

# LETTER TO FRIENDS AROUND THE WORLD

## FORUM ON OVERCOMING EXTREME POVERTY



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- LETTER N° 101 -

### CHILDREN PUSH US AND ENGAGE US

In Madrid, the children of the Taporí<sup>1</sup> Ventilla group heard their mothers talking vividly to each other. They were talking about the European Social Charter<sup>2</sup>. But what is this charter? The children decided to find out more. It is not easy to understand a text written for adults, but they decided not to give up: if you don't know the rights, how can you uphold them? Gradually, they noticed that certain rights were not respected for their neighborhood, such as being protected from poverty and social exclusion, or procedures to limit forced evictions. The children then decided to become journalists-reporters by going out on the street to promote the social charter and ask people about the important rights that were respected, or not, in their neighborhood.

Taporí groups around the world have taken up the same idea: children have reflected on the rights that exist in their communities. They took to the streets in their neighborhood or village and then made features, radio broadcasts, etc. Children have become "Rights

reporters" because, they say, "If the adults around us don't know their rights, how will they take care of us?"

Amazing children pushing us. In their energy, there is an abundant imagination, a desire to learn without limits, a boldness when they are together, a strong sense of justice. They are also aware of their fragility and dependence on the adult world. They do not just claim rights for themselves, they want adults to know their rights and commit themselves together to implement them.

Today the world faces major challenges to which children are particularly vulnerable: the challenge of climate, biodiversity, war, extreme poverty...The International Convention on the Rights of the Child, of which we are celebrating 30 years this year, has brought out the best interests of the child. Children push us to connect the challenges to their rights, to take them up by listening to their voices, by letting us question them, by following them in their demand for a just world. They show us the way to their future. Let's follow them.

**Isabelle Pypaert Perrin, General Delegate,  
International Movement ATD Fourth World**

<sup>1</sup> Taporí: Children's branch of the ATD Fourth World Movement

<sup>2</sup> The European Social Charter is a convention of the Council of Europe (47 States) which sets out social rights and freedoms in the fields of housing, health, education, employment, movement of persons, non-discrimination, protection against poverty and exclusion.

### WORDS FROM THE TEAM

The year 2019 marks the 30th anniversary of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). In this context, children remind us that too often their rights are undermined and show us the way to the future.

Thanks to the Friends of the Forum Around the World, which is committed to working with children and their families, we can reaffirm that it is possible to uphold these rights. For example, this is the case of Jemaa from Morocco who wrote to us: "My father fought to give me the chance to get an education. Today I want to give this opportunity back to the children of my city."

On the occasion of this Letter to Friends, we would like to

share with you some of these experiences and initiatives. Everyone builds a path, in Algeria and Peru, through the theatre by allowing children to have a place of expression. In Cameroon, young people testify to the sharing and learning of community life. Sometimes the initiative comes from the children themselves, as in the example of the work exhibited at the UN Human Rights Building in Geneva.

Thus, October 17 of this year will be the occasion to celebrate these various commitments on the theme of: **«Acting together to empower children, their families and communities to end poverty».**

## WHEN THE THEATRE IS A SECOND FAMILY

In Algeria, there is a distinct lack of cultural facilities for young people. The only place in which they can express themselves is out on the streets. But they are nonetheless keen to take part in theatre, music, art and all other kinds of cultural and artistic expression.

Azzedine joined the youth club in his home town at an early age, exceedingly keen to get involved in theatrical activities. To start with he just attended rehearsals of the troupe from the local theatre, but later he took small parts in plays for children. Then, when he left school, he went to study at the National Training Institute for Specialized Teachers.

In 2002, he was based in Si Mustapha, a small town of around 15,000 inhabitants typically employed in the local factories or working on the land around the town. In the absence of any cultural infrastructure the locals decided to create their own cultural association, called AFAK, and asked Azzedine to use his experience to help them.

