

PRESS RELEASE

AS BILLIONAIRES' WEALTH SOARS, INEQUALITY REACHES ALARMING LEVELS - LARGE PARTS OF HUMANITY SUFFER HUNGER AND MISERY — THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR OCTOBER 17 SOUND THE ALARM

VILLARCEAUX, FRANCE - 6th June 2026 — In a world where a tiny handful of individuals own more wealth than the most deprived half of humanity combined, an international coalition of human rights defenders has issued a thundering declaration from the heart of France: enough is enough.

The Villarceaux Declaration of the International Committee for October 17, delivers a blistering indictment of global inequality — and an urgent, unflinching demand for change. The Declaration warns that poverty is the result of policy failure, a human rights violation committed in plain sight. It testifies that poverty persists due to deep-rooted discrimination, oppressive social and political structures, and the systematic denial of resources and rights — leaving the most vulnerable trapped with no path to escape. But the Declaration carries a message that goes beyond outrage. It insists that poverty can be overcome through the power of human rights - a moral and legal framework that can transform unequal power relations, oppressive social, political and economic systems and guarantee genuine participation. People who live in poverty are not the problem to be solved. They are the experts the world has been ignoring.

THE EXPERTS GOVERNMENTS NEED TO HEAR

For too long, policies to address poverty have been designed by those who have never experienced it — in offices far removed from the realities of hunger, homelessness, and humiliation. The Villarceaux Declaration calls this out as not just a moral failure, but a practical one. People living in poverty possess irreplaceable knowledge experiencing first hand the visible and invisible dimensions of poverty. They understand, from the inside, how systems fail. They know which policies cause harm, which create invisible barriers, and which hold genuine promise. Their insight forged through lived experience is expertise that no think tank or government ministry can replicate. "The

co-design of policies with people living in poverty," the Declaration states, is "indispensable to justice, peace and democracy." Not a nice-to-have. Not a consultation box to tick. It is a basic human right. The Declaration calls for a fundamental shift from tokenistic participation to genuine, inclusive deliberation — recognising people living in poverty as both rights holders and knowledge holders, whose voices must shape the policies that govern their lives.

THE NUMBERS ARE DAMNING

The facts laid bare in the Declaration defy belief in a world of extraordinary abundance: 1 in 5 children under five has never been officially registered, invisible to the state from birth.

1 in 5 of all children is living in extreme poverty right now.

Two thirds of the world's workers toil in informal employment — no contracts, no protection and often in precarious conditions.

Half of humanity has zero access to social protection.

Billionaire wealth has exploded by 81% since 2020 while millions go hungry every single day.

"Although there is enough food and enough resources to offer a dignified life to everyone," the Declaration states, "large parts of humanity go hungry every day and live in unbearable conditions." This is not scarcity. This is a scandal. And those closest to it know exactly why.

"POVERTY IS PRODUCED" — AND THOSE IN POWER ARE RESPONSIBLE

In language that pulls no punches, the Declaration states that the wealthy are getting richer because the system is designed to make them so. The Committee condemns the "growing concentration of economic and political influence, including through media ownership, lobbying, and campaign financing" and calls out the policy choices that allow billionaire wealth and corporate profits to skyrocket while gutting the public services that millions depend on to survive.

The climate emergency is no exception. The wealthiest 10% of the world's population is responsible for 77% of global emissions and yet it is the most deprived communities, who contributed almost nothing to the crisis are left to suffer with the loss of their

homes, crops, and livelihoods due to climate-induced natural disasters. They have been sounding the alarm for years. The world has not been listening.

NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US

The Declaration's demand for co-design is backed by a concrete tool: the Inclusive and Deliberative Elaboration and Evaluation of Policies (IDEEP), a human rights based framework that structurally embeds the knowledge and experience of people living in poverty into the policymaking process. This is not charity. It is democracy and participation in its fullest sense.

The Declaration is unequivocal: solutions to poverty that are built without the people who live it are doomed to fail. History has proven this, repeatedly, at enormous human cost. The Villarceaux Declaration demands that governments stop repeating the same mistake. "Recognising people living in poverty as rights holders and knowledge holders," it states, is not optional — it is "indispensable to democratic life." "Ideological attacks on human rights are a denial of the lessons of history, a moral failure, and serve only the powerful," the Declaration states bluntly.

