



6 - 7 February 2004
Warsaw University

An overview of the meeting

Acting Together for a Europe of Dignity for All



A European meeting organised by the International Movement ATD Fourth World, with the support of Professor Andrzej Zoll, *Commissioner for Human Rights in Poland*, the European Economic and Social Committee, and Warsaw University.

An essential and necessary contribution to the construction of Europe

As Europe continues to develop, large numbers of people are left behind and are living in poverty. These men, women, young people and families are engaged in a daily struggle to survive and to ensure that their dignity and the dignity of those close to them is respected. Recognizing their courage and the value of their experiences can help us develop an understanding of what's required in order to ensure that everybody has access to their fundamental rights and can make an active contribution to society.

Following on from similar meetings organised regularly since 1989 with the European Economic and Social Committee in Brussels, the Warsaw meeting created opportunities for a genuine dialogue between people from European countries with very different horizons, in terms of their country of origin, social environment and responsibilities. This meeting constituted the Eighth European Conference of the Fourth World People's Universities.

The 300 participants at the meeting came together to participate in a dialogue, with the knowledge that they share a responsibility to eradicate poverty and social exclusion and to work to build inclusive societies that respect the dignity of all their members. By learning to dialogue with people from very different backgrounds – including those people whose voices are often dismissed or ignored – participants at the Warsaw meeting reaffirmed their commitment to building an inclusive Europe and made an original and necessary contribution to this process. They expressed:

- how and in what manner each person contributes to ensuring that everyone's dignity is respected;
- the extent to which it is necessary to gain the commitment and mobilisation of everyone so that European citizens and peoples can live together in harmony;
- the ambitions we share for Europe and its inhabitants;
- how the experience and participation of people living in poverty is essential and provides an opportunity for promoting the advancement of democracy in Europe and in the wider world.

The European Meeting in Warsaw was held under the auspices of

Aleksander Kwaśniewski

President of the Republic of Poland

and

Walter Schwimmer

Secretary General of the Council of Europe

and members of the Committee of Support

Bronisław Geremek, José-Maria Gil-Robles, Kardynał Józef Glemp, Arpad Göncz, Jacek Kuroń, Federico Mayor, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Andrei Plesu, Mary Robinson, Mario Soares, Petar Stoyanov, and Kardynał Miloslav Vlk.

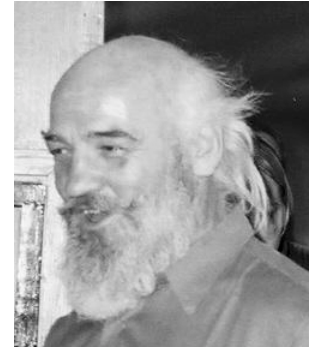
Countries represented

Belgique, België, Belgium • Česká Republika, Czech Republic • Deutschland, Germany • España, Spain • France • Ireland, Eire • Italia, Italy • Luxembourg, Luxemburg • Magyarország, Hungary • Nederland, Netherlands • Polska, Poland • România, Romania • Россия, Russia • Schweiz, Suisse, Svizzera, Switzerland • Slovenská Republika, Slovakia • United Kingdom

From dictionary definitions to real-life contexts



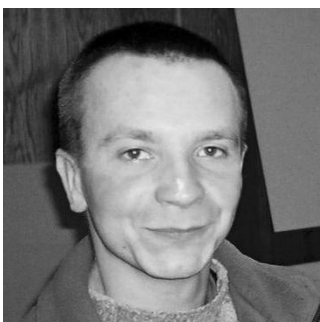
«House» launched the organiser, «Dom» carried on a Polish delegate who was sitting in the first row. «Maison,» hurled a group of French, proud they got the meaning. «Casa,» launched Helena. We were all applauding except Helena who was not happy with it. She took a photograph from her wallet. A house is not just a word in a dictionary but a reality of tarpaulin and wood that she fitted out herself. That was «her» house she proudly showed everyone. The house for her children, «enfants», «Dziecko», we all admired in the photo passing round.



We understood each other without saying a word. The common branches were quickly found on the tree drawn on the wall: «solidarity», a word easily understood by people familiar with what home and family life means and by those sharing the same problems. A short while ago, they also learned how to say words such as «to eat», «to drink» in different languages, knowing their significance too. The word «dignity» was also easily understood, providing you have a home and a family and are not looked down on by others. Then it is no longer an abstract word but something you have or are deprived of, regardless of your nationality whether Polish, French, German, Swiss or Dutch.



This is Europe, being built more effectively here in this Warsaw language workshop than in those international conferences where words are spilled out by an army of translators but where no one's checking that everybody understands the real life consequences of them. No, Europe cannot be summed up by figures, ideas and principles, rather it is embodied in concrete, wood or brick houses, where families meet and those thousand little gestures of solidarity counter a cruel world which has no compassion for the poor and weak.



Perhaps, if the world's leaders exchanged photographs like the ATD Fourth World delegates in Warsaw, they would understand better. The words «war», «poverty», «recession», «unemployment» and «health» would then have a new face, that of the men, women and children who make up what is called «Europe» and all their suffering.





This language workshop was only one of the meeting places of the ATD Fourth World's conference in Warsaw, the 6th and 7th of February 2004.

Here with words, somewhere else with small pieces of metal or dances and music, everyone getting to know each other, being brought closer by their life experiences, their sadnesses and their quest for recognition, so that in the end differences and mere words were no longer barriers.



The first of the public sessions to take place in the vast and imposing auditorium of Warsaw University, began with one «hello» ten minutes long. To say «hello» in all languages takes time. Some participants, like the two representatives from a «Romany» community preferred to say hello singing, while others were shouting out words of joy and welcome.



This sincere and moving hello laid the foundation from which all the rest followed. It is difficult to pin-point just one thing from such a conference, so different, as it was, from any other. Do we focus on the hope of those who sang «our children will find love, sun and bread tomorrow». Or on John who said, «I learn so much by really listening»? Do we remember Robert's message: «Never give up on yourself» or Teresa for whom «children are the essential of life»? Do we think of Freddy who said that: «in today's society, unless you produce something you're excluded», or Antonio who wanted recognition that even in deep poverty «we are citizens like everyone else»? Or Piet who said that «support must be based on mutual trust»?



