

LETTER TO FRIENDS AROUND THE WORLD FORUM ON OVERCOMING EXTREME POVERTY



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JUSTICE AND LOVE FINALLY BROUGHT TOGETHER

We cannot but question what life means if people around us are dying, unnoticed.

Or if children deny themselves the right to dream to the point of saying: "I never dream. What's the point? My dreams won't come true anyway."

When young people are excluded from social or school programs because we are afraid of them, or because everybody has given up on them and on their families.

When people are fighting to promote justice on behalf of those living in poverty but never really take the time to listen to them.

We may also question what life meant for Joseph Wresinski, who as a child grew up in extreme poverty and who, as a grown man, called people together on 17 October thirty years ago. At that time, he bore witness to "the millions and millions of children, women and fathers who have died from misery and hunger" and to "the poor of all times, still poor today, forever on the road, fleeing from place to place, despised and disgraced". He continues to inspire us to act to bring about a better world.



17 October, Beitouna, **Lebanon**. Ph. ATD Fourth World

Walking in his footsteps, millions of women and men, young people and children have sought to overcome their sense of guilt and the notion that extreme poverty is inevitable. They have refused to let their intelligence go to waste.

They find the strength to meet other people including those in high places, although they do not attend the same schools and do not have the same education as them.

They show that these encounters, rooted in the hearts and minds of those who experienced them, are not impossible.

These take place between people who are made to feel useless, and people who are constantly overworked. They take place between people at the very bottom and people at the very top of the social ladder.

By initiating these undreamt-of encounters, people resisting poverty experience the pride of coming together as one, of being part of the same humanity, generate unexpected changes, as guiding lights for a world free of extreme poverty.

They also give hope that new encounters will happen in the future.

In this way, they respond to the message that Fr. Joseph Wresinski acclaimed on 17 October 1987 at the first gathering which brought defenders of human rights together:

"What about you? Are you going to pave the way for a new world where justice will prevail over profit and exploitation, where peace will prevail over war, and where justice and love can be finally reconciled?"

Yes, let us all dare to continue these encounters on 17 October and every other day !

Isabelle Perrin, Director General,
International Movement ATD Fourth World
Excerpt from the 17 October message

<http://www.atd-fourthworld.org/justice-love-finally-brought-together/>

● A COMMUNITY'S COURAGE

The Mobile Team travels across the Amazonian region in a dugout canoe to reach out to the indigenous peoples and those who are the most marginalized.

After eighteen hours of travelling up the Tauhamanu's river in a dugout canoe, we caught sight of the village of Nova Oceania. The assistant to the village chief welcomed us and helped us carry our bags. This welcome made us forget our tiredness so we went to visit the school and everyone started to tell us about the village's life and history. They used to live in Oceania but they were chased out by rich landlords who forced them to leave.

They broke our hearts when they said: "In 2014, while we had gone to a celebration, the owner of a timber company took advantage of our absence to burn our houses. When we came back, everything was gone in the fire."

They rebuilt their houses, started to cultivate the land again and got some recognition as farmers.

They now fight to get recognition as an aboriginal community. They already have a primary school but they want to expand it. They want to



enable the teacher to complete his training. They also want to build a church, already putting up a cross where they plan to have it.

Our visit has been for them a sign of encouragement to keep on fighting.

We committed ourselves to support them and help them in the process they initiated to get an official protection of the region where their 'uncontacted brothers' (those who have not had contact with the outside world) live. Although injured by their arrows and fearing them, the Nova Oceania's inhabitants try to protect them from the timber companies that also want to take possession of their land and chase them away.

We bear witness to the courage of this community who is working to overcome so many struggles. These people are standing up for themselves and they still find the strength to help the 'uncontacted'.

They told us about seven other communities we could visit in a very isolated area. They are ready to get us in touch with someone who could bring us there.

More travels to come !

PACO A., BRAZIL. ■



● MEETING PEOPLE FROM DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS HAS STIRRED SOMETHING IN ME

My name is Salwa and I am a teacher. I have always wanted to enable underprivileged children to gain access to culture.

In 2009, I had the good fortune to discover Taporí, a movement of friendship between children, promoted by ATD Fourth World. Taporí allows children to create relationships and to exchange stories about life and courage. It showed me the importance of reading for all children, including those from underprivileged backgrounds. Before that, I had worked in a French-speaking cultural center then in a French school, both places welcoming children from well-to-do families.

In 2012, I returned to my profession as a teacher in a small town in the east of Egypt. Every afternoon, on my way home from work, I saw children playing in the street after school. The only library in town closed at 1:00 pm. Thinking about an afternoon reading activity with the children, I went to a school to speak about it. The librarian asked an employee to come open the library for me. I then set up a time to meet there with the children. With the other schools, the news spread by word of mouth.

