



# Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
17 November 2021

English only

---

## Commission for Social Development

Sixtieth session

7–16 February 2022

**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and  
the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:**

**Priority Theme: Inclusive and resilient recovery from  
COVID-19 for sustainable livelihoods, well-being, and  
dignity for all: eradicating poverty and hunger in all its  
forms and dimensions to achieve the 2030 Agenda**

### **Statement submitted by the International Movement ATD Fourth World, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\***

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

---

\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

### **Dignity for all in practice: Recommendations to eradicate poverty and to achieve the 2030 Agenda**

The International Movement ATD Fourth World is a non-governmental organization that works to overcome poverty by seeking out people living in the worst conditions of poverty and exclusion and involving them in the fight against poverty. ATD Fourth World welcomes the Priority Theme of the 60th Commission, which explicitly connects the eradication of poverty with the necessity for human dignity.

The dignity of the human person is not only a fundamental right in itself but constitutes the real basis of all other fundamental rights. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights enshrined human dignity in its preamble: ‘Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.’

The International Movement ATD Fourth World maintains that “dignity” is not only an abstract concept: it belongs to each and every one. Today, many people living in poverty experience their dignity being denied and disrespected. The way in which the poorest people are treated is a measure of the respect in which human dignity is held in our societies. ATD Fourth World, in partnership with the poorest people, aims to place dignity at the heart of all thought and action, and at the heart of our human societies. The Movement’s contribution to this 60th Commission for Social Development is based on illustrating how international actors can put human dignity at the center of program design and policy practice.

The dignity of a human being is built through self-esteem and the recognition granted by other individuals and society more broadly. Therefore, for the conditions allowing a life in dignity to be met, a person must have access to basic human rights, and must be respected on interpersonal and institutional levels, through equal treatment, recognition, and inclusion in society.

Considering poverty as a violation of human dignity requires working on the multiple dimensions and forms of poverty: deprivation (work, income, material); relational dynamics and their impacts (institutional and social abuse, unacknowledged contributions, the suffering that follows); but also, on empowerment and resistance.<sup>1</sup> These dimensions are interdependent, complex, and all contribute to the violence suffered by the poorest, to their denial of dignity. People living in poverty must be enabled to exist with dignity before the law and assert their rights, in their immediate and family environment, and in a just, balanced and sustainable society. Working on the eradication of poverty also means understanding its persistence over several generations, and therefore acting on different time scales. This global approach cannot be achieved without the participation of people with a lived experience of poverty. Any effort to design, act and evaluate public policies and programs risks failing if their intelligence and experience is not at the heart of the process and not fully taken into account.

---

<sup>1</sup> ATD Fourth World and Oxford report. The Hidden Dimensions of Poverty. 2019. [https://www.atd-fourthworld.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2019/05/Dim\\_Pauvr\\_eng\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.atd-fourthworld.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2019/05/Dim_Pauvr_eng_FINAL.pdf)

### **Achieving dignity through guaranteeing a legal existence, belonging to a family and community**

Legal existence is an indispensable condition to accessing one's rights and recognition within a society. Poverty and discrimination are among the main obstacles for accessing the right to a name.<sup>2</sup> UNICEF notes that 166 million children are not registered, and a further 237 million do not have a birth certificate, which results in 403 million children worldwide, without a proof of identity. The lack of formally recognized and documented identity creates major problems for children to access basic rights such as education, health, development and social services. "The right to be recognized as a person before the law is a critical step in ensuring lifelong protection and is a prerequisite for exercising all other rights."<sup>3</sup> Target 16.9 of the Sustainable Development Goals to "provide legal identity for all, including birth registration," will not be met unless specific measures are taken to remedy the lack of official identities.

ATD Fourth World supports strongly the HRC resolution that calls upon states to identify and remove all barriers that discriminate or impede access to birth registration, in order to ensure that birth registration procedures are universal, accessible, simple, expeditious, effective and provided at minimal or no cost, and to remove documentation requirements that are difficult or impossible to fulfil.<sup>4</sup>

Apart from being recognized in the eyes of the law, strong family relations and belonging to a local community are essential steps to breaking the cycle of poverty, since they are the first places where one can build one's personality, exercise their citizenship, participate and act for their rights and those of others. It is therefore necessary to support children and young people to grow up in their family and local community, and not be separated<sup>5</sup> because of the extreme poverty they live in.

