

Seamus Neville, address to the United Nations, 17 October 2017

Céad Míle Fáil ta

That's Irish Gaelic for "a hundred thousand welcomes."

My name is **Seamus Neville**. I am from **Ireland**, and this is my **first time** here in **New York**. I am a long-time **activist** with **ATD Fourth World Movement**; and, **as an activist**, I fight for **human rights**.

We, the **poor people in the world**, have only **one voice**. We **all** have the **same goal**, and that **goal** is to **stop poverty once and for all** throughout the world.

I would like to see a **brighter future** for families who are **struggling** in poverty, to finally see families being able to **bring up their own children** because they are **respected**. Families around the world are **abused** by the system because they are **poor**.

I **helped** my wife to **deliver** one of my children. That's **amazing**, for a **father** to **help** in his **son's birth**, and I feel **very proud**. But, unfortunately, my son was **taken into care**, and then my eldest daughter was **put up for adoption**. When that happened, I just **broke down** outside the court. I felt **guilty** for being a **parent**. I **know** I did everything **right**. But **nothing** you do is **right** in their eyes, and it makes you feel **less than a person**. To wake up every single day **without your children** makes you feel there is a **gap in your life**.

When children are taken **into care**, parents **grieve** all their lives, even if the children are alive. I felt like a **failure** when **my** children were taken into care a **failure** as a **father**. Also, when my daughter was put up for adoption, I was allowed to send her cards only twice a year, but she told me later that she never got them.

Everywhere in the world, extreme poverty **separates children** from their **families**.

As **families** who have been **abused** by the system, we need to **stand up** and join our voices to say **enough is enough**. Coming together gives us the **strength** to **fight** for our rights. We may be **poor**, but we are **rich** in knowledge. All we ask is to be **respected** and to be treated in the **same way** as other people. We **do need** to treat one another with **respect** and **dignity**.

Today in many European, African, Asian, and Latin American countries, in Great Britain, and here in the United States, **we**, the **people living in poverty**, conduct training programmes to teach social workers, teachers, and citizens about what **we know**, what families like ours **experience**. For me, it means that I put on a front to **hide my suffering**. I hide my pain when I work with those professionals, and I get my **strength** from **other families struggling** as I am. Our **goal** is to make professional practice and behaviour **change**, and to ensure that our **own knowledge** is **taken into account**.

Fighting for **human rights, dignity, and justice** is a long battle; but we will **overcome** for the **sake of our children**. The time has come for **us all** to say to our governments **not** to take our **parental rights away from us**.

Thank you.