

CSocD56 Side Event “A Systemic Approach to Eliminating Homelessness”
Patrick Lubin, ATD Fourth World Activist

My name is Patrick Lubin. Thank you for this opportunity to speak on behalf of the International Movement ATD Fourth World at the UN.

To start, I would like to say that I don't want to speak just for myself because this is a problem for the world. I find the strength in my heart to share my story because I know you want to fight for change too. At the same time, I don't want you to define me as just a homeless person. I am who I am and I think what's important is to send this message. It's a very hard situation, but I am not my situation. It is possible to survive and get out of this trouble.

When you are homeless, people DISCRIMINATE against you. They will not give you the chance to progress in life. They will leave you with no consideration, no respect.

We are ashamed of ourselves when we are homeless. Why do people want to humiliate us even more? Why do people want to put us down? Why do people want to make us understand that we are different?

No, we are the same. We deserve RESPECT, CONSIDERATION, and DIGNITY. People don't realize that to be homeless is not just to have no money, it's not just to have no place to stay, it's mentally, you've been very affected.

Homelessness is also not a disease. Homelessness is humanity giving you trouble because society is not here to help when there is a catastrophe happening to you. My landlord was doing everything to make sure I couldn't live in his place, so I lost my apartment.

After, I tried not to be in the street and I was looking for a place to stay. I went to so many places and called everywhere. All the doors were closed. Everyone said “no”; they said “*you know what, Patrick, go to social services.*”

I had to learn by myself. There is no learning process, no training. There is nothing. And I remember that my strategy was not good at the beginning. I thought I looked like a tourist with my big bag. But I was outside all the time, the bag was cutting my hands and hurting my shoulder. I was walking back and forth all night between places open 24 hours because I didn't know where to go. I needed emergency help. I had nothing, I just had the mind to say: “*I'm not going to stay like that, I will fight for what I am.*”

I eventually went to social services. That was 2 years ago. The financial support they gave me was not enough to pay for the most important things. And the price for this support is that they treated me like a criminal. I felt like I was punished, like they took away my rights.

I never experience something so difficult than being in the street... but I am still here, alive. Maybe I made it because I have a very powerful faith... because I always remind myself: “*I'm not a criminal, I'm not guilty, I'm not different*”.

When you are in the street and nobody helps you, you need to think in your mind first: Can I make it through the night? Is it possible for me to go to sleep? Is it possible for me to find a place to survive? You know I never went to jail but I believe that when you are in jail, you count the days until you're going to be free. For me, I count the hours, and sometimes I count the minutes, I count the seconds until the night is over and it's going to be light outside.

Each morning, there is this hope to find a new place or somebody that will open the door to help you. At the same time, I know I will be near death the next night because of the violence, because it is so cold. I've been through three winters almost without warm food. The only things we can buy with the food stamps are cold

food - we cannot buy hot food and we cannot buy prepared food. We are losing power and energy, we are losing capacity for conversation.

You know, a homeless person cannot be sick. If you're sick and you have nobody to help you, you're going to die.

When you don't lay down like me for months or years, you get problems with your health. Believe it or not, I didn't sleep for 3 months straight. I don't know how I made it. And if sometimes, I closed my eyes, police officers come and say: "yo man you cannot sleep here." And they pushed me and they removed my chair. Where can you be safe?

The less you are sleeping, the more it affects your whole body. That's why my legs and feet were so swollen. I cannot get to my shoes or tie them. In the subway, when you see the legs of the homeless people, they are always so swollen. That's how we recognize each other.

I remember one day I was at the community kitchen. I spoke to a homeless person that I didn't know and I told him: "*I cannot drink too much water.*" And the guy spoke back: "*Yeah, you're right because if we drink water like we're supposed to, we do not have a bathroom.*" And he added: "*we also need to take specific food because we cannot go to the bathroom if we get sick.*" This is something in my heart I cry for.

People need to understand that to not have access to clean water is very dangerous because if you don't drink, you get problems with your health. But if you do drink water, you don't have access to a bathroom. Why do so many subways close their bathroom at night? This is the way our society treats human beings?

When you are homeless, it is like no matter what you do, a solution leads to another problem. For me, it doesn't matter the weather, it doesn't matter the situation, it doesn't matter the people who say "*Patrick you will not make it.*" "*Patrick you're going to die*", "*Patrick you cannot sleep here.*"

When it doesn't disturb no one, when it doesn't make trouble with nobody, the homeless need to be somewhere. As I wrote in a poem: **Vivre ou laisser mourir, which means Live or let die.** We all have a choice. If we don't do anything, the person will die mentally, physically, spiritually. ENOUGH is ENOUGH.

To hold on, you need to have something to think about, something that is beautiful for you in your life- someone you love, like your children, or something you love to do. You need to be positive, extremely positive. If you are not positive, you will not make it. If you lose your mind for any reason when you're homeless on the street, you're not going to make it.

But, there is still hope. We need to send hope to everyone in the street who have no place to stay. I will now finish with some recommendations that I prepared with my colleagues.

1. People living in poverty should be introduced as new partners in building knowledge. This knowledge will inform social policies that are effective and based on human rights. For example, at the local level, the knowledge of people living in poverty is needed to reform social services and the shelter system.
2. People living in poverty have the Right to Adequate Housing, as stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The human right to adequate housing is more than just four walls and a roof. It is the right of every person to gain and sustain a safe and secure home in which to live in peace and dignity.
3. The Right to water, sanitation, and hygiene is equally crucial for the well-being of all. Clean drinking water and sanitation have been recognized by the UN General Assembly as essential to the realization of all human rights. Issues such as discrimination of the homeless are still major obstacles to claiming their rights.

Thank you all for your attention.