

# WORLD DAY FOR OVERCOMING EXTREME POVERTY, OCTOBER 17, 2020

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**By Donald Lee, President ATD Fourth World International**

Dear friends,

We come together this [October 17](#) during a deeply troubled and unsettling year caused by the ongoing global coronavirus pandemic.

The global pandemic has caused great hardship and suffering for people in poverty. Since the spread of the coronavirus, some Governments, international organizations, civil society organizations and citizens have attempted to provide urgent financial and other assistance to people in need. However, in general, people in extreme poverty have received little direct assistance and resources to physically protect themselves from the deadly disease or to overcome the economic and social challenges they now face.

*Without adequate and sustained financial aid and other vital support, people*

*in extreme poverty have been left with little choice but to rely on their innate intelligence, experience, courage and spirit of solidarity to continue to work as best they can, despite knowing full well they risk exposing themselves and their families to the coronavirus.*

As schools have closed to contain the spread of the virus, children in poverty have found it almost impossible to participate in remote learning because they lack even the most basic tools, digital access and support to continue their education. Millions of children who depended on free or subsidized school meals are going hungry.

The global pandemic has truly exposed the unconscionable inequalities and social injustices within our societies.

This year, when we come together in solidarity to recommit ourselves to eradicating extreme poverty, it is more crucial now than ever before that we remain strong and united as we work together to ensure that no one is left behind.

This year the theme of our commemoration, **“Acting together to achieve social and environmental justice for all”**, urgently reminds us that social justice cannot be truly realized unless we also act together to overcome the serious environmental injustices experienced by people in poverty.

The impacts of rapid climate change and global environmental destruction are serious and disproportionately affect the livelihood, food security and health of people living in poverty. These impacts will only get worse for them unless we urgently act together.

We already see these impacts for ourselves in the worsening air and water quality where we live, work and play. We see the effects around us in the toxic plastic pollution that chokes our oceans, rivers and neighbourhoods. We are being harmed by the abuse of pesticides, heavy metals and other substances that poison our food supply. We have experienced firsthand the change in weather patterns that bring stronger and more destructive storms and floods, or longer and harsher droughts.

*However, we have always known that people living in extreme poverty, often through sheer necessity and ingenuity, are the first to act decisively within their communities in response to poverty, climate change and environmental challenges. Their invaluable efforts, knowledge and experience must be recognized because they are true drivers of change and their voices must be heard, especially in international bodies.*

**We must ensure Governments act decisively — in partnership and in solidarity with people in poverty — to create economic growth and social change that actively promote environmental sustainability and social justice for all.**

We can achieve this when we work together in solidarity!