

IRISH COMMUNITY ACTIVIST SPEAKS AT THE UN

Posted on 14 March 2023



Above: Andrew Kelly (left) with Mark Hogan

This text is based on a speech given by Andrew Kelly at the UN for the [International Day for the Eradication of Poverty](#). Mr. Kelly is an [ATD Fourth World Activist](#) living in Ireland.

Two important anniversaries

This year marks the 35th anniversary of the [World Day to Overcome Extreme Poverty](#) and the 30th anniversary of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. This day honours the millions of people suffering from poverty and their daily courage. It also recognizes the essential global solidarity and shared responsibility we hold to eradicate poverty and combat all forms of discrimination.

Can you imagine a world where the dignity of everyone is respected in practice? This is

the international theme for 17 October this year. Can you just imagine living in poverty for 35 years or longer, like not even being born? My mother lived in poverty and it passed onto me, so it's way longer in our case. That is the reason I am here; to try and show you that even though I have gone through this. I still have a voice and I intend to use it. So my kids don't have to go through what I have.

My mantra

I live by this quote I have made it my mantra,

"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.¹"

Wherever we are in the world, if we are to improve access to rights. We need to take account of the [hidden dimensions of poverty](#). The institutional maltreatment, the poverty based discrimination, the shame and stigma of being poor are all obstacles for accessing rights. In Ireland we are currently engaged in a [campaign to include poverty-based discrimination as the tenth ground of discrimination in Irish equality legislation](#). So that people experiencing socio-economic discrimination have a right to legal redress and protection in the law. To discriminate against someone because of their socio-economic status is to disrespect the inherent dignity that we all hold within us.

Also, we have to remember that [non-take-up of rights](#) is neither a lack of interest, nor a personal failure of the rights holders but the lack of information about their existence or excessive administrative barriers in accessing these rights.

It is important that if this law is introduced in Ireland, it also must be fully implemented, as passing a law itself is not enough.

A world without poverty

Can you imagine a world where people don't have to worry about poverty or worry about getting a job because you are from a run-down area. Imagine all the lives you could save, because personally speaking when a man can't provide for his family it starts to worry him and in today's society... men are told and believe that they can't be weak they can't show emotion and that is why male suicide rate is so much higher than for females. Because men don't open up and talk about the stresses of life, they hold it all in. So I go back to my original statement; imagine having a law in place where socio-economic discrimination isn't allowed, I bet the count for male suicide rates would go down, I can almost guarantee that it would.

I became a father

When I started with ATD I was really nervous and shy because I felt my voice wasn't important. I thought that my poverty was just the normal until I saw the unjust system that we live in ... I used to stutter a lot when I spoke.

Then I became a father. That gave me confidence to speak out about the things that matter in life. I was blessed to be given so many chances to make a difference. You see, for as long as I have breath in my body I will continue to fight for a better future not just for my kids but for all kids.

So if anyone sees me speaking and you feel you don't have a voice let me tell you this everyone has a voice. Especially those who have gone through poverty. I feel the only way out of poverty is to consult with the experts on poverty. The experts on poverty are the ones that are living in poverty. The only way I feel we can eradicate poverty is by including them at the tables of power such as this one. So on behalf of everyone that is going through poverty. I would just like to thank you for this opportunity to speak on such a high platform. Thank you very much.

Watch Mr. Kelly's speech:





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