

International Children's Forum
Tapori : Friendship Wins Over Poverty
On the Occasion of the 10th anniversary
of the Convention on the Rights of the Child
Geneva, 20 November 1999

(Meeting with Mary Robinson, U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights)

Children's Appeal - Parents' Message

Children's Appeal

We are 86 children from 37 delegations and we are coming from 24 countries. We are representing children we know from all over the world and with whom we have worked very hard to prepare this gathering. We are thinking especially of those who have not been able to come because of the situation in which they are living. We believe that it is very important that all children be able to gather together and learn from each other. We need to allow this to happen.

A lot of people say that children are the future. If everyone really believed this, there would be less, and even no more, poverty in the world. Today, fighting poverty is the most important thing.

All around us, in certain countries, there has been war these past 10 years. Many children lost their fathers. Hardship and poverty have entered our houses. It's very hard for us, but refugees have even more problems. Some children no longer have their parents or their homes.

Some children don't go to school. They are always in the street and sometimes we see them asking passersby for money. For those of us who are around this every day, it's very hard to look at.

Many among us live in very poor neighborhoods where there are a lot of drugs being sold. Some people go there just to buy drugs. They shoot up in front of the children and this makes them afraid. They are also afraid to get stuck by needles which have been left lying around on the ground. Parents are afraid for themselves and for their children; it's becoming dangerous.

Too many children live in poverty. Because of this poverty, they are often lost in life, lost in the world.

For us, the family is the most important thing. Without families, we can't live; we can't grow up. But families can't live in homes or communities without friendship. Without friendship, there is no life. Many families are chased away and have to hide; all alone with no friends. Yet, the earth and the sun are for everyone.

All children should have a house and should live with their family; there should be no more children in the streets. Children living in the streets suffer a great deal.

We have to do everything we can so that children live with their parents.

There are fathers who don't have enough money to raise their families. They travel very far to find whatever they can to feed their families. Sometimes they don't come back because they were unable to find anything, and then people accuse them of not loving their children. What these people don't know is that these parents love their children with all of their hearts.

All parents want to send their children to school but some are unable to do so because they don't have any money. They are forced to let their children work in order to keep the family alive and so that the younger ones are able to go to school. Our parents already do all that they can, and we have to help them. We know children like Augustine, who goes with his mom each morning, before going to school, to sell things at the market. She's always late to school. Once school is out, she goes back to the market to sell, often without having eaten anything since the morning.

We want to say that the world would be better if all families were happy and would help each other. We want our mothers and fathers to be happy.

Adults must help us, please!

We, the children, need to stay strong, hand in hand. We need to demand respect, the right to peace, friendship, and the right to have normal lives. We would like for it if our imaginations could fly free like a dove of peace and that our dreams could become reality.

We want all children to be able to come together so that not one child has to endure poverty.

All children should have places to go like our Taporí groups where we can meet together and do things together, even if our lives are very different. When we take the time to know each other, we can be friends and be stronger.

We believe that all children should have the same chances. One thing that everyone absolutely deserves is to be protected. This is what makes love possible and gives the hope and the courage to continue.

We believe that all children should be able to go to school for free and learn. The ability to know how to read and write can make them want to learn a trade which could help them get their family out of poverty. For each child to learn, they need to be respected and for no one to make fun of them. Adults need to make it possible for children to respect and to help each other. Everyone needs to work on this; children need grownups to set the example.

It's important for parents to have jobs to help their children grow up properly and to get a good education. We want children to be able to help out with certain tasks, but not to do have to do too much or to do work that is more than their strength can manage.

Children need to be able to play even if they are lacking many things. Children love to play. At school, we can play with a lot of other children. Playing together is important in learning to show respect to other children and adults. We demand that people show concern for this for all of the children of the world.

No more violence! We need to do all we can to protect peace in the family and in the world. Most importantly, no more selling guns! Children want to live in peace. If we have peace, we'll have friends.

We would like land mines to turn into shoes
We would like bullets to turn into candy, and cannons into tractors.

We don't have solutions, but we want everyone to understand the situation of children who have problems, that these children no longer feel lonely and that, in the end, we find a solution to give them a better life. We are asking the United Nations to understand poor children and to learn from them all that they already do with their friends to make things better...

We, as Taporí children, want to be friends with everyone. It's important to get together for the world to change and to be fairer to people who suffer. If everyone could convince people to believe in Taporí and in the new generation, the world would be a better place.

Adults must help us make this happen, please.

Parents' Message

We thank you, children.

We are proud of you
and of all the children from all over the world whom you represent.

Every morning we wonder:

"What am I going to do today so that my children can be happy?"

Every day we worry about that.

You know it because we often carry this worry together.

We want you to be respected for who you are,
that is to say children who, like all children,
want to grow up, want to make their parents happy,
want to laugh, play and sing,
want to learn and to discover the world.

We are proud of all the gestures and the efforts you make every day
to support us,
to support one another,
to support those who are alone.

When we see what you do,
when we hear what you say,
our adult hearts are deeply moved
because this respect and this solidarity are what we are trying to pass on to you.

Your good mood and your energy give us new courage to go on fighting.

We want to commit ourselves with you,
in everything you do, to create the peace we need so much.

Thank you Mrs Robinson
for having welcomed the children and listened to them.

We have much ambition for all the children.
We want all the parents, whatever country they live in,
to be able to give their children what they desire:
to live as a family, to get an education, to be sure of growing up in respect and dignity,
to live through their strong desire for peace and justice.

But many among us, the parents, have little means
and struggle with worries that are too heavy.
We need support. We need friends.

We no longer want parents to be obliged to work too hard in order to survive,
so hard that they sometimes die.

We no longer want parents to fear that their children will end up on the street
or be brought up by others because of extreme poverty.

We want that the efforts made by the parents to enable their children to learn open on to
a real future.

Today, through the messages that come with their 5,000 stones,
the children show us a way to put an end to injustice and extreme poverty.

Along with them, we appeal to all adults,
whether they know poverty or not,
whether they are a father or a mother, an uncle, an aunt, a friend or a neighbour,
whatever their responsibilities are.

We ask them to commit themselves
to make sure that no child goes on suffering because of extreme poverty,
to make sure that the rights written in the Convention for Children's Rights are
implemented for everybody.

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International Movement ATD Fourth World – 95480 Pierrelaye, France Tel 33 (0)1 34 30 46 10 – Fax 33 (0)1 30 36 22 21
