

**Speech by H.E. Mr. Cassam UTEEM
President of ATD Fourth World**

**At the sixth official meeting of the International Committee for 17 October
hosted at the International Organisation of La Francophonie**

Friday, 10 June 2016

We are brought together today by an call to action, made almost thirty years ago by Fr. Joseph Wresinski, alongside the forgotten families from the shantytown of Noisy-le-Grand, and many other defenders of human rights. This call to action remains both unsettling and demanding. It has been proven and renewed: *"Wherever people are condemned to live in poverty, human rights are violated. It is our solemn duty to come together to ensure that these rights be respected."* The roots of this message were in the lives of millions of people worldwide who are enslaved by poverty and cast aside by society. It is strengthened by their experiences, their commitment, and their ideas. Since October 17, 1987, on the Trocadero Human Right Plaza, these words have been chiseled into marble, as if to seal the wish: "so that humanity may at last fulfil its true destiny, refusing forever that misery prevail."

There are forty-nine replicas of [this commemorative stone](#) worldwide, which confirms that the World Day for Overcoming Poverty is becoming more and more widely acknowledged and that its message resounds from the heart of abandoned as well as more public places. These replicas of the commemorative stone have become places to gather and mobilise for the defense of human rights. I am proud that in my country, Mauritius, on the Caudan Waterfront in Port Louis, this replica is a memorial honouring the glory of people in extreme poverty. We also have a national committee on 17 October, which includes many different non-profits. In addition, ATD Fourth World has just signed a agreement with the Indian Ocean Commission this year. This agreement will magnify the impact of the World Day of Overcoming Poverty by associating five Indian Ocean countries. That encourages us to work towards gaining other alliances elsewhere.

ATD Fourth World and the International Committee for 17 October are united now more than ever to promote the initiative to transform society starting with those who are confronted with poverty daily. This initiative which carries the mark of Joseph Wresinski, whose centennial we will observe in 2017. With the members of the network, "Forum for Overcoming Extreme Poverty" (including people and associations from more than 100 countries through www.overcomingpoverty.org), we have undertaken to share reflections, experiences and proposals, to unite with those who have no voice, to give them their place in society and help them to attain their rights.

The establishment of a struggle against poverty and the infringement of human rights entails first of all ensuring the participation of those living in poverty so that they can not only influence the policies concerning them, but also so that they are able to become partners in transforming our societies.

Any other approach, in my opinion, is destined for certain failure, and is a waste of the intelligence of the people who have a unique experience of resistance. I am thinking of these children and young people deprived of access to education due to lack of birth certificates, whom international campaigns fail to reach, in spite of great efforts. I am thinking of these families

evicted and rehoused in places without a future, far from any employment, training, or health care options.

Finally, after a long campaign, in 2015 the international community and the UN General Assembly agreed to an anti-poverty approach that refuses to take short-cuts and aims to “Leave No One Behind”, as adopted in the preamble of the Sustainable Development Goals. The first goal is to end poverty everywhere, and in all its forms. We are delighted by this, but we know that we need to be united and continue to put ourselves in the place of the very poorest people in order to understand and realize this ambition in its entirety by leaving absolutely no one behind.

The Guiding Principles of the United Nations on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights were adopted in 2012 by the Council for Human Rights and the United Nations General Assembly. This established a tool to implement policies respectful of the dignity of everyone while considering people in extreme poverty as partners. Fear and shame have thus been driven back to give way to confidence and justice. That is how peace can be created.

When we talk about having respect for dignity, we are speaking of allowing every person to increase their humanity through their knowledge, their spirituality, and their sense of usefulness to others; first of all with their families and more widely in their communities, with their compatriots, and beyond. This allows each and every person to feel recognized as a human being. Our cultural diversity, beliefs, and social differences are actually virtues if we can only succeed in recognizing the inalienable dignity of each person. Each of us can be an artisan, creating together a world that is more just and with wider solidarity.

2017 will be an exceptional year for mobilizing around the world to spread this message and promote peace as we mark the centennial of the birth of the founder of ATD Fourth World and the thirtieth anniversary of the World Day for Overcoming Poverty. Ms. Isabelle Pypaert Perrin, Director General of ATD Fourth World, will soon lay down the issues for you and you will see how the scope of this movement will be taken to the next level.