This activity was a challenge, because I was unknown in this town and the inhabitants did not understand why I was running the activity for free. For three years, I ran it twice a week with children from six to 13, sometimes as old as 15 years of age. The workshop was organized in three stages: stories, drawings, and games. The children always asked me to read them stories of "Joha". These are tales showing life and friendship in a humorous way.

Aya, the daughter of my neighbor, came knocking on my door wanting to come with me. On the way, she told me stories. I understood later that she made them up. I was moved as I noticed how much these workshops opened up her mind.

Ahmed, a youth of 15-years of age with a mental handicap, always pestered the others. Since I was absolutely not going to abandon him, I put him in charge of handing out and picking up crayons and paper. So he felt useful. One day, a girl brought me a story that she had borrowed from her school library. For me, these workshops with the children were like seeds I sowed: I do not know what they will yield in the future.

In 2015, I returned to my studies. I chose the area of "education and culture" to better help underprivileged children.

SALWA I., EGYPT. ■



● **TODAY, EVERYTHING HAS CHANGED**

APROJUMAP (Association for the Promotion of Twinning and Friendship between People) aims to contribute to the economic and social development of rural Rwanda by combating poverty. They do this in partnership with the Rwandan authorities and several Belgian municipalities.

APROJUMAP supports families to take collective action in regular tasks, such as working in the fields, renovating houses, digging ditches to combat erosion, and other activities. One example of their work includes ‘small livestock’ projects, accessible to the poorest people. They receive young animals like goats and pigs, which they raise in barns. The livestock provide manure which can then be used in the fields.

The families meet in small groups in the woods once a month to talk, to share their problems and discuss solutions. The communal working, like the meetings, aims to develop solidarity to face problems together.

“I gave up school, not because I wasn’t intelligent, but so that I could pay the school fees and buy the school materials for my brother. I worked in the fields by myself. It was hard without animals. It was tiring and I didn’t manage to cultivate all my fields. Today, everything has changed.”

APROJUMAP introduced us to collective action. We help one another and cultivate the fields in no time. This solidarity has enabled me to plant manioc, sorghum, sweet potato, beans [...] I got 120kg of beans at the last harvest, whereas before I never got more than 57kg. I even hope in the coming years to return to school.” Jean de Dieu N.



This association encourages communities and authorities to identify the people who are the most excluded and isolated. *“We need time to reach them. In general, after participating for several months you can see the change. The people aren’t the same any more. The most excluded families become less isolated and feel progressively more human like everyone else. They have become a force to be reckoned with and show others that they exist. People need to come together to combat poverty. People must know that they need each other to find answers to their problems.”*

EUGENE N., APROJUMAP, RWANDA. ■

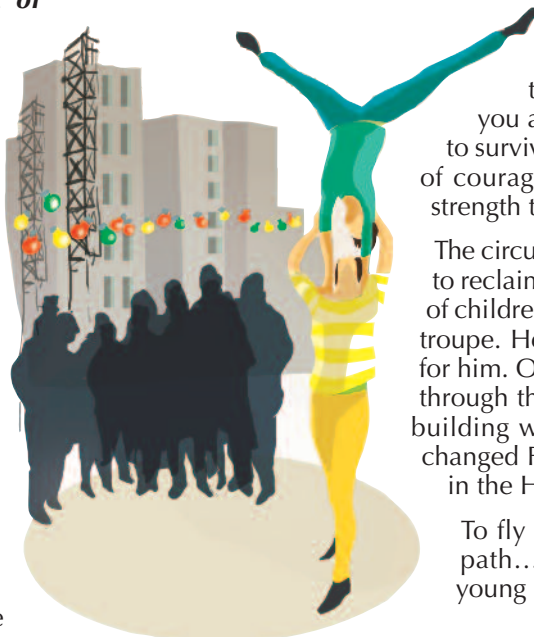


● **THE CIRCUS IS LIKE A RAINBOW: YOU LOOK AT HOW BEAUTIFUL IT IS WITHOUT LOOKING DOWN!**

Created in Romania in 1996 by the Franco-Algerian clown called Miloud O., the Parada Foundation works with children living on the streets. Calling on their many artistic skills, the work of the foundation restores their desire to live and to become part of society.

The Parada Foundation building is full of life, from top to bottom. Young people, children, and their parents from time to time, are there and talk with one another. They are sometimes worn out by drugs or diseases, too often physically or psychologically exploited. Their faces betray a very hard life, but they can be brightened by smiles - however fleeting.