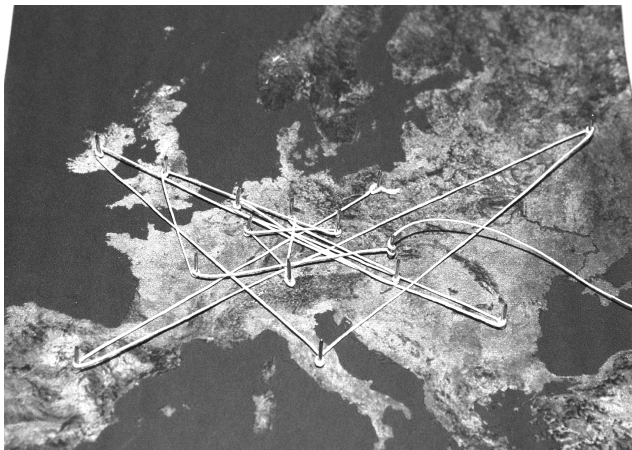
Each of these thousands of declarations are equally valuable. In this report, we will let many people have a say. In Warsaw, each word, each declaration was endowed with a strength and richness because the experience of life matured each one of them.



Europe for all of us by all of us

The Warsaw meeting had one key goal – *“to act together for one Europe and the dignity of all”*. Throughout, the emphasis was put on meeting others. Around 100 students were brought in to assist in exchanges and translate conversations. Eleven workshops were run where everyone had the opportunity to have their say. Dozens of contributions from participants were passed around.

The participants’ willingness to really get to know each other was apparent from day one, in the words of welcome in the opening speeches by each delegation – from France, Romania, Luxembourg, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Poland, Slovakia, the Netherlands, Ireland, the Czech Republic, Belgium, Spain, Germany, Italy, Hungary, Russia and all of the other countries we may have forgotten to mention. *“Though so many countries are absent,”* said Louis Join-Lambert, organiser of the Warsaw meeting with the ATD Kielce group and a large number of other European volunteers. *“We believe the friendships and lasting commitments that have been made will continue to support us.”*



Open forums which are creating a new culture

“Our meeting,” concluded Eugen Brand, Director General of the International Movement ATD Fourth World, *“commits us to creating forums that are open to all, from university graduates to people living on the street or in state-run homes. Forums that are created by men and by women, able to unite, to share with their souls and their consciences, freely and with all of their strength. Men and women who are able to turn the uselessness, injustice and suffering of unemployment around, to use the time for cultural, artistic and spiritual creativity, fundamental levers in the fight for the right to work that is shared by all.”*

Europe, which is *“haunted by security issues”* must take a bold step and institute the most vital of security measures, *“that of agreeing to forge links with others so as to build this new culture of meeting together”*. A goal to which Jérôme Vignon, representative of the European Commission responded as follows: *“We’ll never find out what freedom means if we don’t learn from those who’ve had their freedom taken away from them. We’ll never know what solidarity means if we don’t learn from those who have no family and no home, and really know what it’s like to have basic securities snatched away from them.”*

Building Europe is also about meeting to exchange ideas, to invent new forums for debate, like those of the European Fourth World People’s Universities described by Roger Briesch, President of the European Social and Economic Committee. They *“encourage dialogue which is so important, between people living in poverty and suffering social exclusion, and other citizens from all walks of life, actively engaged in the fight against intolerance and for human dignity, justice, and social progress for all.”*

For a society that is whole

The University of Warsaw has played host to some of the most eminent people in the world – Pope John Paul II, the Dalai Lama, and many famous politicians and eminent scientists.

However, in the view of Piotr Wrieglenski, the University Rector, *“never has such an important issue been examined as the one we are looking into today.”*

The Europe that is in the process of being built, and of which Poland has chosen to be a part, will not become a reality if it is not a Europe for all, a Europe where each and every one of us *“however rich, whatever religion, whatever colour, should feel free and retain his or her dignity.”*

This Europe, according to Elzbieta Kauch, ATD Fourth World activist in Kielce, belongs to all European citizens. *“We get together,”* she says, *“because we feel responsible for the future, the future of those around us, and of Europe.”* She adds that we have to: *“ensure that in the new integrated Europe, there is an alliance between those who are socially excluded and those who are not.”*

ATD Fourth World helps to break down barriers. We are reminded by Louis Join-Lambert that from the time of the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the international movement ATD Fourth World has sought and found people who consider that abandoning the weakest members of society is untenable. *“The movement is based on people, in Madrid, in London, in Dôle, and everywhere else in Europe and throughout the world, whose family links are subjected to the strains of grinding poverty and social exclusion. It is also based on citizens who believe that accepting social exclusion means accepting that every day society will become more violent towards the weakest among us.”*

Can't speak or can't hear?

“All of the associations that are set up in response to extreme poverty are seeking both to improve the lot of the underprivileged and to make the society we live in a more humane one,” says Louis Join-Lambert.

Public institutions also have a role to play. According to Roger Briesch, *“Europe can only be a benchmark for other countries to measure themselves against if it makes a firm commitment to eliminating the poverty and the precarious situations of the socially excluded and those living on the edge of society. Only a democratic and federal Europe with the ability to act will enable us to achieve this goal.”* *“Social benefits are not a luxury,”* adds Maud de Boer Buchicchio, Deputy General Secretary of the Council of Europe. *“Poverty and social exclusion are a threat to liberty, peace and stability in Europe. Citizens who are deprived of housing, social benefits, access to jobs and education, experience an attack on their human dignity. They are the victims, but it is society as a whole that suffers the consequences as the cohesion of our communities and all of the civic, social and economic progress that we have made are compromised.”*

“But we only listen to those who know how to make themselves heard,” concludes Dagmir Dlugosz, spokesperson for the Polish Ministry of Social Affairs, meaning that we forget to listen to those who cannot speak. Louis Join-Lambert believes that there are not really people who cannot speak, but rather it is our societies that are not listening. The meeting in Warsaw, among its many other aims, sought to open up a space in which people could both speak and listen.



