

ALL HUMAN RIGHTS FOR ALL PEOPLE



Drawing above: Portrait of Joseph Wresinski, watercolor, 1991 © Mireille De Wilde / ATD Quart Monde / CJW-AR0200601002-3

For February, the birth month of late ATD founder [Joseph Wresinski](#), we are republishing an editorial of his that appeared in the February 1982 ATD Fourth World Switzerland newsletter.

The ultimate goal of human rights is the protection of dignity

It follows that implementing these rights will lead to all people living in freedom, justice, and peace.

Only if they are taken as a whole can these rights guarantee human dignity. This is why all human rights must be protected at the same time. We believe that it is not just civil and political rights that must be protected, but also economic and social rights. Moreover, the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights conceives them as an indivisible whole. This is what the people living in poverty themselves teach us. Indeed, if instead of upholding their dignity, we grant those at the bottom of the social ladder the freedom to organise their own lives, but fail to provide access to education, employment, culture, and spirituality, we are committing a double error.

On the one hand, we humiliate them, because this freedom remains theoretical as long as they do not have the means to take it on and exercise it. Thus, deprived of the security that allows them to have peace of mind and take control over their own lives, they cannot make use of their freedom; they can't even begin to think about it.

On the other hand, they are made dependent on the arbitrariness of the welfare system and charities, which is the opposite of freedom.

This is not a question of omission. It is much more serious than that, because we create inequalities, deep-seated injustices that are contrary to peace, that are contrary to the very principles that we seek to protect. Indeed, giving people freedom without other rights does nothing to advance the cause of human dignity; on the contrary, it sets it back.

The families in the deepest poverty never complain about not having what other families receive. But they do complain about being regarded as undeserving of the rights that are generally granted to others.

The piecemeal granting of rights to the people living in poverty comes at the price of their further humiliation and dependence. This is why ATD Fourth World, while fighting for human dignity, struggles to ensure that all rights, without exception, are granted to all people and especially the poorest amongst them.

Joseph Wresinski

More about Joseph Wresinski:

www.joseph-wresinski.org

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