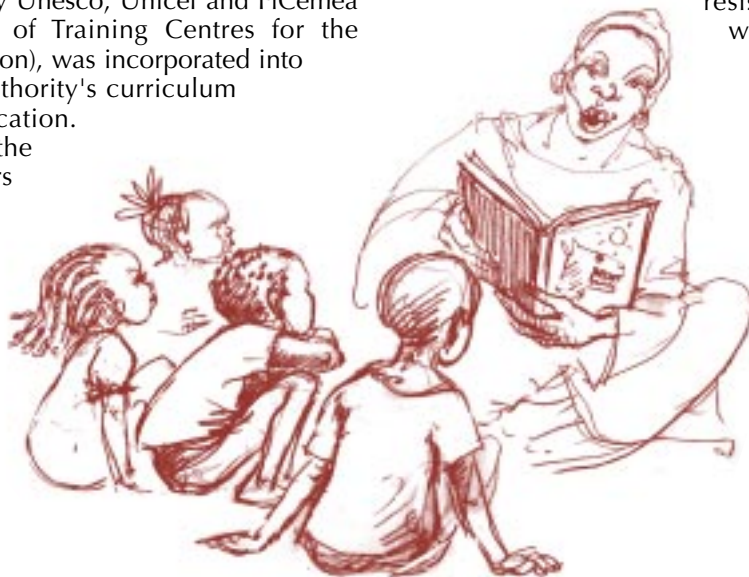
• **"These children achieve better results"**

"The 'clos d'enfants' ('children's space') project began in Bamako, capital of Mali, in 1997. It's an alternative solution for children aged 3 to 6. Diakit  O.F. is president of the women's association called Jigiya ('support' in the bambara language). This is what she says: *'I live in a lively neighbourhood, and used to see little children spending the day next to their mother, in the markets and on the streets.'* Today 45 children are cared for by around 15 women with specialised training in looking after young children, paid by the government.

Samantara was the first Malian village to launch this project. In this village, about 60 women of all ages take it in turns in groups of five to look after 60 children. Most of them are illiterate mothers who work on a voluntary basis for one week every three months. Stories, songs, dances and games taken from the local culture form part of their training. The trainee child carers also receive training in concepts such as hygiene, nutrition and education of young children, and learn how to make toys using salvaged materials. *'We don't prepare the children for reading and writing as one would in a conventional nursery school. We stimulate them by means of non-basic subjects and we teach them how to behave properly in society,'* summarizes Rama S., one of the project participants.

In Samantara last October, the first class to leave (11 boys and 5 girls) successfully joined the village primary school. *'These children are bright and active. They achieve better results than children who go through the conventional system!'* confirms Mohammed D., the school headmaster. As for the school fees paid each month by the parents, on average they are ten times lower in the 'clos'. In 2001, this initiative, supported by Unesco, Unicef and FiCemea (International Federation of Training Centres for the Promotion of New Education), was incorporated into the national education authority's curriculum for nursery school education. Sixty 'clos' created by the government, local mayors and women's associations now exist throughout the country. 1500 children leave the 'clos' every year."

FOUSS NI T. F., MALI



• **"It was important for us to get involved as well and receive training"**

*Last 17 October, an international gathering took place at the City Hall in Paris (France), bringing people together from towns and villages across the world that have a replica of the Commemorative Stone in honour of the victims of extreme poverty. Here is a short extract of what Cecile R. said during that gathering.*

"I lived in extreme poverty. I belonged to what people call the Travelling community (I'm Gipsy) and I believed that Travellers were the only ones who were poor. I had the chance to go to school which helped me to see that I could do other things, but I didn't see how. Do-gooders would come to us, stay a few days and then disappear after having promised us the world.

At the heart of ATD Fourth World, which I discovered in 1974, I didn't find do-gooders, but people who talked about rights and who said: *'Cecile, you have something to say. People like you have experience and have something to say. We should build something different together.'* I understood but I was still suspicious.

I heard Fr. Joseph on 17 October 1977, during an international gathering. He addressed people like me and said: *'You are the key people in charge of your future, the key people to lead the struggle, together with others, to put an end to the injustice that you experience.'*

That day was a turning point for me. I said to myself: *'He's talking about me. He's saying, 'Cecile, get involved!'* And that's when my adventure started and I realised that we're part of a people across the world who have the same hopes, the same deprivations, the same suffering, but also the same resistance. I understood that if we wanted to improve our lives, if we wanted to learn together, if we wanted the world to learn from us, it was necessary for us to get involved as well and receive training."

CECILE R., FRANCE

The "Permanent Forum on Extreme Poverty in the World" 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 Permanent Forum 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: [permanent.forum@atd-fourthworld.org](mailto:permanent.forum@atd-fourthworld.org) Internet : [www.atd-fourthworld.org](http://www.atd-fourthworld.org) Subscription \$8/8 € per annum - Support subscription: \$10/10 € per annum.

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**H L NE PERDEREAU'S**  
COMMITMENT IS TO  
ILLUSTRATE THE TEXTS  
OF THE LETTER  
ON A FREE-TIME BASIS

PAGE SETUP:  
LYDIE ROUFFET