Witnesses and players

A sculpture, a poem, songs taken up in chorus, sketches, simple gifts: the big stage at Warsaw University didn't only serve to deliver speeches. Communication took a thousand and one different forms. At the start of the two-day meeting, testimony from different viewpoints set the debate firmly in the real world.

Léoncia Sanchez Ramos : *«I am a member of the ATD Fourth World Movement in Spain and I help people whose lives, like mine, are difficult. The experience has helped me recognise my value as a human being and educate myself along with them.»*



I'm learning French and I'm learning to use a computer. I went to a museum for the first time in my life; I enjoyed that because we don't only need a full stomach, we need food for our minds as well. I have learned that everyone can create something beautiful and can be of use to themselves and others. With ATD Fourth World, we prepared a conference in Madrid in May 2002: 'The poorest in the construction of Europe'. Together, we hope to help build a better future for our children and a fairer society for everyone. »

John Habets : *«I work for the local authority in Brunssum, a small town of 30,000 people in the Netherlands. I'm 55, married, and we have two grown-up girls. It was a leaflet showing a very thin child under the heading 'The solution to the hunger problem starts with you' that drew my attention. I realised it was up to me to do something.»*

This "doing something" was a commitment to tackle hunger and poverty in the world, and more specifically the Third World. Then I was shocked to discover that even in a rich country like the Netherlands there is destitution, that some people live in extreme poverty. They had always been there but I had not seen them.

Now, the ATD Fourth World Movement gives me the opportunity to meet people from this other world in a different way than in my role as civil servant in an office. I still have much to learn. I want to give an example of how prejudice and ignorance can affect the way we think and act.

As a young civil servant I met Frans several times at his home. He comes from a family that has been living in poverty for many years. When Frans was born a colleague said, 'This one will be like the rest of the family, like his father and grandfather. He'll get nowhere in life.' That was an unfair judgement. Frans is now 30, and I came across his name in the local authority staff newsletter. His house had just been demolished, he was out on the street and had no state allowance rights. This man, who had no way of defending himself, was held up to ridicule. I wrote to the editor; my letter was published and there were several positive reactions afterwards.



Now, I've reduced my working hours and I will be stopping work completely in six months' time. My dream is to continue to act as a bridge between these two worlds that know so little of each other, to give people who are not heard often enough, or taken seriously, the chance of speaking out. »

“Being driven by the desire to reach those who are far away”

Jérôme Vignon (European Commission)

With the recent enlargement of the European Union, the institutions of Europe could learn some valuable lessons from what we got out of Warsaw. *“The political Europe which I come from, the Europe of heads of states, is always at risk of becoming a prisoner of its own words”* acknowledges Jérôme Vignon, Director of Social Protection and Social Integration at the European Commission.

In his view *“one of the most useful things that came out of the time we spent together in Warsaw was what we learnt about helping political leaders to get the full measure of the consequences of their wonderful slogans”*.



The workshops held over two days taught politicians, trade unionists, businessmen and civil servants the importance of being able to shake up our traditional vision of the world and *“change our way of seeing”*, to turn us all into *“full and equal Europeans”*.

In the view of the representative of the European Commission, *“there is no contradiction between success, modernity, economic efficiency and the acceptance of men and women in full, including those on the furthest fringes of society.”*

Modern policies are quite capable of creating compatibility between competition, economic success and the full involvement of all sectors of the population”.

Jérôme Vignon is of the view that ATD Fourth World is not isolated. It is part of a *“cultural adventure”*. The equal opportunities initiative which focuses on equality between men and women, and the disabled citizens initiative with its *“Nothing About Us, Without Us”* slogan during the European Year of Disabled People in 2003, are seeking the same new culture.

But the Warsaw proposals go even further, looking not only to improve and defend individual rights, but also to promote a society where each and every one of us can play an active role in the spread of justice and solidarity.

“It means being driven by the desire to reach those who are far away, so that we in turn, can be reached by them. This is the hidden secret, which gives Europe its soul today. This secret is not the sort of thing they teach at schools or universities, it is something that is deep and spiritual”.

“Confronting Europe with the history of the courage shown by the very poor”

Eugen Brand (International ATD Fourth World)



After two days of discussions, exchanges, celebration and songs, Eugen Brand, Director General of the International Movement ATD Fourth World, tried to pick out the meeting's conclusions. *“I feel our meeting here in Warsaw has encouraged us to pause in what we are doing, giving us time to reflect on our questions, our commitments and our future.”* He said the meeting was an example of “culture” as used by Joseph Wresinski: *“Culture is created by the exchanges between people. It is founded in the history of the human race. It is the history itself of humanity, moulded and forged together. It is the negation of fatality.”*



He called on all those taking part: *“Your artistic creations and discussions emphasise the importance of knowledge and culture. How can we continue talking about European construction if at the same time we do not use our energy and imagination to share our knowledge? We all carry within us that something which can free us and means that we can declare: this is what I am, this is where I come from, this is where I am going with the support of those around me, this is what gives my life meaning.”*



Europe has gone through many ordeals. They have given birth to a common way of feeling, thinking, of viewing citizenship, etc. Eugen Brand reminds us, *“We all have a duty to remember those men and women who, century after century, kept alive the desire to learn from one another, even in the worst times of confrontation and destruction.”*



“With all the strength gained from our Warsaw meeting we ask that Europe works hard so that another side of its courageous history is given proper recognition, the history of the very poorest in our different countries. It tells of how they've resisted fatalism and have committed themselves to creating a humane world in the midst of all their difficulties.”