A spark is lit on the ground floor, a space where training in the circus arts and performances are worked on. Since we have practiced circus arts in the streets ourselves, we know that



this is a wonderful tool for moving forward together. It is in this space that Marian and Tania work.

They already knew the Parada Foundation from when Miloud, its founder, was there. Miloud was involved with boys and girls who were roaming the streets and train stations of the Romanian capital shortly after the change of regime.

Being in the circus gives children and young people an opportunity to reach out to society. It means acting in front of others on a stage or in the street and being ‘visible’ in a society that rejects you. Life on the streets doesn’t teach you about History or Geography. It teaches you how to survive. The circus enhances self-esteem: it takes a lot of courage to face others. It is a tool that provides the strength to fight against poverty.

The circus also offers a chance to overcome one’s shyness, to reclaim one’s own space, and to change people’s vision of children living in the street. Florin was part of the circus troupe. He had no ID card, and the police were looking for him. One day a policeman recognized him in a march through the Bucharest city center. He went to the Parada building where he told him how to get an ID card. This changed Florin’s life. Later on, he was able to participate in the Homeless World Cup in Mexico.

To fly with their own wings and to pursue their own path...This is what is happening to these dozens of young people taking part in Parada!

BENOÎT AND VÉRONIQUE R-S.
WITH MARIAN M. AND TANIA P., ROMANIA. ■

LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

- In the context of commemorating the World Day for Overcoming Extreme Poverty, ASCOVI (Association of Consumers of Food Crops) recommends going out to meet people in order to conjugate three verbs - Look, Listen and Share - with those struggling the most in poor neighborhoods. *Patrice M., RDC.*

- 'Family Next Door' strives to integrate immigrants and refugees into Portuguese society. It promotes a positive image of cultural diversity. To accomplish this, a family welcomes into her home another family (immigrant or refugee) that she does not know. They gather around preparing and sharing a convivial

lunch, typical of Portuguese culture. This is a way to welcome "the other". *Anselmo P., Portugal.*

- We seek to fight against extreme poverty and deprivation. The elimination of this scourge requires giving children a high quality education and supporting the socio-economic efforts of their parents. Everyone longs for a better life that they can enjoy right where they are and without having to run the risk of crossing the ocean. But even in the twenty-first century, some parts of the world suffer from scourges. How can we stop this and create a brighter, livable world, right where they are?

Ali M., Solidarity for Life, Northern Togo.

NEWS FROM 17 OCTOBER 2017 WORLD DAY FOR OVERCOMING EXTREME POVERTY

Excerpt of a testimony, read on the Plaza of Liberties and Human Rights in Paris, where the very first 17 October commemoration took place.

'Try to meet and listen to people who live in poverty. Consider them as human beings. Come and talk with them, to think and create a world leaving no one behind.

You, the young people who have the ambition to succeed in life, do not let yourselves be taken by the madness of money that destroys the world. Go for humanity.

You, the heads of organizations, of trade unions, political parties, we need you to understand the Fourth World. Dare to build with the poorest!

Act so as not to create any more divisions between people in poverty here and elsewhere.

We all have the same future. We all want it to become fairer. By coming to this Plaza, you have taken a further step with us. Let's continue together! Together we will gain in humanity. Together we shall be part of the same humankind, a humankind beautiful for everyone.'

Marie J., ATD Fourth World activist, **France.**

Forty-nine children focused on how they could show their love towards others even less privileged than themselves:

Agreeing that no-one should go to bed hungry, they decided to form a small group, to go to small eateries, and to package their unsold food to give it to children or adults who are hungry.

Out of respect for all these children and adults, they agreed that rotten food shouldn't be eaten by human beings, whoever they are. They spoke their minds so vehemently that even adults pondered over this.

Michael H., Shabnam Resources, **India.**

Ten students and professionals met for the first time in the village of San Martin Mendoza in Argentina. Here are excerpts of what three of them said:

'It requires a lot of effort to celebrate 17 October. It is a day which shows us that, together, we can pave the way towards true social equality. This means that exclusion and marginalization won't be part anymore of the daily life of the poorest families.' Candela P.

'Fighting to eradicate poverty can't be the work of just a few people.' Maria F.

'We watched the video 'Extreme Poverty is Violence' and talked about it. Together, we realised that, starting in the country we live in, we need to be involved in the daily struggle of those who are the most excluded.' Miriam M.



Dublin, Ireland. Ph. ATD Fourth World



Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Ph. ATD Fourth World



Bouaké, Ivory Coast. Ph. ATD Fourth World

You can also share your observations and your experiences on the website: www.overcomingpoverty.org or by email: 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 Internet: www.overcomingpoverty.org Subscription \$8/8€ per annum - Support subscription: \$10/10€ per annum.

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ILLUSTRATIONS FROM
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