

# LETTER TO FRIENDS AROUND THE WORLD

## FORUM ON OVERCOMING EXTREME POVERTY



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- LETTER N° 108 -

### FROM POWERLESSNESS TO EMPOWERMENT

As of this writing of the Letter to Friends, the 27th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP27) is in full swing at the seaside resort of Sharm-el-Shek, Egypt. States are hammering out an agenda to save a planet in peril. Global power asymmetries are in full play with poorer nations being left to suffer to consequences of climate change caused largely by the pollution of richer nations. Compensation for climate damage and loss is not a question of charity, it's one of climate justice. Similarly ending poverty, is not a question of charity but of social justice. The current political and economic systems are instruments of control by the most powerful countries, corporations and the wealthiest in our societies. These morally bankrupt dysfunctional systems put corporate profits before people and the planet, prioritising the short term gains of today over the long term consequences of tomorrow.

Poverty is not the fault of the people living in it. It's the result of the deliberate policy choices that disenfranchise, exploit and further impoverish those already in poverty. What explains the skyrocketing inequalities, the unprecedented increase in corporate power and the wealth of billionaires alongside the erosion of workers rights and loss of jobs? In a world that wastes and over produces food, why do millions die of hunger? Why is it that whenever there is a crisis, (climate, COVID or conflict), those in poverty are always the hardest hit? In the face of the cost of living crisis, why are governments

introducing austerity measures that in essence discipline people in poverty and protect the rich?

All is not doom and gloom. By acting together we can make different choices. We can bring about change. Joseph Wresinski made a conscious choice to stand with those living in poverty. He made the conscious choice to install the first Commemorative Stone where the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was signed. By moving from charity to rights - recognising people living in poverty as humans whose fundamental rights have been violated, moves us from a position of weakness to a position of strength, from a position of powerlessness to a position where we are empowered.

October 17 has been an expression of that empowerment. The articles in this issue highlight how with this day, we brake the silence of poverty and the people who lead the toughest lives are seen and heard. We can look back on the past three decades of this day with pride.

As we look towards the future, we must carry the meaning and the spirit of October 17 with us every day of the year. We must expand the political, social and economic spaces of the disenfranchised in our societies as well as intellectual and cultural spaces. To end poverty, we must transform power relations - recognise the power we have in our hands, head and heart. Our October 17 experience is one of making the impossible become possible.

By exercising our power, we can change the deeply entrenched unjust systems and achieve dignity for all.

Aye Aye Win

President of the International Committee for October 17

### A WORD FROM THE TEAM

In December 1992, 30 years ago, the United Nations General Assembly recognized the date of October 17 as the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. Then in 2006, the United Nations Secretary General's report A/61/308 on the impact of the day stated: "This is an opportunity to recognize the efforts and struggles of people living in poverty, to give them an opportunity to voice their concerns and to recognize that the poor are at the forefront of the fight against poverty."

During the consultation, in January 2022, to choose the theme for this year's celebration, the International Committee for October 17 wanted to ask an additional question, the "bonus question": **What have we gained with this day/or what achievements are we particularly proud of in commemorating this day?**

Many of you have shared your thoughts with us. You can read in this Letter to Friends around the World, number 108, what are the advances, but also the challenges still to be met.

# What have we gained with this day/or what achievements are we particularly proud of in commemorating this day?

01

## INCREASING PRIDE, DIGNITY AND CREDIBILITY

On October 17, people all over the world discover that they are not alone, that their struggle is universal. They activate and launch the society with them.

*"October 17 allowed me to meet local authorities, deputies. I spoke and I was heard by people I had never imagined meeting. I am proud of all the times we have come together to imagine a more just and egalitarian world."*

**Emile C., (from the group of Solidarity Families, ATD DRC)**



*"This day has made it possible to give great legitimacy to the words spoken by people living in poverty and who are the most impacted. It is a day for people living in poverty all over the world, a day of hope, a day of sharing of experience and showing that living with dignity is possible."*

**(Collectif France Refuser la Misère)**

*"We are proud of all the celebrations, because they have given place and a voice to society's most forgotten. They spoke before international bodies. It is a victory for every year."*

**Christian R., (Congolese University in India)**

*"In Guatemala, people from families living in extreme poverty have access the Government's National Palace thanks to the 'Cambio de la Rosa' event, so that through their daily struggle, in precarious conditions, they can be seen as peacemakers".*

**Max A. (International Committee for October 17, Guatemala)**

02

## THE OVERCOMING POVERTY MOVEMENT GROWS AND MOBILISES

The network of people fighting against poverty is growing and growing. This day makes known the poverty and, especially, the actors who fight to eradicate it. On October 17, local populations unite with associations. This makes the struggle known. It gives hope, because overcoming poverty is possible.