So that a new day dawns

The 1st of May 2004 will not be seen as significant for the enlargement of the European Union, but for the reunion of European people. For ATD Fourth World, it is not possible *“to accept that European states take political action which is in contradiction with the commitments they have made. Politics that reduce social budgets in an unjust and unbalanced way, demanding from the most vulnerable disproportionate efforts that seriously jeopardise their health, ability to learn and the future of their families.”*

For us the big political question is the right to a family life. Delegates from Great Britain said, “When our children are taken from us, it’s like losing our life”. This is what many families suffer. It is the shared experience of many of the Warsaw delegates. It must force countries and the European Union to change their approach to family policy so that they ensure that every family is respected.

“The links we have made here,” Eugen Brand concluded. *“Must now lead us into all the public arenas – of politics, culture, trade unionism, economics, community and religion. These links must also help us to develop our discussions with the European Council, European Union and all our governments on how to create the conditions so that people in extreme poverty can be involved in the crafting of Europe. Our exchanges made it clear that unless we learn to live, think and act together, freedom and fundamental rights go unheeded. Because when human beings are divided Human Rights disappear for the poorest of them.”*

We are not only in Europe, we are also in the world as a whole. What we learn and achieve in Europe will be of use to other people and continents, from which, we too, have so much to learn.

For dawn to come tomorrow to this ‘Earth of the evening,’ as Vaclav Havel’s puts it, we must already have a glow of light today, this comes, not from giving lessons but by recognising the bravery of the most fragile citizens by focusing on their dreams

to overcome the violence which besets their lives.”

Joseph Wresinski’s Poland

Warsaw and Poland has opened up ATD Fourth World towards the east of Europe. For the ATD Fourth World activists, it is also a symbolic place, as ATD’s founder Joseph Wresinski’s family came from there. *“Born into suffering”,* Joseph Wresinski was the son of a Polish immigrant, Ladislav Wrezinski. Joseph Wresinski’s father had a very hard life and was badly received by France, the country where he took refuge. He *“bore the shame of not being able to give his family the security and happiness he wished for them.”*

“The story of ATD Fourth World is linked with Poland,” maintained Eugen Brand, *“to these people of culture and resistance. Joseph Wresinski’s father was one of these. Thirsty for dignity, he travelled all over Europe looking for work to feed his family. He knew from painful experience that you need more than the absence of iron bars and of barbed wire to be free. You are not free when the lack of work prevents you from paying the rent for a home worthy of its name. You are not free when you depend on public and private assistance to feed your own children. You are not free when everyone feels they have the right to intervene in your private life”.*

“Ladislav Wrezinski became the father of a great man whose name is engraved in the most prestigious places in the world and who brought the message to as many people as he could that all humans have the right to be treated in a way which leaves their dignity intact. He joined the battle ‘that could only be won if it was led in the full light of day and by gathering together people from throughout the world.’”

Eugen Brand demanded that: *“Europe brings to the fore one part of its history, that of the most excluded who have resisted poverty and have worked through their pain, putting their energies into creating a more humane society.”*

Creation, a means of meeting and discussing

In July 2003, forty people from Poland, Switzerland, Belgium, Luxembourg and France met up for a week of creative workshops at Kalkow, in Poland. One of these was lead by Philippe Barbier, a Belgium volunteer of ATD Fourth World. In the “wire” workshop, Philippe asked everyone to express what was important to them by making a little “sculpture” with wire. There were further workshops in different countries in Europe to prepare for the Warsaw meeting. All the sculptures that were made were collected together to make “The Meeting” sculpture that continued taking shape during the Warsaw meeting where it was displayed.



“The wire workshop was first a meeting. A meeting where one found oneself again. Then a meeting or a (re)discovery of each other in a different way or context.

A length of wire in one hand, and pincers in the other; what can we make out of it? So we set to and slowly, something took shape. It’s beautiful, but not only beautiful.

At times it comes from deep down, perhaps it’s the first time it has “come out” and if it’s important for me, then it’s important for the others.

These workshops showed that throughout Europe everyone has something important to share, everyone is capable of making something.

This workshop became a point of reference during the meeting”.

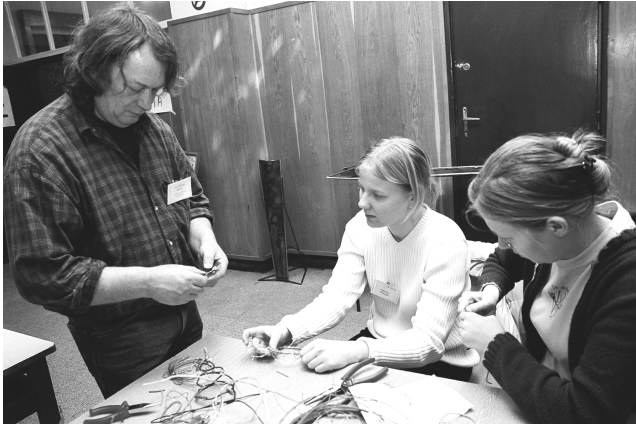
(Philippe Barbier – Belgium)

Meeting
Being carried
Carried along by the meeting enables us
To come together
To learn to know
To learn from the other
To learn to love the other
To be carried along by the meeting that enables us
To feel trusted
Loved
Respected
And precious
The true meeting enables us
To grow

To stand upright
To dare to take new steps
To go forward

The true meeting
Gives us the strength
To carry the other
In our hands
Our hearts
Our thoughts
Wanting to be tall
Wanting to stand upright

(Ursula Messerli – Switzerland)