Azzedine approached a college located close to the association, knowing that it offered no cultural activities, with a proposal to form a children's theatre troupe, as a joint venture between the association and the college. As time

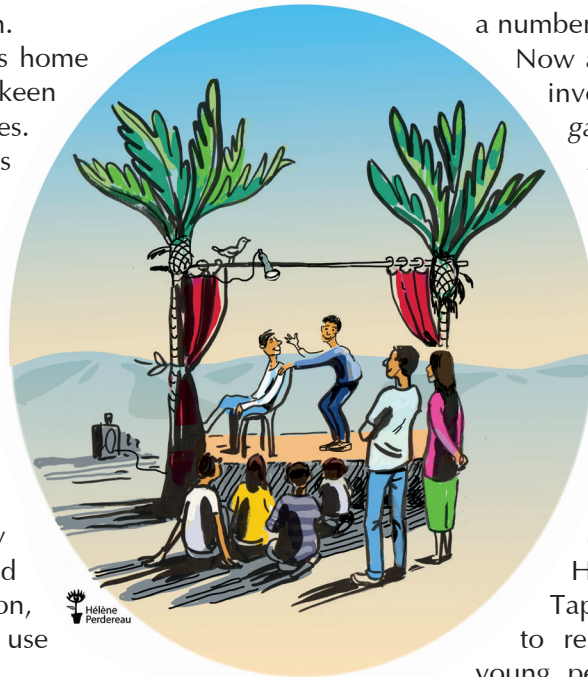
went by more and more youngsters got involved. Azzedine helped set up a cooperative called El Ajwad in order for older teenagers to engage with adult amateur dramatics.

Students of all secondary school ages took part in a number of festivals in the region.

Now aged 28, Sid Ali was one of those involved: *"I love the way the theatre gave me the chance to express myself. I could discuss things with my director that I could never have discussed with my father. The troupe was like my second family, and still is. I won the prize for best performer at the festival of theatre for children held in Constantine in 2005. My mother and my two sisters were very proud of me, and I know that my father is too, even if he doesn't show it."*

Having this year become aware of Tapori, the cooperative has decided to reach out to a larger number of young people by offering more activities than theatre alone. Every week there is a two-hour meeting which starts with Tapori activities and ends with theatre rehearsals.

**Azzedine D., Cooperative, Algeria**



## THE CROWN OF PEACE

When I was a child my mother always used to say that "the best way to respond to violence is with peace" and "if you have friends who love peace then work with them to spread the word". I remember the day when she set up a big blackboard at home, headed "love and peace chart", with a column for each

child. At dinner one day she instructed us to "put a tick in your column every time you lend a helping hand, break up an argument, or do a good turn", adding that "at the end of the week whoever has the most ticks will be awarded the crown of peace". So thanks to our

mother my sisters and I put in place a peace network at our schools and amongst our friends.

Later, as a young adult, I worked with friends to set up an association called the Young Entrepreneurs of Bonassama. Our members are united by a desire to foster

civic participation amongst young people. We organise workshops and exchange visits in their neighbourhoods, which are designed to stimulate dialogue and mutual comprehension and to encourage young people to listen to one another, to respect differing points of view, and to welcome diversity.

We appreciate for example that education is an essential element of development. Youngsters from disadvantaged backgrounds have real difficulty in getting an education, because they lack funds or even because they simply do not realise how important it is. Our activities help them to understand that going to school can be valuable, bring benefits, and be enjoyable. We also raise awareness by talking to parents, particularly mothers, about the important role they play in transmitting values to their children.

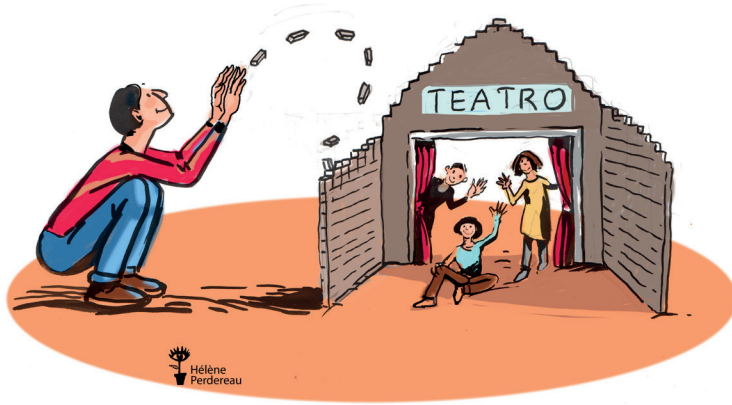
In 2018 the Young Entrepreneurs targeted youth groups, because the possibility of socio-economic exclusion means that young people face lots of dangers; they risk getting involved with gangs and terrorist groups, in drug and alcohol abuse, in prostitution, and so on. We ran awareness campaigns both on social media and on the streets of Greater Douala, reaching some 10,000 and 1,000 young people respectively.