*"Year after year, the message of those who are not heard reaches more and more people. This also works to spread the word, making people aware. As we have been celebrating this day in Bangladesh for the past few years, we have also seen that young people are becoming more active in this regard by knowing and celebrating this day."*

**MATI Bangladesh, (Mridrah Shihab/Lenen Rahaman)**

*"With the celebration of October 17, FERAPAD, our association, is proud to have involved the beneficiary communities to implement a henhouse. From this action, two extensions were born, not without difficulties. We are proud to have taken advantage of October 17 to provide the women of the rural communities of Fizi with a local financial empowerment mechanism"*

**Stanislas W. K., (Bujumbura, Burundi)**

*"We have progressed our teamwork and we have paid attention to the thinking of everyone and in building a common dynamic. We also popularized the day in our country and better structured the issue of poverty."*

**Blaise N., (Yaounde, Cameroon)**

*"I think there is a growing awareness that poverty is a common burden for all of society, and I think this is partly due to the work of the overcoming poverty movement and the activism of October 17 - helping to increase understanding of poverty each year."*

**Gideon A., (Nigeria)**

*"What is named, exists. So, little by little, poverty is seen, named, and exists in society. The more we name it, the more responsibility we have to help eradicate poverty. This changes the social approach and when the poor move from the fringe to the centre of the society, it begins to change the correlation of forces between the relationships that have historically been established between the different social sectors. When people in poverty begin to feel a sense of belonging, a sense of expression, it changes societies from generation to generation."*

**Carolina E., (International Committee for October 17, Guatemala)**



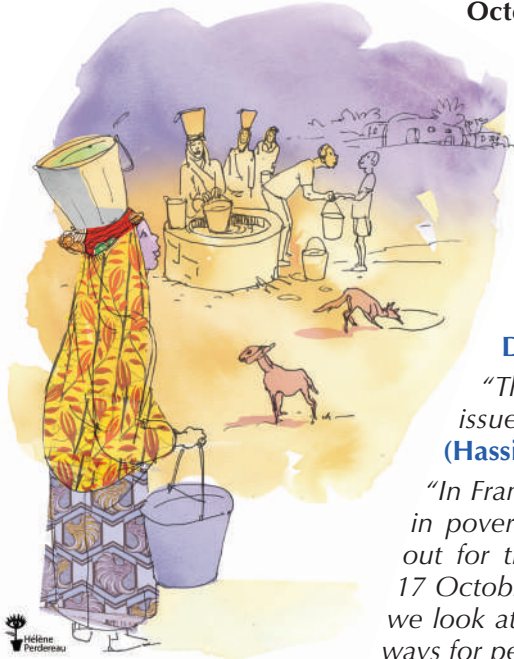
October 17 is a great opportunity to make the voices of those in poverty heard by state institutions, politicians and decision makers. This day allows people in poverty to make their voices heard and communicated to the institutions that should act against extreme poverty.

*“When Joseph Wresinski introduced the idea of the relationship between human rights and poverty, it was a crucial shift in the way of thinking about poverty. It was so visionary... no one had made that connection between poverty and human rights. This approach has influenced thinking within the United Nations, and we see that it is growing... the participation of people living in poverty has increased over time.”*

**Donald Lee, President of the ATD Fourth World International**

*“Through this day, we have inspired decision-makers to take into account the issue of poor people’s access to clean water and sanitation in their programs”.*  
**(Hassimi S., Seepat, Burkina Faso)**

*“In France, this day was an opportunity to: - Contribute to the voting of laws for those in poverty (RMI, CMU, etc.) - Create a collective of associations, together to speak out for those who have little or no voice (e.g. collective ALERTE, PPV, Collectif du 17 Octobre) - Raising awareness of the issues of extreme poverty and changing the way we look at it – Working together, increasing visibility, raising consciousness and creating ways for people to be active. (Collectif France “Refuser la misère”)*



However the fight against poverty remains a major challenge. Indeed, there are still many places in the world where people live in poverty and where their dignity is not respected or assured. We must unite ourselves and our strengths, we must help each other and learn from each other in order to succeed.

