

REACTING TO THE UNITED STATES ELECTION: ON CHERISHING HUMAN DIGNITY

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This is a letter from ATD's International Leadership Team.

During the recent election campaign in the United States, harsh words were spoken, words that disrespected human dignity. Many speeches, actions, and viewpoints were deeply offensive to us, to people across the United States, and around the world. Some people were expressing their anger, frustrations, fears, and their rejection of politicians who have not managed to take seriously the realities they face. This is what happened so recently in the United Kingdom with the Brexit vote. This is also a strong possibility in the offing elsewhere in Europe.

We must find ways to develop further our understanding of the rejection of the status quo that has shaken the US, and other countries around the world. Today's reality is a signal pushing us to be still more inventive in reaching out to those who feel pushed aside, abused, or tricked, people whose worst fears have been manipulated. We must also continue to increase understanding and solidarity among all people whose lives are fragile, whether in economic uncertainty or abject poverty, and including all those who must overcome discrimination and prejudice. The coming years will require great courage.

We have been remembering today how very much ATD's founder, [Joseph Wresinski](#), loved the United States. He was certain that it is the place where all social justice movements can find renewal. In 1983 he said in a speech to Americans:

As a people, you descend from those families who, throughout the centuries, stood up against misery and oppression [...and] wanted to build a society of justice, brotherhood, and peace. Their pride and courage flow in your veins. This is why America is a symbol of freedom, justice, and peace.

America has not always been faithful to its ideals and destiny. But when America is unfaithful, the whole world is betrayed and suffers, and the poor are humiliated and deprived of hope because they are left without a homeland of freedom. They are left without a land where freedom can take root and grow, and where hope can spring again. [...] Those who suffer misery, hunger, ignorance, and despair keep their eyes focused on this country. America has the responsibility to allow the poorest people to encounter freedom, justice and peace. [...]

But ending poverty is not just a question of distributing dollars or planning development programs in offices: neither is it a matter of waving banners or shouting slogans. To eliminate poverty requires an encounter with men and women. It requires going to seek them out wherever they are – not in order to teach them, but to learn from them the validity of our own convictions, to learn from them who they are and what they expect from us, so that, together, we can work toward what they really want.

So, have the courage to leave your security behind you. Seek out the poorest people in the world. Then, and only then, will they have reason to believe in freedom, justice, and peace.

The American people are more generous than this campaign season of invective and tirades. Through all the people who cherish the human dignity of each and every person, we know that the country has ample creativity, courage, and daring to find a way forward.

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