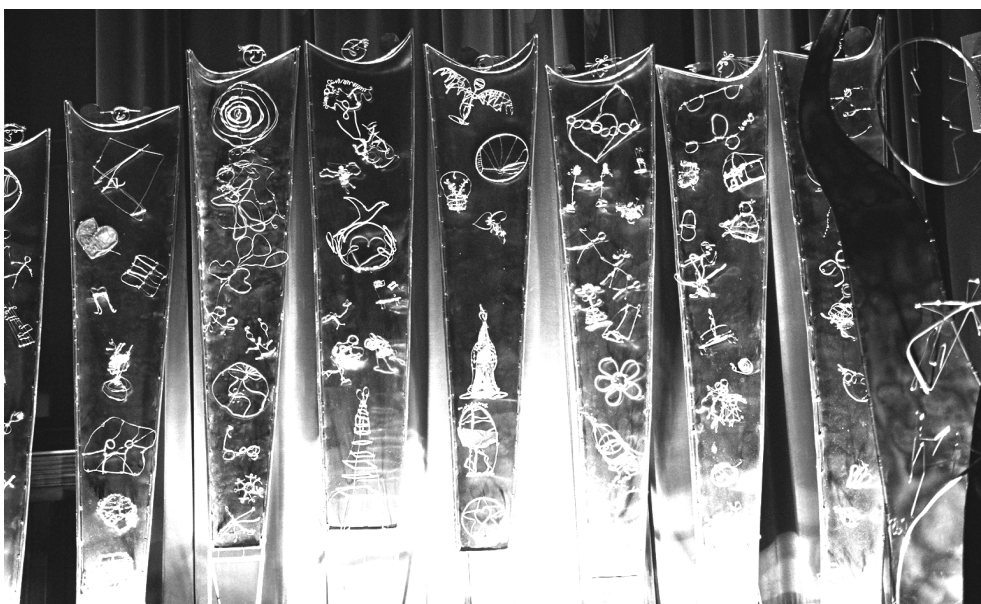
Philippe didn't say much but he did ask, "What was important for you?" And then he said, "Go on." At the beginning, my head was in turmoil. We were all wondering what we were going to do. After debating a bit, we picked up the thread and began talking. It came all on its own and we couldn't stop.

(Walentyna Alichniewicz - Poland)

I was struck by the beauty, the workshops, the way the sculptures and paintings were shown off to their best advantage, the intense and intimate moments around music, cello, poetry... It was really the very intense moments that got to us, we were deeply stirred, sometimes overcome, and that, that's something that couldn't be forgotten. I talked to some young students about it; they said it deeply touched them, it really hit them. They were also amazed that we could have these kind of experiences when people were so different from each other, so poor. By working through art and creative activities we can communicate on a profound level, it's really a path to explore as often as we can.



(Claude Farrer - France)



Meeting face to face

From the discussion group «*Everyone needs to be active and feel useful*»

"For us, Europe was the land of prosperity. We were amazed when we discovered you had so many poor people, as we did," said one Polish participant. The statement served as a guideline for the eleven workshops organised to enable simpler, more direct exchanges.



Each person came with their own story, their own experience and doubts, their desire to communicate. The streets of Warsaw where homeless Marek daily rubs shoulders with misery is only a handshake away from Paris, where Robert used to live on the streets.

"Living together", "know each other and so respect each other", "make heard the voices of the excluded", "help, while respecting the person's dignity", "call on each person's knowledge", "be active and useful", "live a liberating spirituality", "gain access to culture", "support families' projects", "be connected with a community", "enjoy one's rights without the violation that is absolute poverty" - with each topic, the first thing to happen was that people met face to face.

"You have to begin with yourself," said Robert. But this is not the "every man for himself" free-market creed that abandons millions of isolated, excluded people to their fate. It's the message of men and women who refuse to be taken in hand by others without having their say, who want to be free

and responsible men and women, respected as such, who are convinced that they carry inside themselves the rich resources of their own lives.

To accept a helping hand during a difficult period does not mean adopting a "welfare mentality"; it is already the beginning of an exchange.

This makes it difficult to sum up the thousands of testimonies given in these workshops, the impromptu encounters and the harmony discovered between people who were often very different. *"I've never heard before what I heard today,"* acknowledges an employer, representative in Warsaw of the French Social and Economic Council. A regular participant at conferences and negotiations, after listening in silence for two days he admits that now he has *"got moving"*. On him and many others, the Warsaw encounter left its mark.

To be active and useful

The workshop on the subject of "Everyone needs to be active for themselves and for others" took the advice proffered by one participant and considered society as the two banks of a river, where everyone must help build bridges so that people can cross over. There is indeed one riverbank where there's integration, work and wealth. But it's important to realise that the other side is not an arid desert. Those who live in the world of exclusion and poverty have values, even if their lives are difficult. *We ought to show society that poverty does not set us aside, that we are worth something, and that we can take part in society,"* said one participant.

The change comes from oneself, inside oneself. *"If you don't believe in yourself, if you're not sure of yourself, if you're not convinced you have something to give, then you're nothing!"*

Getting a job is without any doubt the point of passage between the two shores.

A job? Work, rather, which makes a person productive, useful, earns them recognition. "With work, people respect us," says Robert. "Now, people come to ask my advice on what to do," says another recently-hired participant. "I'm someone now." "I've gone back to the silversmith's trade," says another Polish man, still homeless. "People appreciate what I do. That gives me new life. Now I am teaching my craft to my children. They see me differently."

It's around a recognised skill, a service rendered and appreciated, that individuals build themselves and their dignity. Philippe, who has disabilities and is condemned to worklessness because absurd and incomprehensible administrative rules prevent him from getting a job, says the same: "Why must I make such an effort when all I want is to be able to work, be useful, be like everybody else?"

To work is also to provide for one's family's needs. "Work is not enough. Some people work and still can't make it," says one person. "I begged, but I'm not ashamed of it, because that way I was able to feed my family," says another. "When you've lived in complete poverty, as a rule you're only offered very insecure jobs, with no value and no guarantees."

Why should we not have the right to a proper job too?" asks Robert. "When you're out of work, if they find you a job, you just have to accept it. Sometimes you have to take work you don't want, with a long journey," adds Freddy.

All agree that the passage is never easy. A helping hand, a person who looks at you with trust, someone who listens and understands - these are all essential. "My life changed the day someone who was responsible for finding me a job listened to me and took my wishes into account," says Robert. Another participant told how, when he was hiding in the woods and reduced to mere survival, what restored his sense of his own value and gave him the courage to get out of his situation was the look he received from an ATD Fourth World militant.