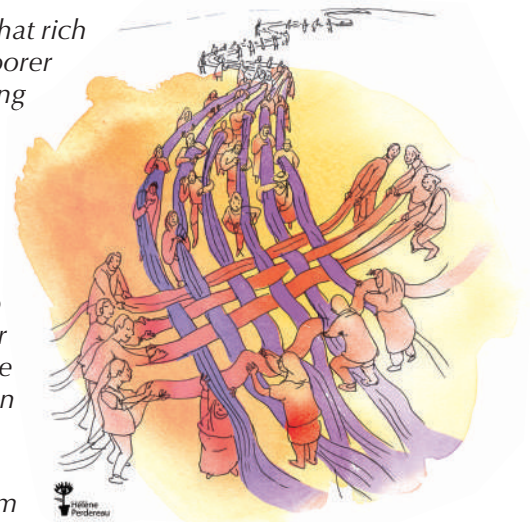
*“If it is true that there is progress, we need to move much faster. It is not possible that rich countries have access to vaccinations while there are not enough vaccines in poorer countries. It is not possible for some millionaires to get on a rocket to go sightseeing while people die from lack of oxygen.”* **(Sylvie D., Mano a Mano, PERU)**

*“Targeted efforts towards inclusion and leaving no one behind, [...] dignity and equitable inclusion of all in poverty eradication efforts have become a stronger goal for which we strive.”* **(Jyoti T., NEPAL)**

*“When we wonder what we have gained, I remember Pérez de Cuellar saying, “You are our eyes and ears”. But what about these ears and eyes? We can do seminars and reports, but how can we force nations to apply what they hear from the poorest? With October 17, awareness and knowledge of what extreme poverty is has expanded, but what do we do with it? There is no link between people in poverty and the world’s greatest concerns.”*

**(Bernard M. and Jean T. International Committee for October 17)**

*“It’s a question that I’ve been asking myself a lot lately: is the current form of October 17, the form that one would have hoped to reach at the beginning of the day?”* **(Nicolas D., ATD Belgium)**



The sentence written on the commemorative stone in honour of the victims of extreme poverty, remains a contemporary and urgent cry!

*“Wherever men and women are condemned to live in extreme poverty, human rights are violated.*

*To come together to ensure that these rights be respected is our solemn duty.”*

**Father Joseph Wresinski**

# WORLD DAY FOR OVERCOMING EXTREME POVERTY 2022

October 17, 2022 is the 35 anniversary of the first Day for Overcoming Extreme Poverty and the 30 anniversary of UN's recognition of the International Day for Eradication of poverty. This year again, many people around the world celebrated it.



The association of young entrepreneurs of Bonassama celebrated the day of 17 October by carrying out a big action for the protection of the environment. The members of the association gathered to collect plastic waste from the town which will then be recycled and transformed. The funds will be donated to finance urgent projects for the local population.

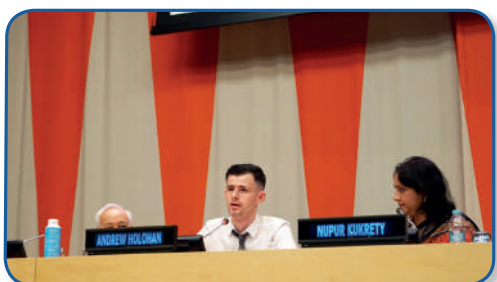
In Haiti, young people came together to celebrate 17 October despite a more than difficult economic and social context. They still wanted to celebrate this day to make visible the resistance of people who represent dignity and hope.



In the Philippines, on the National Day to Overcome Extreme Poverty, people gathered around the replica of the stone in Manila. Young people also presented a performance to show the difficulties of access to education for all.

## 17 October 2022 at the Trocadero in Paris around the Stone.

People living in extreme poverty were heard.  
*«I live in a social hotel with my family. Often we are told: "You are staying for free". «Thank God you are being looked after and fed... this phrase has nothing to do with dignity. «We have to dare to say the situation that humiliates us, that tramples us to make it stop».*



The celebration of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty at UN Headquarters is an opportunity to recognise the efforts and struggles of people living in poverty and to give them the opportunity to make their voices heard.

## HERE IS AN EXTRACT FROM ANDREW HOLOHAN'S SPEECH:

*« Can you imagine a world where the dignity of everyone is respected in practice, as is the international theme for 17 October this year? Can you just imagine living in poverty for 35 years or longer, like I wasn't even born, my mother lived in poverty, struggled against it with all her courage but stood alone and so we also grew up in poverty, so it's way longer to overcome it. [...] »*