

# LETTER TO FRIENDS AROUND THE WORLD FORUM ON OVERCOMING EXTREME POVERTY



www.overcomingpoverty.org

International Movement ATD Fourth World  
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## A NEW HUMANITY WITHOUT POVERTY WILL SEE THE LIGHT OF DAY

*"The very poor tell us over and over again that a human being's greatest misfortune is not to be hungry or unable to read, or even to be without work. The greatest misfortune of all is to know that you count for nothing, to the point where even your suffering is ignored."* said Joseph Wresinski, founder of ATD Fourth World.

Last 17 October, we paid tribute to everybody facing the violence of extreme poverty. Marked by deprivation and contempt, many flee from place to place driven by armed conflict, drought, floods, and hunger.

All too often our societies are deprived of the experiences of people whose lives are forged by courage and patience as they seek out pathways that could bridge our divisions, and lead us toward peace.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ms. Louise explains: "With ATD, no one gives us money, but as a movement we find intelligence that helps us get out of poverty. Our goal is to find the person who is the most stuck in poverty. We see him and speak to him, saying, 'Stand up tall; you have the strength to do it.' I teach

him to carry packages as I do, and we continue by working together. We manage so that no one is left behind."

Ms. Louise's struggle for every person's dignity to be recognised is also happening in other places.

Around the world, thousands of people with first-hand experience of poverty have come together. Joined by public officials, grassroots community workers, and academics, they are merging their knowledge. Their work influenced the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, in which heads of state made a commitment to ensure that development will "leave no one behind."

This promise awakens hope and fuels our commitment.

This path to free humanity from poverty is a long one. Joseph Wresinski set us on this path with determination. Like him, we continue to believe that "a new humanity without poverty will see the light of day because we want to make it happen."

Isabelle Perrin, Director General,  
International Movement ATD Fourth World



## WORDS FROM THE FORUM ON OVERCOMING EXTREME POVERTY TEAM

Thanks to you, our Forum correspondents, each issue of the Letter to the Friends Around the World contains such extraordinary humanity! Across the globe and in many different contexts, through simple acts and gestures, we each seek in our own way to express our desire for respect and human dignity.

A desire for respect for those who have very hard lives: *"We need more opportunities for everyone. I do not know how to read but I have other qualities ..."* "My blue bicycle" is the testimony of a father who, in Spain, tells us how simple acts of solidarity give him a glimmer of hope.

A desire for respect expressed through countless ways of getting involved:  
In Indonesia, Norman, a young student, spent time at a

village library with a man who, during retirement, chose to do what was lacking most in his life; helping others.

In Morocco, Jeema has also been doing this for years. *"My father fought to give me the chance to be granted an education. Today, I want to give back to the children of the city."*

In Louisiana (USA), Gina and members of her FFLIC association refuse to let young people who have been permanently excluded from school turn to activities that could lead them to prison.

This desire for human dignity is what continues to unite us day after day and we publicly express it every year on the 17 October, World Day for Overcoming Extreme Poverty.

## ● THE MISSING PART OF LIFE

**Norman graduated from the Politeknik ATMI Surakarta College in Indonesia. In this story, he bears witness to the voluntary activities of a retired factory worker. As a student, Norman helped with school support for children from disadvantaged communities.**

On 8th November last year, we went to Ampel, a village in Central Java to see a waterfall called Semuncar. Before we went to the waterfall, we were welcomed by the villagers and the headman of the village. The headman didn't charge us a single Rupiah to visit the waterfall. Instead, he asked us to donate a children's book and took us to the Jendela Merbabu library in the village. When we arrived, children were sitting in a row watching a film together.

Mr. Gunarto, who is in charge of the library, introduced himself. Several years ago he used to be an industrial worker in a factory but felt that there was something missing in his life. When Mount Merapi erupted at the end of 2010, he took part in relief operations for the victims. It made him get involved and from these experiences he found what he had been looking for. This was the answer! When he retired from factory life, he chose to stay and live in the village.

His first initiative to support the villagers was to help promote the Semuncar waterfall. Actually, many international visitors are impressed with the daily activities that go on here. Drawing water from a traditional well, cleaning out the cowshed, farming, visiting caves, hiking on Mount Merbabu, eating the village's traditional food, picking tea leaves, and drinking tea from the leaves.

Mr Gunarto could foresee that by developing the waterfall there was also the potential for the village children's development.