"I've just been hired for a permanent job. But if I had not met that person, I could never have done what I've done. Now my aim is to help others the way I've been helped."

Freddy, who joined a centre when he came out of prison, also says: "I remade myself by helping others (...) With all the casual jobs I've had, I learned how to do loads of things and worked with loads of things that gave me confidence in myself and enabled me to settle down. Now, my wife and I are gradually getting things together and we're able to live with dignity."

"You have to realise that a great deal is demanded of a person who's just integrating," says Angélique. "The demands made on a person who wants to work are enormous, but why are there no demands made on employers, the unions and the rest of society?"

There are not enough volunteers to help people over that bridge – often a mere ford where many people fall. "I agree," says Jacques, note-taker for the workshop. *"It's not the excluded who produce exclusion, it's society. If exclusion is regarded as a passing phenomenon it will continue indefinitely. Everyone should lend a hand: employers, unions, the whole workforce. Not just the politicians. The politicians won't budge unless the rest of society gets moving."*

The politicians are essential, as was illustrated by the example of how the Polish employment services found work for a man with disabilities. With good will alone and no policy, we will not pull through.

And even then, those who make the policies and those who apply them must respect the people concerned. People usually kick against being forced into anything. To integrate without rehabilitating means using pressure, forgetting dignity. And dignity is essential.



But as noted by Jozef, a European trade unionist, we must not forget collective action. European plans have already enabled some progress to be made. Of course, he admits, the trade unions don't take sufficient account of the situation of the poorest. Their role is necessary, however. We need "bridges" between people in work and people without.



"If only because it's a narrow gap that separates people from exclusion," says Ewa, a Polish trade unionist. "So many people topple into poverty because they lose their job, or because of family problems."



“The challenge of creating an inclusive community”

Olivier Gerhard, group participant

The initial challenge

About twenty people (some of whom had never taken part in a meeting outside their home towns) gathered for this discussion group.



For four hours, we shared experiences and discussed the topic of this group. The initial challenge – which is also the first step towards creating communities with people from all backgrounds – was to find a way of dialoguing with each other despite our varied life experiences.

Three participants were mothers from a very poor neighbourhood in Sicily, Italy. They gradually became involved as volunteers in the “Il Quartiere” organization, which provides activities for their children – “to keep them off the streets”. Four other participants were Polish and part of the Monar-Markot organization, which provides shelter for people living in the streets of Warsaw. These participants joined the organization after benefiting from its services, at a time when their own lives fell apart. Two Spanish fathers, of Romany origin, introduced themselves by pointing at the shacks of the shanty town in which they had lived for years before recently being relocated. They are active members of ATD Fourth World in Madrid. Other group participants included a psychologist, a theologian, a bank manager, a Polish civil servant, a mother, and full-time volunteers of ATD Fourth World. The meeting was chaired by a Spanish civil servant in charge of the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion.

The discussion group focused on three issues: firstly on examples of how to build trust-based relationships with others; secondly on how children fight exclusion and how adults can support them; and the thirdly we discussed our own commitment to reaching out to the most disadvantaged in our societies.

Being brave enough to approach others

The first step is to learn to listen to one another, which is not always easy.

From Spain: A family living in a shanty town was re-housed. This family never left its new home and avoided its neighbours, who in turn thought the family was trying to hide something. The new neighbourhood president visited this family to introduce himself. A discussion ensued during which the president told the family that its behaviour seemed odd to all of the neighbours. The mother then pointed out that nobody had ever greeted her and because of this she never left her home. It was this conversation that meant the ice was broken between family and neighbours. In order to build trust, you have to see each other's point of view which can be difficult.



From Poland: People who live on the street lose their self-confidence. They can't imagine how they can change their lives. We support them so that they can build up their self-esteem again.

But sometimes this seems impossible to them. Homeless people often refuse to speak with us. But when we are able to spark off their determination to change, it's incredibly fulfilling.

From Italy: We also believe that you need to build trust in order to create communities. But how do you overcome the barriers? We have noticed that the parents who need the training meetings the most don't attend. Initially, we passed judgement on them. Then we told ourselves that they didn't come because they were ashamed and felt inferior. To break down these barriers, we would visit them and offer to accompany them to the meeting as friends. It is difficult to join a group that already exists. In order to introduce new people into the group, you need to bring them in as friends.

The young people said that the summer camps were very important, because they enabled them to leave their neighbourhoods and come into contact with other people with different life experiences. They also said how important it is to study and gain understanding in order to create an integrated society.

Children show the way to harmonious living

The participants spoke about their own children as well as other children. Children inspire us, as one of us said: *"Children can be very inventive in finding ways of getting on together. I would like us to talk about how we can support our children so that they can empower all of us and become a strength for Europe."*

From France: In a primary school, William, a 9-year old child, causes a lot of trouble. He likes to fight, is violent and disrespectful, and refuses all attempts to get him to behave, both from children and adults. The teacher, the monitors and the children in his class are at their wits' end and nobody can stand him anymore. He is always being excluded from the class, left out of activities, and shunned by the others during breaks. This makes some of the children in his class unhappy and they tell the teacher that it is not a good idea to always exclude William, since it just makes him meaner. But the adults have given up.

The children haven't and continue to look for a solution. During a Taporì meeting (a children's group initiated by ATD Fourth World), they proudly explain: "We discovered how to help William: we bring games in from our homes and we play with him during break time. Now things are much better in the classroom, he is becoming nicer every day, and we are all friends."

From Italy: Children force us to re-assess our limits. Most of the time, they're the ones who encouraged us not to stay at home, and to participate in the activities provided by the "Il Quartiere" organization. For example, one of us attended the meetings because her children took part in the activities provided by the "Il Quartiere" organization and she didn't want to place all of the responsibility for her children on other people.



We also see what an important role children play in helping us all live together. For instance, when we have a neighbourhood party, our children bring us together.

