

ATD Fourth World

Louis Adrien Delva and Mahamadou Kone – Oct 17, 2017

DADY: My name is Louis Adrien Delva and I come from Haiti.

I first learned about extreme poverty when I was in secondary school. As you may know, Haitian society is very stratified. People from different walks of lives never meet one another. But I was part of a catechism group in my college and together, often on Friday afternoons, we visited people who lived in very difficult conditions. I had seen poverty in the street before, but now I learned about extreme poverty in neighbourhoods where I would never have gone without specifically wanting to meet the people who lived there.

Now I realize that there are people living in poverty and people living in extreme poverty.

Here, at the United Nations, you speak of the eradication of poverty. But in Haiti, people are hoping that their efforts to seek peace will be supported.

MAHAMADOU: When Joseph Wresinski launched ATD Fourth World Movement, he wanted to initiate an approach to reach people who are living in poverty and are left behind. He asked other people to join him. I answered his call, starting from when I was a child. I still remember running to see the books that ATD volunteers brought to my neighbourhood in Bouake, Ivory Coast.

When I was a student in Mali, I wanted to offer children that same opportunity to satisfy their desire to learn. Together we started a library under mango trees. Later, after I completed my studies, I chose to make a long-term commitment to follow Joseph Wresinski's path; and since then, like others and with others, I seek out the most tired, abandoned people and help them find their place in our society.

I pursue this commitment around the world, like a calling that leads me to the intelligence and courage of families who are often left behind.

Everywhere in the world, children are separated from their families because of extreme poverty. In Burkina Faso I met Dramane, a child living in the streets of Ouagadougou. After two years with ATD, he tried to reconnect with his family. His father lived alone, in isolation. He was banned from his village because his son had left without giving any explanation

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After Dramane started visiting his father, a path gradually materialized in the bush between the village and his father's place. Soon, other members of the community began using the path.

Dramane's path had become everyone's path. With pride, his father could use it to reach the village. It became a path of links, of sharing, and of solidarity; a path to belonging to a community.

Joseph Wresinski made a promise that one of these paths would lead here, to the United Nations, so that, in their turn, the United Nations could also take this path.

DADY: Haiti is my home. I don't have to force myself to stay there. I made the choice to remain in my country. I am not the only one; there are other people who stay. Some stay because they are privileged and they take advantage of it. For me, I stay because it is the place where I feel I can be myself.

I believe that as a citizen I can do something, in the context of my country's very difficult history, to try to make some progress, at first individually then together.

I believe that, as citizen, I can support the efforts of families who live in great hardship to rediscover their sense of dignity.

I have a personal history with families who live in poverty, starting back in 1991. I thought I could imagine anything, but when I first met them, their situation overwhelmed me. What I saw and what I heard was beyond my understanding. This is why I made a commitment to them

My point of reference is families who live in poverty. When I am among them and when we interact in a friendly way, we are going forward, taking a step in the right direction. When they find in me someone who can echo their concerns, we are taking a second step.

What bothers me the most now is that the families are making such an effort but still they are getting increasingly poorer. That worries me deeply. Extreme poverty dehumanizes people, and it's up to people to find a solution and to recognize one another as brothers and sisters.

MAHAMADOU: In meeting with families facing the violence of poverty in Burkina Faso, as in Haiti, we realized how lucky we are to be able to make free choices. Today, we understand that our freedom allows us to make a commitment to the hopes of Angélique, Seamus, Alex, and so many others throughout the world. Enough is enough. We have to be together to say stop.

These people have helped us understand that a search for our own humanity is not a personal issue, but a collective one. The humanity of all of us has the same foundation — our common dignity.

Here at the United Nations, we still need to learn how to create paths that would enable each person to feel part of a human community. If there is one place to learn this, it is among families who live in extreme poverty. They know the meaning and the value of belonging to this human community, all the more because it is constantly denied to them.

In today's world, where no one can see the end of the tunnel, these families who are working for peace show us a path where everyone can walk together.

DADY: How can we tolerate what is intolerable? There is no risk in fighting extreme poverty; we just have to reach out to others to build peace. And all of us will benefit.

Thank you