There was already a library in the school, but for a long time it had not been maintained and had become unpopular among students. With only 140,000 Rupiah (equal to 14 US dollars), Mr. Gunarto bought some second hand children's books. Now, visitors don't pay anything to visit the waterfall. They donate books for the children. After school, if the children aren't helping their parents in the house, they can come and read books at the library. In this village, the internet signal is so bad that it is nearly useless to watch a TV show. It is a brilliant move to divert teenagers from their phones or tablets to reading books.

Mr. Gunarto has told me his many hopes and dreams. I hope to come back to the village and share with the children my experiences of studying in the city. We can sing, draw, and make handmade crafts together.

NORMAN, INDONESIA

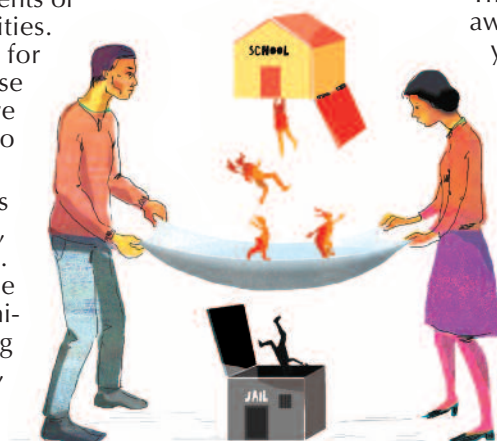
## ● LET OUR KIDS BE KIDS

**Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children (FFLIC) is a state-wide, membership based, parent led organization committed to abolishing the school-to-prison pipeline and reforming the juvenile justice system.**

15 years ago in New Orleans, parents and families walked in the rain to the juvenile courthouse. They stood up and gave voice to over 2,000 voiceless families in Louisiana, and became the unstoppable force for families across Louisiana known as FFLIC.

Since 2000, we have become infamously known through the halls of the State Capitol and in any meeting room as the "RED SHIRTS"! Through policy advocacy and grassroots activities we continue to support the abolishment of the school to prison pipeline. We have grown our membership and trained over 100 parents who work as agents of change in their communities. FFLIC has advocated for hundreds of families whose children were and are entrapped in the school to prison pipeline.

This year, as FFLIC celebrates 15 years of accomplishments, there is still much work to do. Ten years ago, Hurricane Katrina ravaged our communities and since then, rebuilding efforts have, unfortunately, increased racism.



Due to the higher cost of living, gentrification <sup>1</sup>, and new school regulations, Black families continue to lose control of what's happening in their lives.

Schools' "zero tolerance" policies, for example, mainly affect Black youth in our state. Pushed out, they stop attending school and eventually turn to activities which lead them to prison. The deeply entrenched racism and discrimination perpetuated by the education and criminal justice systems in Louisiana destroys thousands of our children's lives and excludes them from participating in normal civic society.

FFLIC's mission is to ensure equal life opportunities for all our children, particularly those most at risk of being criminalized. We don't want them to be tracked into the juvenile justice system because of schools that fail them.

We, as parents, can dismantle the school to prison pipeline. Through our campaigns, we build community awareness. We train and empower other parents, youth, and families with the knowledge and skills that will challenge zero tolerance policies.

FFLIC knows that children are not problems, they have problems. We need to revive the value of healthy practices and equality in how we address the challenging behaviour that children sometimes present. We must "Let our Kids be Kids!"

GINA W., UNITED STATES

1. The process of renewal and rebuilding accompanying the influx of middle classes or affluent people into deteriorating areas that often displaces poorer residents.

## ● WITH MY BLUE BICYCLE

***Necessity forces you to get out of the house, when you have no other choice. I would like to wake up every morning and go to a regular work place. Before I used to work and I enjoyed that lifestyle of security and a regular income every month.***

It allowed me to have a more comfortable lifestyle, to eat out with my wife, do the shopping etc, but now with the recession, it's harder to find work.

I am able to claim a benefit but can't manage to live on it. I have to go out of the house to find enough money for food, or for things for the house. Collecting scrap metal provides work for a lot of people nowadays.