Committing ourselves to creating communities involving everyone

It was great how we were all able to explain how committed we are to building communities where everyone is welcome!

From Italy: Every day after school, one of us takes care of an orphaned child. This has had a great impact on her. She says: "If somebody had told me six years ago everything I would be doing for the "Il Quartiere" organization, I would have thought they were completely mad. But here I am, doing all of those things." When our members develop skills this helps us all to grow.

From Spain: *With the help of ATD Fourth World and the sisters living there, the inhabitants of the shanty town fought hard to ensure that they were all relocated into decent housing.*

They said: “If we live in neighbourhoods that are cut off from society, we will remain on the fringes. We want to live with people who are different from us, so that our children can grow up with children from many different backgrounds.” Although we now live in ‘normal’ neighbourhoods, there are still many obstacles. People have to want to learn from each other. In places where this is not the case, it will never be possible to live together in harmony, neither here nor anywhere else in the world.



From France: *My daughter Anne came home from school one day and told me: “I don’t understand why Linda is always at the back of the class. She is 12 years old, but she is always in the back drawing pictures while we all study. The teacher won’t allow her to borrow books from the library because she doesn’t have a library card.” Together we looked for a solution with the help of the Tapori Movement, and Anne had an idea, she checked out Linda’s books on her own library card. This gave Linda the courage to ask the teacher for examples of letters to copy, because she wants to learn how to write.*



The discussion group chairman: *Our Polish friends have showed us that when a person receives help, she or he is then able to help others.*

Our friends in Poland have given us the example of a home that is open to all. They provide us with the inspiration to convince politicians of the need to guarantee fundamental rights for all.

Relating to the world...

In each workshop, a photo or a thought or a question on the workshop theme called to mind someone from another continent, making them present. Delegates wrote to Marthe, from the Ivory Coast, about the question set in the workshop: “getting to know each other enables us to respect and live with nations and people whose history and cultures are very different from ours.” Grazyna from Poland wrote to her, “*Children are and will be our strength. Never forget that.*”

Marthe later replied, “*I received your words and I am very happy to see my message reached Poland. Thank you very much. If one day we could all meet up to bear witness to those who live in poverty and to describe how we are living, it would be better than communicating by letter! Only understanding can change all these difficult situations. People must understand each other.*”

Participants talk about the meeting...

I used to think that we just had to put up with the continual political chaos here in Poland and elsewhere in the world, which meant that as citizens we could not help but feel distressed and bewildered. Then the preparation for this European meeting in Warsaw made me think more about the meaning of citizenship. What does being a citizen mean to me? What can I change in the world around me? What actions I can take? What is their impact on my country and on Europe?

I used to see citizens as no more than mere pawns. I thought the word "citizen" had become overused and meaningless. Yet, during the meeting in Warsaw, I realized that this word has great significance. While listening to different speeches, I realized that not only was citizenship a set of rights and duties, but it could also be a need as vital as the need to eat, have a family life, access to culture...

Citizens are people who feel responsible for what goes on around them, who are prepared to be creative and work with others. During the meeting in Warsaw we participated in a process whereby we all engaged as citizens and we were confirmed as a true "citizen". But for everyone to be able to fully engaged in this process there needs to be encouragement and we must remember that each citizen, even the poorest, has a role in the construction of Europe and the world.

During the conference at Warsaw we talked, got to know each other, worked together and laughed together. Now we must share what we have learnt and our experiences with those who we are close to. And we must continue to look for those who are imprisoned by their problems, to ensure that their voices get heard in the discussions about the future of our society.

Agnieszka Drelich Magdziak (Poland)

Some young students came to welcome us at the airport. They were friendly, taking us to the bus and showing us round the city. At the University, they helped us to understand each other even though we were speaking different languages. Ewa kindly gave each of us a map, with a little message of welcome on it.

Michele Piguet (Switzerland)

For the first time, I felt what it would be like to be European and for all of us to be equal.

Andrzej Kulik (Poland)

I realised that we must build a Europe for peace and justice. I know the Polish fear joining Europe because of their high unemployment rate, concerned about new factory closures and the separation of Church and State. I learnt that in some European countries (Russia, the Netherlands, England and Ireland), there are projects which empower the socially excluded to enable them to speak for themselves and to be listened to. These people are a source of hope: can we learn from each other's experiences?

Mariette Legendre (France)

We met in the workshops and there we talked with people from all over Europe, exchanging opinions and learning from one another. We listened to what was said by the Spaniards, French, Belgians, Dutch and English. I suppose that's what bound us all, being together we could support each other.

Marek Kauch (Poland)

The best thing for me was that we were all able to understand each other really well. That was wonderful! I felt that everyone valued my work. I felt understood. I made friends and got to know about the lives of people from many different countries.

Victorina Tudorica (Romania)

To listen to each other was more important than to speak about oneself.

Michel Savary (Switzerland)

I went to Warsaw to help the world move forward not only for myself, but also for all those who are really in need.

Alfredo Escudero (Spain)

We share the same values, express feelings in the same way, enjoy music, enjoy lots of things, like the countryside. It was inspiring, to see all these people coming to this meeting and willing to talk with us!

Lucjan Aslanidis (Poland)

It was overwhelming to see people from so many different backgrounds and nationalities all together, and to realize how difficult it is for all of us to achieve what we are working towards. It was impressive to all be in Poland on the day before the European Union's enlargement, knowing what a huge mobilization of human resources that has taken. We were most touched by the young people going up onto the stage, they seemed to convey a message to us about the future of Europe. This mobilization of human resources will bear fruit in Poland and throughout Europe.

Isabelle et Stuart Williams (Ireland)

This meeting will be worth while if we let ourselves be influenced by our experiences here and by people's commitment!

Steffen Köhnlein (Germany)

What I liked most about this meeting was when the Polish Commissioner for Human Rights spoke, urging us to fight for all our rights, including the right to decent housing. Everyone, rich and poor, has the same rights to life and respect.

