

ATD Fourth World - Martine Le Corre October 17, 2017

First, I want to give a special greeting to the young people here. We are proud to see so many of you among us today.

In these gardens of the United Nations, between the Berlin wall and a boat full of people fleeing famine, we are gathered today in front of this stone. It continues to remind us, even now, how extreme poverty tramples on our freedom and violates our most fundamental rights.

It is unbearable, unacceptable, that extreme poverty still today destroys so many lives of men, women, and children.

Yet, we dare to say that things will not remain the same.

Mr. Chemin, you used to live in emergency housing close to mine, in utter destitution and total isolation. You thought, as many other people did, that you no longer mattered to anyone; yet you found the courage to join us on October 17, 1987, for our first gathering to champion human rights. On that day, you told me, “I felt proud again to be a person and to be alive. I had lost all hope.”

My friend Yvanite, great lady from Haiti, you told me, “We do not choose whether we are born in poverty or not; that's just how it is. But what we can choose is to take responsibility for one another and with one another.”

You have struggled against extreme poverty all your life. Against all odds, you have worked to create peace. That is why nothing will remain the same.

You have not struggled in vain. This stone speaks of you. It speaks on your behalf. Your struggle and your courage —and those of millions of people who have been disregarded and forgotten — are carved here in the history of humanity. They bring us together today here at the United Nations, a place where people around the world try to find common cause.

People of the Fourth World, this stone pays tribute to you. Father Joseph Wresinski said to you:

"You are greater than what other people say of you.

"You are greater because you have courage, because you come from generations of people built on courage.

"You have never agreed to be imprisoned by poverty, which you have always resisted, and you have never agreed to be consulted only about trivialities. You have always insisted on being seen as people whose struggle and ideas are valuable for everyone.

"Demand that the world learn from you and from your courage. Aim to build the democracy that you desire!"

Zena Patrick, and Kimberly, you are right — the violence caused by extreme poverty and its effect on our lives is shameful.

But this shame is not for you to bear, or for anyone living in extreme poverty around the world.

This burden of shame linked to the violence of extreme poverty that imprisons and destroys lives is everyone's burden. This is something that we clearly understand.

We are here, strong and proud, aware of our legacy. We know what people and what struggles went before us, and we have confidence in the people who will continue after us.

Kevin, 14 years old and living in deep poverty, looked right at me one day and declared, "Tomorrow, my job will be to work in solidarity, like my mother."

We all know that the only answer to extreme poverty is to unite in our fight to free humanity. We have no other choice.

That is our choice today: not to ignore one another and not to abandon one another.

Together we make this solemn commitment around this stone. Together, we are determined; we will not give up. But I also know that nothing is possible without each one of you.

Father Joseph wanted us to climb the steps of the United Nations, and now we are here. We are starting on a new journey, lifted by hope. Together, we will work at finding a path to peace — peace that is anchored in

everyone's heart; peace that will endure; peace that will banish forever the violence of extreme poverty. This is our duty. It is also the primary duty of our nations to guarantee this peace for all people.

Let us write down this history, because tomorrow, for each of us, nothing will be as it was.