**Martinien M., Young Entrepreneurs of Bonassama, Cameroon**



## WE ARE MAKING OUR CONTRIBUTION

Since I was a child, I have been around street children whom my parents support. Sometimes they would stay and have lunch with us. Theater has also been with me since I was a child: I studied anthropology while wanting to be a great actor. My first experience with a group of children made me understand that my vocation was not to be a great actor, but that theater allowed me to share learning and experiences. I then started working with the association «Pasa la voz»



which offers workshops to children and adolescents in difficulty to acquire social skills for life. Because of my experience with them, theater has become a tool rather than a goal.

When a young person moves from silence, from shyness, and starts talking, we are encouraged because they express their opinion. Through the workshops, children have the opportunity to participate, express themselves and reflect

on what they can do to make a difference, on what kind of person they want to become.

Unfortunately, the «Pasa la Voz» project has closed. But the young people asked us to continue and we couldn't just tell them that it was over. They motivated us to carry on. With the people who stayed behind, we decided to create a collective called «Simpay», where we work as community educators. We focus on the Marcavalle Minors' Center. Juvenile centers are almost like prisons, children have to do everything they are told, and there is no one to tell them, «You did well» or «Now what do you want to do?» Many arrive in these centers because they have been alone, they have not been accompanied, and that is why they make mistakes. Many have been manipulated by adults to commit crimes.

In this Marcavalle center, we have developed workshops, alternative learning spaces useful for life and citizen participation, and strengthen the social skills of young people. We continue with the same quality as if we were receiving remuneration.

I get a lot when I meet a young person who has left the center and says to me: «Now I work in a hotel and am finishing my training in catering» or «If I hadn't met you, I would have been a criminal». We are told that we are too involved with these young people, I say that the relationship goes beyond that, they make us a part of their life, they rely on us. We are making our contribution.

**Eduardo F., community educator, Cusco-Peru**

## MY HEART IS IN THIS STONE

In the United Nation's Human Rights Building in Geneva, in the main entrance hall, we are struck by a marvelous, shiny sculpture. It looks like an antique vessel filled with small stones. On its top, there is a mobile: sails? twigs? This vessel – in the form of a tree – is filled, just like a treasure, with the precious stones collected by children either where they live or where they work: 5,000 stones from mines, quarries, fields, a cemetery - but also toys and lucky charms, holiday souvenirs, collected stones. Each and every stone tells a story of its own :

*« I don't sleep in a room, but on the ground with pebbles and stones. I picked up this stone at the place where I stay, next to the big mosque. My heart is in this stone. »* (Roger, Burkina Faso)

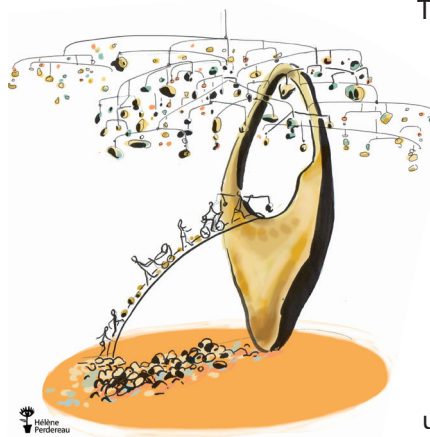
*« I found my stone on the hill. My father and José my little brother work in the mines. José goes there to accompany my dad. When my dad is too tired, he helps him to make it home. »* (Guido, Bolivia)

This sculpture comes from the ATD Fourth World youth branch, Taporí. It was a gift in 1999 from children who came from worldwide delegations to send a message for the 10th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

They wanted to create a sculpture that would touch everybody's heart for more peace and respect in the life of every child on this earth.