To fully respect people's origins and identity as part of the physical, psychological, cultural, spiritual and development needs of every person, family and community support to persons and communities experiencing the hardest forms of poverty should be reinforced in all local, national and international programs.

### **Achieving dignity by addressing discrimination & institutional and social maltreatment**

Aside from legal existence, another key aspect in eradicating poverty is to address discrimination. Discrimination is both a cause and a consequence of poverty. Poverty is often a result of long-term discriminatory practices, and in turn people living in poverty experience different levels of discrimination in all spheres of society which deny them dignity. Discrimination based on social status is rarely recognized as a real challenge, even though people facing poverty-related exclusion experience it regularly. In his 2021 report, Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights Olivier De Schutter evokes the notion of "poverty-ism" or simply classism. This discrimination exists at an inter-personal level, as well as in the form of social and institutional maltreatment. In an international participatory research entitled the Hidden dimensions of poverty, where people living in poverty were co-researchers

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 7

<sup>3</sup> UNICEF. (2019). Birth Registration for Every Child by 2030: Are we on track? <https://data.unicef.org/resources/birth-registration-for-every-child-by-2030/>

<sup>4</sup> HRC resolution A/HRC/RES/43/5, §5b and §7 [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3874878/files/A\\_HRC\\_RES\\_43\\_5-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3874878/files/A_HRC_RES_43_5-EN.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> ATD Fourth World's Submission to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child for the 2021 Day of General Discussion on Children's Rights and Alternative Care <https://owncloud.unog.ch/s/j0qk6e5tZMjghsK/download?path=%2F4.%20NGOs%20and%20NGO%20coalitions&files=53-NGO-all-together-in-dignity-fourth-world-en.pdf>

alongside academics and practitioners, institutional maltreatment appeared to be the failure of national and international institutions, through their actions or inaction, to respond appropriately and respectfully to the needs and circumstances of people in poverty, and thereby to ignore, humiliate and harm them.

ATD Fourth World calls for the adoption of national and international laws which prohibit discrimination on the basis of socio-economic status. ATD advocated for such a law in France<sup>6</sup> successfully in 2016. The Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights also advocates for the implementation of such a law in his latest report, as a way of overcoming the persistence of poverty.<sup>7</sup> The purpose of a right to non-discrimination would be to protect individuals by guaranteeing them fair and equal access to the opportunities available to them. By condemning the stigmatization and discrimination people living in poverty suffer, we directly address their difficulties in relationship to others. That is, the dimensions of social abuse, institutional abuse and the non-recognition of their contributions.

### **Achieving Dignity while ensuring genuine participation**

“It’s not that we don’t care, but we’re never consulted. When the politicians get it wrong, the most vulnerable are the worst affected and that pushes us even further away. We want those who decide and make the laws to come down a level and we should move up a level to them. That way we’ll meet in the middle” (UK member of ATD Fourth World with experience of poverty)

Apart from having a legal existence, being part of a family and community, tackling all forms of mistreatment and discrimination of people living in extreme poverty, achieving sustainable livelihoods, well-being and dignity for all passes by giving voice, power, and representation to all, including those who in our societies are the hardest to reach. Meaningful participation of those with direct experience of extreme poverty is key to developing effective policies, programmes and projects to overcome extreme poverty and social exclusion.<sup>8</sup> Their non-participation is a denial of their fundamental rights which prevents our societies from making progress in the fight for human rights for all.

