

ATD Fourth World

Angelique JEANNE's speech on the 17th of October 2017 at the UN Headquarters in New York.

Good afternoon. My name is Angelique and I come from France. I have five children. At one point in my life, when I was living in extreme poverty and isolation, social services took my children away after ruling that I was an unfit mother. No one offered support or tried to understand my situation. I was judged, humiliated, and condemned to live without my children.

From the very beginning, we don't have the same opportunities. Even at a young age, our children see the harshness of our lives. To help us, they take on responsibilities that are not theirs to bear as children. They want to protect us even though it's not their role.

At home, sometimes I was completely drained and couldn't keep up with everyday tasks. Sometimes, my children had to go to school with an empty stomach, because there wasn't anything at home. But my children never spoke of that, for fear of people judging us.

When I was a child, I did the same thing to protect my own parents.

I remember arriving at school and the teacher forcing my older sister to wash herself. She said she smelled bad, and she did that in front of everyone. The teacher pulled my hair and humiliated me, saying that my family — my family name — was disreputable. We never told that to our parents, because we did not want to add to their suffering.

In our neighborhoods, poverty makes children mature too quickly, and their lives are marked forever. This is deeply unjust. There is no place anywhere for our children to speak of their lives without fearing that their families will be judged.

Living with no money in sub-standard housing, despairing of finding any work, dropping out of school, often without knowing how to read and

write, and with no job training, added to the fact that many of us as children were removed from our families — that's the violence of extreme poverty.

In order to survive, we are forced to ask for help, and we depend on charitable organizations to eat, to find housing, and to have what we need for our children, this is not what we want to have to do. When we have little or no money, we are discriminated against, humiliated, ignored, or even treated like children. We are forced to be dependent. Living in extreme poverty, we are lectured, coached, and told what to do and what not to do. We end up feeling ashamed of ourselves.

We suffer these humiliations and grit our teeth in front of people who are supposed to help us. They think that we have no intelligence, that we are worthless, and that we can't bring up our children. They don't expect anything from us, so any decisions that affect us are taken without consulting us, without taking into account our experience, our strength, our willpower, or our desire to build a more just world.

Will you get to know us and acknowledge us? Aren't we human beings like you? Enough is enough. We are not to be blamed. We are people who resist and who want to build peace. Our experiences have prepared us to do that. We are standing on our feet.

What I wish for myself, I wish for every person throughout the world. All of us need to commit ourselves not to look down on anyone, not to leave anyone behind, and not to leave anyone alone in extreme poverty. We can rest only when extreme poverty is overcome. Then everyone everywhere will be able to live in peace.

Together with you, that's what we want to help build.

Thank you