

LETTER TO FRIENDS AROUND THE WORLD

FORUM ON OVERCOMING EXTREME POVERTY



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- LETTER N° 109 -

EVERYONE CARRIES A MESSAGE FOR THE WORLD

On October 17th, Don Oscar was due to speak at the National Palace of Culture in Guatemala. Speaking publicly to a large crowd, especially a crowd of "important people", is intimidating for someone from a background of poverty, but so is speaking on behalf of other families from different countries and cultures whose lives, like yours, are shaped by difficult, unrecognised, and poorly paid work. It's daunting to represent everyone who struggles to make a living and provide security for their family - people like you who desperately want their children to get a good education and have a better future.

Suddenly, someone asks Don Oscar, "If you could speak to the whole world, what would you say"? Without hesitating, Don Oscar answered, "I would tell people with money that it's important to share your jobs. I'd say that you can trust us because we know how to work hard. We just want to work and earn a dignified living". This is the message Don Oscar really wants people to hear!

This *Letter* also talks about the ways people in poverty are prevented from sharing what they want to say and what they know. You can read Sebastian's true story about violence that Brazil's indigenous people have suffered. The violence of bullets at a government protest can be deadly. But there is also violence in erasing an entire people's history, something that happens frequently to families in extreme poverty. For example, when parents can't tell their children how they struggled against poverty and humiliation, something vital is lost.

In this *Letter* you will also meet Annie, who highlights how important it is for parents to be able to share their family's

history with their children. "We have nothing, we live in poverty", she explains. "But we can always give our children everything we have learned through our life experience."

Both Sebastian and Annie reflect an important point from ATD's three-year Social Philosophy Seminar. This seminar included ATD activists, allies, and Volunteer Corps members as well as academic philosophers, concluding last December with a conference in Paris. The work identified a form of injustice called "the injustice of transmission." This occurs when it is impossible to share one's struggles and hopes with subsequent generations, for example, when children are placed into care. If others do not consider a family's experience or knowledge to be legitimate or worthy of being passed on, they eliminate part of history. In addition, this loss prevents the next generation from developing a sense of identity, a key element in building a world without extreme poverty.

The contributors to this *Letter* demonstrate a common desire to make the world a more open, healthy, and joyful place. Each individual carries within themselves something uniquely important to say. Everyone has their own distinct way of caring for the world and all its inhabitants. Sadly, many do not have the peace needed to express their perspective and understanding. However, it is important to remember that each individual has their own sensibility, perceptions, and dignity. People living in extreme poverty, especially, have valuable insights - irreplaceable lessons for our understanding of humanity. It is vital that we listen to those in poverty and allow them to share their special wisdom with the world.

Martin Kalisa

Deputy Director, International Movement ATD Fourth World

A WORD FROM THE TEAM

In this *Letter to Friends around the World*, we are pleased to share more true stories from people making a difference. These stories give meaning to our work at the Forum on Overcoming Extreme Poverty. They allow us once again to marvel at what each of us, starting from our own reality and sensitivity, can do to build a world free of poverty.

On page 4, we have compiled perspectives from our readers

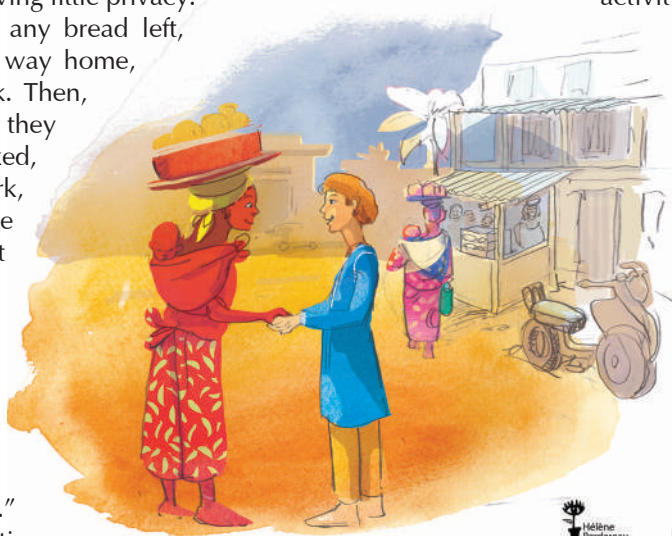
based on this year's focus for the International Day for the Eradication of Extreme Poverty. The emphasis on **dignified work and access to social protection** are both mainstays for the common good that enable everyone to live in dignity. On October 17, these topics will reunite us and define how, together with people experiencing poverty, we can put "dignity in practice".

WE ALL HAVE SOMETHING TO PASS ON

Caroline and Annie, two young women – one a mother of three children and one a mother of four – were on their way home after buying “le pain couchée” or the “gone-to-bed bread”, as they say in the Ivory Coast. This day-old bread is sold at a low price in the impoverished area where they work. Here the huts are made of planks, one beside the other, leaving little privacy.

The day we met, there wasn't any bread left, and the women were on their way home, each with a baby on their back. Then, just in front of my house, they approached me and boldly asked, “You wouldn't have any work, would you?” When Caroline introduced herself, I felt an instant connection because we have the same name. I responded, “I don't have any work, but I can offer you my friendship. I have just arrived here; I don't know anything about the area, but it's your home, you can help me discover many things.”