The adults faced with the dream of those children were

sent the following message: « A huge sculpture has to be made for peace! Or, a source that flows like soft music ». The message further said: « Do not feel guilty when you look at this sculpture but find strength in it and emphasize that children help adults ».



Those adults were afraid not to be a match for the dream of those children.

Then Philippe appeared on the scene, an artist from the former mines of the north of France.

It was obvious that he was the one who created this unique work of art. He was after all once a child, locked up, humiliated and negated, who fought on a daily basis

to live those peaceful moments and be acknowledged.

Today, the UN magic tree in Geneva seems to be dancing very slowly. People stop and look at it: school children with their teachers; groups of visitors. There was an employee as well, holding her baby in her arm, looking very happy and trying to touch the mobile to trigger the bell.

**Noldi C., ATD Fourth World, Switzerland**



# THEME FOR OCTOBER 17, 2019



Each year, a consultation process is set up to choose the theme for the World Day for Overcoming Extreme Poverty (17 October): proposals for themes are sent to various individuals and associations working for a world free of poverty to gather their views. This year, the proposals took into account the 30th anniversary of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child.

You were 74 (friends of the Forum, people, associations), from 34 countries, to share your thoughts. Thank you all for your participation. Your contributions have enriched the proposals, and after presentation and discussion with the United Nations, the theme finally chosen for this 17 October 2019 is:

**“Acting together to empower children, their families and communities to end poverty”.**

Below, we present brief extracts of your contributions:

## EXTREME POVERTY IS VIOLENCE

“Children are currently an instrument of illegal exploitation in all sectors of life. Without access to educational, health and other facilities, children are recruited and exploited in armed groups, mining squares, factories, domestic work and in various forms of trafficking without any legislation in their favor.” (Arsène B.,

World of the Vulnerable Working People, DRC)

“Self-esteem is an important subject and all people should better understand the impact that judging and social exclusion have on children who experience it because of poverty.” (Annelies N., Utrecht Anti-Poverty Coalition, Netherlands)

## NOT WITHOUT THE FAMILY

“How to protect children’s rights without protecting parents’ rights? We cannot talk about children without talking about their parents and families. Accompanying parents is participating in the education of children. It’s like a tree, the parents are the base and the children the branches. We must care for the children but for the parents as well, so that the base is solid.” (ATD Fourth World Montreal, Canada)

“I sincerely believe that more than anything else we must talk about the defense of the family, since that is where the rights of every child are fully developed. It is true that the State and society have to do their own work, but without the family unit there won’t be a guarantee for the defense of children’s rights.” (Father Antonio P., United States and Peru)

## ADULTS, GUARDIANS OF CHILDREN RIGHTS

“Although it is necessary to ensure the participation of the children’s sector that already has some capacity to act, it is primarily the responsibility of adults to ensure the well-being of children.” (Mario S., Social Pastoral Delegate, Jesuits for Latin America and the Caribbean, member of the International Committee for October 17, Peru)

“Providing a safe and sustainable environment to our children means we want, as early as today, to ensure their future. Today is the time for policies and regulations to be truly implemented and followed before it becomes too late and irreparable consequences are committed.” (Alfredo T., Wadah Foundation, Indonesia)

## CHILDREN ARE ACTORS

“We take initiatives to end poverty, such as our radio program where we call on adults to respect our rights. The Taporí gatherings we have every week allow us also to share our ideas and express our dreams. We do visits, we support, do manual work to show solidarity, etc. Our friend Irengé has found many friends today because we supported him and welcomed him into our group. The support of our animators and families who mobilize to accompany us in our gestures of solidarity is very important also.” (Taporí Group, DRC)

“The process of empowering children guides them to feel and believe that they are actors in their own right. Children learn well from peer groups and if we can teach them about their rights early on in life, their internalization will mature as they advance in years. They will become strong advocates as adults for overcoming poverty with dignity.” (Jyoti T., International consultant on gender and human rights, member of the International Committee for October 17, Nepal)

The Forum on Overcoming Extreme Poverty is part of ATD Fourth World International but those who join it, do maintain their own status and identity.

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