Antonio Perez (Spain)

What made these crucial meetings happen? For me the creative workshops were one of the key elements. To take part in these workshops we had to “abandon our armour”, become more open to others. And, as Mr Vignon put it so well, to agree to set ourselves free, free from our usual ideas and prejudices. This is the only way to make space inside ourselves and accept others and their differences.

Jean Pierre Gollé (France)

It is by setting ourselves the task of creating something, whether in song, in metalwork, in painting, that we can achieve some very beautiful things.

Marie Christine Py (France)

The meeting has given me the hope and strength so that I can continue to fight against wickedness and exclusion. Yes, now I feel stronger and more confident, I have no doubt that thanks to ATD Fourth World and Tabori, we will be able to bring a ray of sunshine into the life of each individual. Well, the first step to build a more dignified Europe has already been taken!

Miruna Ionescu (Romania)

These two days raised the issue of how to tackle exclusion and questioned us all as individuals and citizens. Our industrialized nations, generating richness and exclusion at the same time, raise a key political issue for Europe, particularly in terms of European solidarity. The impact of these two days must reach the institutions we represent: heads of companies, either private or public who want to base their business on the concept of citizenship; trade unionists concerned with those excluded from the workforce; representatives of the non-governmental organizations working for social inclusion. The organized civil society must be a go-between, linking organizations and individuals that fight against exclusion, and raising awareness among political leaders.

Jacques Chauvineau (Economic and Social Council France)

The world is not so beautiful as it could be - it could be different, it could be transformed. And EUROPE must be shown in all its diversity and beauty. We must learn how to open our eyes and to help each other to see that new world.

Jacqueline Gillet (Luxembourg)

A common theme of the meeting was that people need to feel useful to others. And someone asked this fundamental question: «What are we going to do if there is no-one with an open heart, ready to accept what the poorest have to offer?»

Maryvonne Caillaux (France)

The most striking part for me was when we sang together during the plenary session, as well as this shared sense of belonging, a shared feeling of unity. I realized then that if people shared common values and ambitions based on common experiences, it doesn't matter how long they had been separated.

Inna Vishneva (Russia)

AND NOW?

The time we spent in Warsaw was marked by the exceptional humanity of our way of being together – it was also a powerful political time. The delegates said so and it is even being described in that way by people who weren't there.

The consequences of the meeting are being felt by people throughout Europe because the participants were changed by the experience and they came away with new ideas. *“I will look at how I can fulfil my responsibilities differently,”* said several politicians. Some people now want to organise exchanges between countries, others plan to set up projects bringing young people to meet families living in poverty, others feel encouraged to reach out to the most isolated in their communities. And the spirit of Warsaw will continue because we are going to continue setting up reciprocal exchanges within our neighbourhoods, villages and towns, as between countries, giving further opportunities for discovery and learning from each other.

How can the Warsaw meeting change our way of being and of doing politics in Europe? How can it create fundamental change to ensure that human beings are at the centre of our concerns and our action?

Our insistence that everyone's dignity is respected and our fight against poverty and social exclusion are one and the same thing. They are both essential for peace and democracy.



There is no simple and easy solution, the Warsaw meeting has given us pointers, however. Firstly, we must be together to think about the future, we must look for solutions all together, including with the very poor.

We must ensure that the conditions are right so that those who have the hardest time participating are able to do so. They are essential partners in the construction of Europe and the world. More importantly,

however, it is a question of breaking down the fear of difference so that everyone, from no matter what background, feels comfortable and able to contribute to the dialogue.

We need to meet regularly with others who are working against poverty and social exclusion in different settings from ours, who may be coming from a different perspective or culture. This will help us to ask ourselves pertinent questions, to make needed long-term investment and develop new creativity.

It is a question of claiming justice, respecting human rights for everyone and daring to build a common humanity. The Warsaw meeting has not given us any formulae. It reminds us, however, that finding ways of living and working together is indispensable, possible and an opportunity for everyone.

*Benoît Fabiani and Herman Van Breen
ATD Fourth World Co-ordinators for Europe*

The European Meeting in Warsaw was made possible thanks to the commitment and support of many people. Our heartfelt thanks go out to:

- the 300 participants and numerous people in the 16 countries represented who helped prepare the meeting;
- all of the Polish students – over one hundred – whose presence and availability was of great value and use to all, and also contributed to breaking down language barriers and making communication in meetings possible.
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- the journalist Régis Verley, for his assistance in compiling this document (articles pages 1 to 8, and 11 to 13).

A complete program of the meeting – including a list of the plenary meetings as well as descriptions of the 11 discussion groups – has been published in three languages (Polish, English, and French) and was given to each participant. This program is also available upon request in the eight other languages used during the meeting.

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ATD Fourth World was founded by Fr. Joseph Wresinski (1917-1988) in an emergency housing camp in Noisy-le-Grand, France, in 1957. He had grown up in extreme poverty, and the deprivation and humiliation suffered by his family, as well as their courage in the face of their problems, left an indelible mark on him. ATD Fourth World is a non-governmental organization with no specific religious or political affiliation. It has a consultative status to the UN ECOSOC, UNICEF, UNESCO, ILO and participative status with the Council of Europe. It also has close links with the institutions of the European Union.

On arriving in Noisy-le-Grand, Joseph Wresinski undertook to establish the poorest as genuine partners in places of decision-making affecting the future of the whole world. This led him to unite with the families living in extreme poverty in Noisy-le-Grand, and later throughout the world, in their efforts to eradicate poverty. He called on people from different backgrounds to work in partnership with people living in extreme poverty to promote a world in which the equal dignity of every human being is respected.

For over 45 years, ATD Fourth World has been carrying out programmes aimed at enabling people living in extreme poverty to gain access to their fundamental rights, to a voice in society and to opportunities to contribute to the decision-making process on issues that directly affect them as well as on wider issues for society. ATD Fourth World works with other NGOs and professional and political partners (on a local, national and international level) to seek out and fulfil the conditions needed for the very poorest to become active partners in the development of modern society.

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