So we arranged to meet several times, and she showed me around the neighbourhood: the factories that make attiéké (grated and fermented cassava – an Ivorian speciality), the market, the rubbish dump, the place where they smoke the fish... She opened my eyes to many things that, as a foreigner, I could not see. And then one day, she said, “Hey, that's my house; let's go in”. Our friendship grew from this, slowly, day by day.



I told them about my work with the families living in poverty and about my dream of establishing a Tapori group (Tapori is a worldwide network of children whose motto is: “We want all children to have the same chances”), a group where children learn together, build friendships through cultural and artistic

activities, and try to change the world by transforming how extreme poverty is viewed. Caroline and Annie were enthusiastic about the project, but because they still needed to find work, they had concerns. Despite this, in the heart of the neighbourhood, they found a spot with space and shade for the group! Because it's in the same place where they sell their bread, they know many of the families that live there.

Is asking them to work for free unfair when they have nothing? If I ask for their help, it's because we can create something together; I can't do it without them. That's when Annie

says, “We have nothing, we live in poverty, but we can always give our children everything we have learned through our life experience”. For her part, Caroline gives free loaves of bread to women in more difficult situations than her own. I truly admire them as I witness their daily struggles, hope for a better future, and the extraordinary faith that carries them.

Caroline Blanchard, Ivory Coast

I WANT TO PLAY A ROLE IN THIS FOURTH WORLD

My name is Susanne Privitera. I live in Switzerland, and I am a member of the Forum on Overcoming Extreme Poverty. I'm part of this network because of an “instinctive” feeling within me since I was a child. In Switzerland, we face long-term social injustice. For example, since the 1960s, unfair work regulations related to migration have deprived “seasonal workers” of the right to a permanent residence permit and, therefore, the right to live together with their families in Switzerland. The famous Swiss writer Max Frisch said in 1967: “We sent out a call for a workforce, and human beings came”. It is estimated that more than twenty thousand people have no legal status in our country – “undocumented” migrants with their children are forced to live hidden from the authorities – a flagrant violation of Human Rights.

One day I discovered the term “Fourth World” (coined by Joseph Wresinski, founder of ATD Fourth World), and it resonated with me. This concept breaks the vicious circle used by the Europeans from the colonial era onwards – northern countries as colonisers and southern countries as colonised; a world that I do not accept. This new world, the “Fourth World”, brings together all people living in extreme poverty from all countries

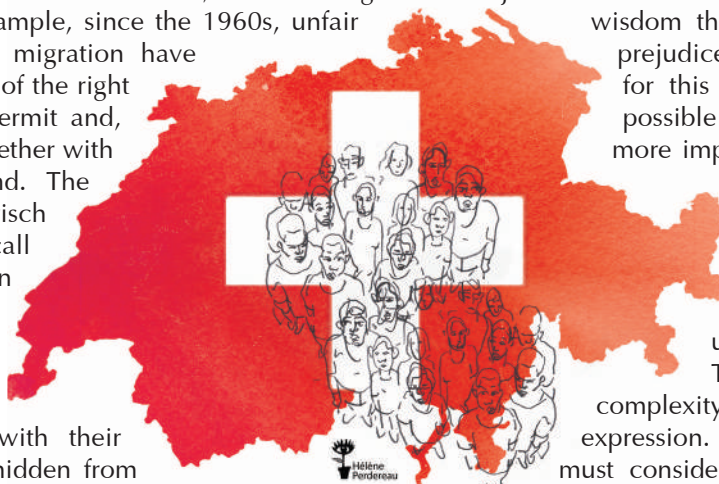
and backgrounds and those who support them. I want to play an active role in this “Fourth World”.

In this global movement, **we refuse to accept extreme poverty.**

This rejection is a necessary form of political courage and wisdom that will enable us to overcome all prejudices. With acceptance of and respect for this “Fourth World” a dignified life is possible for each human being. Nothing is more important than human dignity; when it is suppressed, existence no longer makes sense.

I translate the *Letter to Friends Around the World* from French to German. My priority is the use of non-discriminatory language. This is imperative because the complexity of a language is connected to each expression. Furthermore, an accurate translation must consider the reality of people's lives and portray them with equity. The research on *The Hidden Dimensions of Poverty* (a participatory research project led by ATD Fourth World and Oxford University designed to improve global understanding of multidimensional poverty) is, in that sense, of fundamental importance because **the people concerned speak for themselves in their own words.** All that remains for us to do is to listen and give them our full attention.

Susanne Privitera, Switzerland



THYDÊWÁ, HOPE OF THE EARTH

I was born in Argentina but moved to Brazil when I was twenty-five. I was attracted to the wisdom and spirituality of the most wounded peoples. However, my life changed when Brazil and Portugal celebrated the 500th anniversary of the “discovery of the Americas”. Three thousand people took to the streets to protest, and the government opened fire. When I heard the cries, the violence and despair, I decided to stop working in advertising and do something else with my life.