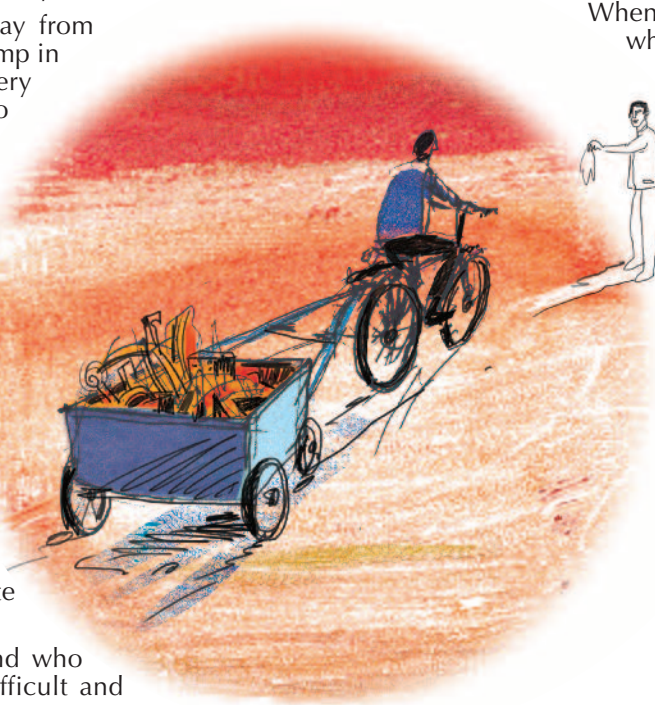
I use my bike as I live quite faraway from everything and there is no rubbish dump in my village. If I go with a cart it is very slow. With the bike I manage to do more and to get home to spend time with my children.

This lifestyle is very hard, as some days I can find enough to allow us to buy things for the house, milk or meat, etc, but other days, I earn 3 Euros, and have no money to take home.

It's hard physical work and tiring, working with the metal, but I put up with it. It's difficult to live like this, with little means, and not harming anyone.

Some days it's so desperate that you don't feel like living any more. Because you're really in desperate situation and you don't find anything.

There are people who insult you and who antagonise you, it makes it more difficult and makes life harder.



When people insult me I try not to reply, to not turn around. I continue on my way. It's a waste of time replying. One day I was on my bike and a person blocked my way with their car.

If I was physically attacked, how would I manage to feed my children?

Sometimes it's the other way around. Once I had cut my hand and a man stopped and gave me a tissue and looked after the wound. It's a glimmer of hope when people who don't know you understand and approach you and help you, but not financially.

That motivates me and makes the day a better one.

When I come home after a day where I didn't earn anything, it is very hard. Nothing is certain. You have to go at the right time, when people are throwing something out for you to find. It is a matter of luck. We need more opportunities for everyone. I don't know how to read but I have other qualities which the companies I've worked for have appreciated.

ANTONIO J., SPAIN

## ● THE STRUGGLE FOR HOPE TO BRING ABOUT CHANGE

***Coming from a town marked by the closure of the coal mines, Jemaa shares the story of her Cooperation and DEvelopment Association. 'CODEV' set out to improve the living conditions of women and children.***

*My father fought to give me the chance of an education. Today, I want to give that chance to the children from the town.'*

When the coal mining started, the town of Jerada in Morocco was an economic centre for the region. Many families migrated to the area to become the workforce in the mines. These closed in 2001 and many families found themselves without work. Some ex-miners, women, young people and children continued to mine in secret. Many died in the mines, others died of silicosis.<sup>1</sup>

CODEV was created in 2006. After a survey in a disadvantaged neighbourhood which revealed the key need for literacy, the first classrooms came into being.

The association also supported the creation of Income Generating Projects for women. *'The first actions were aimed at young women who worked with me in a plastics*

*factory which closed in 2005. Motivated, they created a co-operative to produce couscous and other dried wheat products.'*

The women's experience demonstrated the need to look after the children, the main victims of the mine closures, poverty, and violence and often they'd had no education. The teachers like Fayza went to find them in isolated villages. *'I got around on my moped and went to the camp several miles away, running an unusual risk for a young woman in these very traditional regions. To have somewhere to meet, we did up an abandoned shipping container, painting and decorating it. After a while, I established trust with the children, and when my moped broke down, they accompanied me home.'* *'We organise outings but these are limited due to lack of funding. I think of a child who went on an outing to the sea and thought it was a swimming pool: that made me cry.'*

In 2015, women and girls from the mines told of the changes in their lives due to the literacy programme and further education. This experience will be repeated in 2016 with the children.