ATD Fourth World strongly believes that we must create a knowledge built with the poorest and most excluded people in order to attain a more just understanding of the world. Merging of Knowledge,<sup>9</sup> as put in practice by ATD Fourth World and Oxford University, in a recent international research project in six countries (Bangladesh, Bolivia, France, Tanzania, the United Kingdom and the United States) to identify the key dimensions of poverty and their relationships,<sup>10</sup> is an inclusive methodology that recognises the knowledge gained from life experiences that people in poverty bring with them and without which other forms of knowledge (academic knowledge or technical knowledge) are incomplete. Action based on partial knowledge is often inefficient, even having the opposite effect to that which was initially intended. This methodology helps policy makers and professionals in various fields of work, whether business, social work, teaching or others to have meaningful

<sup>6</sup> French law (2016) on social status-based discrimination: [Loi no 2016-832 du 24 juin 2016](#)

<sup>7</sup> Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights report, 2021. <https://undocs.org/A/76/177>

<sup>8</sup> "People living in poverty and vulnerable groups must be empowered through organizations and participation in all aspects of political, economic and social life, in particular in the planning and implementation of policies that affect them, thus enabling them to become genuine partners in development." (Report of the World Summit for Social Development. 1995. Copenhagen (1995), World Summit for Social Development, United Nations. Para. 24)

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.atd-fourthworld.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2021/10/2021-09-08-ATDFourthWorld-GuidelinesMergingKnowledge.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.atd-quartmonde.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Hidden-Dimensions-of-Poverty-20-11-2019.pdf>

dialogue on equal footing with people facing extreme poverty and social exclusion. By creating an environment of respect and using experience and perspective, participants are able to bridge the gaps so that constructive discussion can occur.<sup>11</sup>

### **Achieving dignity while working toward environmental justice**

Since 2019, Covid-19 exposed and reinforced social and economic injustices in all countries. A global crisis closely linked to the growth of human activities and the exploitative and unsustainable nature of our current socioeconomic systems. People and communities living in extreme poverty around the world are the first hit, and hardest hit by the effects of climate change, yet they are the least responsible for its causes and have the least means to protect themselves from it.<sup>12</sup> Climate change impacts are provoking grave and durable violations of human dignity. A vast majority of people living in extreme poverty over the world inhabit areas with limited access to clean water and sanitation owing to cost, lack of infrastructure or denial of services to persons without secure tenure. To earn their living, they accept dangerous working conditions, are exposed to health damaging pollutants and accidents. They are forced to rely on unsustainable practices such as logging, poaching, burning coal or trash. Instead of considering these practices as consequences of precarity, exploitation and displacement, marginalized communities are criminalized while root causes remain ignored.<sup>13</sup>

“The fight against poverty can be combined with the search for a development model that mitigates climate change and halts the erosion of biodiversity”.<sup>14</sup> In order to ensure dignity for everyone, it is necessary to promote the empowerment of the most vulnerable people, creating safe spaces of participation, where they are considered as real partners in designing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating adaptation and mitigation strategies that affect their lives. Climate policies and mechanisms should follow the UN Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, based on dignity and on the indivisibility of rights, and should be evaluated regarding their impacts on the poorest 20% of the population. In other words, targets should be considered achieved only if they are met for all relevant income and social groups, including the most vulnerable.

\*\*\*

The ambitions of Agenda 2030 to Leave No One Behind, reaching the furthest behind first, give us clear indications in understanding which people to start from, prioritize and partner with. These ambitions go much further than the idea of ‘recovering from’, or preventing new groups from falling into poverty, or preventing the increase of inequalities: they encourage us to reinvent our societies on a new basis, with people living in poverty as crucial partners.

---

<sup>11</sup> [https://www.atd-fourthworld.org/wp-content/uploads/old/pdf/Turning\\_Rhetoric\\_Into\\_Action\\_Participation\\_Toolkit\\_Oct08\\_low\\_res.pdf](https://www.atd-fourthworld.org/wp-content/uploads/old/pdf/Turning_Rhetoric_Into_Action_Participation_Toolkit_Oct08_low_res.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> According to the World Bank, climate change could push more than 120 million additional people into poverty by 2030 if effective actions are not implemented immediately.

<sup>13</sup> To read more about our recommendations for an inclusive climate action: [Position paper COP26](#).

<sup>14</sup> UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme poverty and Human Rights Olivier De Schutter, October 2021.