WAR, AUSTERITY AND AI: NEW WEAPONS AGAINST PEOPLE IN POVERTY

The Declaration sounds the alarm on emerging threats that risk deepening inequality further:

Wars are being cynically exploited by governments far from combat zones to slash social spending and funnel public money into military budgets "pushing millions of people into poverty" in the process. "Peace cannot be reduced to the absence of war. It requires justice, social protection, access to rights, and democratic participation so that people can live free from fear, humiliation, and deprivation." says the Declaration.

Artificial intelligence is advancing at breakneck speed and without urgent intervention, its benefits will flow to the already-privileged while its risks fall on the vulnerable. Critically, the Declaration demands that those most affected by AI, including workers in precarious employment and communities facing exclusion, must have a voice in how it is governed.

Austerity is strangling the public services (eg. healthcare, housing, education), that stand between ordinary people and destitution. The Declaration is unequivocal in calling for the protection and expansion of public services to realise the rights and dignity of people living in poverty, enhanced demonstration of international solidarity and expansion of public fiscal space to finance public services, international cooperation and multilateral accountability systems to ensure that no one is left behind.

THE DEMAND: ACT NOW

The Committee delivered a direct call to world governments:

Listen to people living in poverty. Co-design every policy that affects them, using tools like IDEEP that make genuine participation possible.

Tax the ultra-wealthy. Fund public services. Stop the bleeding.

Ensure universal birth registration by 2030 — no human being should be invisible to their own government.

Guarantee universal social protection. No exceptions.

Protect the civic space that allows the most deprived, the furthest behind to speak, organise, and demand their rights without fear of repression or retaliation.

A RACE AGAINST TIME

The next three years mark a pivotal reckoning. 2026 marks the 60th anniversary of the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights as well as Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. 2027 marks 40 years since the inauguration of the original October 17 Commemorative Stone at the Trocadero Human Rights Plaza in Paris, a symbol of humanity in honour of the victims of hunger, ignorance, and violence. And 2028 marks the 80th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a document born from painful lessons of history and necessary foundations for building and preserving peace between peoples.

The message from Villarceaux is clear. Beyond commemorative moments, these anniversaries must become opportunities to renew the awareness of the indivisibility of all human rights and to place the fight against poverty at the centre of democratic, social, and ecological transformation.

"UNITED FOR PEACE AND HUMAN RIGHTS"

For the coming three years from 2026-2028, the Committee calls upon everyone to rally around its central theme "United for Peace and Human Rights." Regarding the specific focus on "Safe homes for all" for 2026, the Committee says "A safe home is not only a roof. It is a place where people can live without fear, hunger, humiliation or exclusion; a place connected to rights and community". The Committee calls for stronger, more open and more inclusive commemorations of October 17 - the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, a day that exemplifies solidarity at its strongest. The Committee calls on people of every generation, and especially young people, to stand with those pushed furthest behind, to hear their voices, to learn from their knowledge, and to build a world where every person, from birth to death, can live in peace and dignity.

About the International Committee for October 17

The International Committee for October 17 promotes the founding spirit of the World Day for Overcoming Poverty / International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. This day was first observed in 1987, when Joseph Wresinski, founder of ATD Fourth World, and over 100,000 human rights defenders from around the world gathered at the Trocadero Human Rights Plaza in Paris to pay tribute to the victims of hunger, ignorance, and violence. They affirmed their conviction that extreme poverty is not inevitable. They proclaimed their solidarity with those who, across the world, strive to eradicate it and inaugurated a commemorative plaque whose text reads: "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." Joseph Wresinski

In 1992, with resolution 47/196, the General Assembly of the United Nations recognized October 17th, World Day to Overcome Extreme Poverty as the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. On the occasion of 17 October 2008, Mr Cassam Uteem, former President of the Republic of Mauritius (1992-2002) and the International Movement ATD Fourth World announced the creation of the International Committee for October 17.