In the capital city, I met indigenous peoples selling crafts representing their cultural heritage. I suggested taking photos of them and sharing these photos with children who knew nothing of their way of life. The children asked incredible questions: “Do they dress like this every day?” “Do they have motorbikes in their village?” Violence is caused by ignorance, so it is essential to explain to children the wisdom of these peoples and their 200 different languages...

I came across the Pankararu people while writing a book. We went to the village with notebooks, video cameras and tape recorders and asked, “If you could speak to the world, what would you say to help reduce ignorance and promote peace?” This is how Thydêwá, which means “Hope of the Earth”,

was born. Four of the five founders of our organisation are indigenous.

We connected the internet to the villages, allowing villagers to communicate their knowledge and experiences with other people. This also enabled each community to collectively write an online book depicting their own unique culture.

Today, we also work with indigenous peoples from other countries on the continent. Using our digital “Fogones”, which means households, it is as if we are sitting together around the fire discussing our lives. Each community brings their different history and traditions. During the meetings, we always ask: “What is the richness you possess that you want to share with the world?” Indigenous peoples are often excluded from national policies.

They are generally “uncontaminated” by a global paradigm that fosters extreme poverty: greed, individualism, and capitalism. Their richness comes from knowing how to share, care for each other, and feel united with Mother Earth. If we could take this richness from the indigenous peoples, spread it to the whole world, we could end extreme poverty.

Sebastián Gerlic, Brazil



JEEVAN VERMA, A ROSE AMONG THE THORNS

My name is Jeevan Lal Verma. I was born in the village of Sunargaon, situated in the Kanda district in the foothills of the Himalayas (North India). My family, inhabitants of this region for generations, were jewellery makers. Our village, Sunargaon, derives from the

name of my family’s jewellery shop - Sunar. After finishing my studies, I wanted to improve the conditions in my village. It is in my nature to help people, and although I never had much money, I felt a true calling to serve the local community.

Because I enjoy meeting new people and desire to connect to the wider world, in the summer of 1988, I hosted a group of international volunteers. With assistance from people in the area, we worked on construction projects based on the community’s needs. This two-week experiment was very successful; the visitors learned about our culture and way of life, and we acquired skills and learned from them as well. It was a very positive exchange.

From this experience, I created a non-profit organisation called

ROSE (Rural Opportunity for Social Elevation). Our goal is to improve our residents’ education and health—beginning with those living in extreme poverty—while preserving our cultural integrity and ecological balance. My deep-rooted understanding of this region’s social, cultural, and environmental problems assisted us in creating a responsible rural tourism model. We organise development projects, practical building projects and craft activities with volunteers from several countries worldwide while allowing all participants to experience respectful and authentic cultural interactions. As a result, we have installed latrines, built a temple, constructed earthquake-proof homes and a community shop. Today our life is organised around organic farming, raising goats, poultry-rearing, and a micro-dairy.

I am convinced that social, cultural, and ecological dimensions are interdependent and integral to our daily life. Taking into consideration these three elements, constructing a fully sustainable approach seems essential. All our activities are carried out in this spirit.

Jeevan Verma, India



DIGNITY IN PRACTICE FOR ALL»

is the 2023 theme for the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. Continuing this theme from the previous year, in 2022 we had emphasised

SOCIAL JUSTICE, PEACE, AND THE PLANET.

Following discussions and input from many sources, 2023 focuses on **DIGNIFIED WORK AND ACCESS TO SOCIAL PROTECTION** and how they are essential for establishing «dignity in practice».

DIGNIFIED WORK

«Work should be a way to feel ‘useful’ to society, to create connections with other members of the community.»

“Some forms of work are looked down upon, and those who engage in them are not accorded human dignity. However, all types of work are dignified, and everyone should be treated with dignity, whatever their position. No one and no job is high or low!” **Frederick - India**

“It’s a constant struggle for the dignity of any work to be recognised. This fight wears you down and discourages you. It can make you want to give up. It is not the work that must be recognised as worthy; it is the courage, the effort, and the struggle of the person who does it.” **Bernard - France**

“If we talk about dignity, it is necessary to balance the workload so that people in poverty have not only a decent job but also have access to opportunities denied to them for centuries.” **Sandra - Colombia/France**

“When work is not dignified, people cannot have a life plan. They cannot build a future for themselves.” **Carmen - France**

“Before I knew my rights, I accepted all the abuse, the unfair pay, and the slave hours. I suffered a lot; I didn’t feel anything, and as a woman, even less. Then I started to educate myself and repeat, ‘I have rights’. Today I contribute to my society.” **Ana Isabel - Peru**

SOCIAL PROTECTION

«Access to social protection is a form of recognising people as human beings.»

“Because I live in Africa, access to social protection is very important to me. I have been working with rural communities for over two decades, and I would like to see children thrive, attend school, and be healthy and well-nourished.” **Seynabou - Senegal**

“It is not okay for people to work only to survive. It is not okay for people to find themselves in difficulty because of health problems.” **Yannick - France**

“The quality of work and access to social protection must be improved so that no one is disrespected, excluded, and oppressed. This can impact their lives (body and mind) and those of their close family members.” **Damien - Tanzania**