JEMAA, CODEV ASSOCIATION, MOROCCO

1. Lung disease brought on by inhalation of dust particles.

## LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

● We are a group of young people. We are working to fight poverty in our country of Sudan. Our action consists of setting up small projects around breeding, agriculture and small businesses. Our slogan is: "From necessity to productivity." We would like to join your network "the Forum on Overcoming Extreme Poverty" in order to benefit from the experiences of others and share our experience.

*Dr. Mohammed A., Sudan*

● I am preparing for the celebration of 17 October and would like to ask you to send to my congregation - the Sisters of Our Lady of Namur - a copy of the Letter to Friends Around the World.

I will do my best so that the Mayor and the Catholic parish begin a campaign that will identify the families in our municipality who are experiencing extreme poverty. Many thanks for your help and for this year's theme.

*Sr. Sandra P., Nicaragua*

● I know most of these 'Letter to Friends Around the World' by heart, having meditated over them for hours, hoping for lessons for myself. For example, the article about a man and two donkeys, the rural bookmobile in action (n°73). Reading has improved the comfort of my living conditions.

*Reg M., New Zealand*

SEEN ON THE WEBSITE

## 17 OCTOBER 2016

More than 260 events have been organised in 54 countries, find out more on the website: (<http://overcomingpoverty.org/oct17/2016/all-countries>)

Theme for 2016  
Moving from humiliation and exclusion to participation: Ending poverty in all its forms



In Burkina Faso, a 17 October commemoration took place in the Delwendé centre which has for several years welcomed people who have been banned from their village, often because they have been accused of witchcraft. Due to flooding, this centre was moved to a village east of the capital, leading to the loss of a network (work and social links) that people had been able to create there.

The commemoration consisted of a parade, theatre piece, music, collective work, speeches and testimonies. All of this was said with the **strength, courage and the resilience of people living in extreme poverty who are often humiliated**. We made reference to what Mr Ban Ki-moon, General Secretary of the United Nations reminded us of in his message for 17 October 2016: "Poverty is both a cause and consequence of marginalization and social exclusion. To fulfil the promise of the 2030 Agenda to leave no one behind, we must address the humiliation and exclusion of people living in poverty". The moral of the theatre piece played at the Delwendé centre also reminded us that: we can all be humiliated if we're not careful and we can also fight against exclusion if we want to".

You can read more testimonies and 17 October reports on our website: <http://overcomingpoverty.org/article/17-october-2016-reports>

Argentina, Australia, Bangladesh, Belgium, Benin, Bolivia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Canada, Central African Republic, Chad, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Dominican Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Guadeloupe, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, India, Ireland, Italy, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Lebanon, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Morocco, Mauritius, Mexico, Nepal, Netherlands, Palestinian Territories, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Reunion, Senegal, Spain, Switzerland, Taiwan, Tanzania, Thailand, Togo, United Kingdom, United States, Zambia.



You can also share your observations and your experiences on the website: [www.overcomingpoverty.org](http://www.overcomingpoverty.org) or by email: [overcomingpoverty@atd-fourthworld.org](mailto:overcomingpoverty@atd-fourthworld.org)

The "Forum on Overcoming Extreme Poverty" is a network of committed people who want to develop friendship and exchange knowledge about what poor and very poor people teach us, i.e. people who suffer from multiple disadvantages in the areas of education, housing, employment, health and culture; those who are criticised and rejected the most. This forum invites people to join a worldwide movement to overcome extreme poverty, to rebuild communities with people living in extreme poverty, inspired by their lives. This movement expresses itself in the Letter to Friends Around the World, which publishes the texts written by its correspondents three times a year, in French, English, Spanish and Portuguese. The Forum on Overcoming Extreme Poverty is run by the International Movement ATD Fourth World, an international NGO whose headquarters are in Pierrelaye, France. Those who join the Forum do so in their own right, and do not have to become members of ATD Fourth World. Our e-mail address is: [overcomingpoverty@atd-fourthworld.org](mailto:overcomingpoverty@atd-fourthworld.org) Internet: [www.overcomingpoverty.org](http://www.overcomingpoverty.org) Subscription \$8/8€ per annum - Support subscription: \$10/10€ per annum. © International Movement ATD Fourth World - Printed by ATD Fourth World - Méry-sur-Oise - No 95 - December 2016.

ILLUSTRATIONS FROM  
**HELENE PERDEREAU,**  
A LONG TIME FRIEND AND  
SUPPORTER OF THE  
INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENT  
ATD FOURTH WORLD

PAGE SETUP: LYDIE ROUFFET