



“ Là où des hommes sont condamnés à vivre dans la misère,
les Droits de l'homme sont violés. S'unir pour les faire respecter
est un devoir sacré ”
Père Joseph Wresinski

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Acting Together, Contributing to Participative Democracy

We would like to take this opportunity to send you the latest Fourth World Information newsletter along with our very best wishes for a Happy New Year.

In Warsaw in February 2004, people living in extreme poverty were true contributors to participative democracy when they met and entered into dialogue with officials from the European institutions.

As a follow up to the Warsaw meeting, members of the Movement were able to meet twice in 2004 with the former President of the European Commission, **Romano Prodi**.

Both of these meetings were a reflection of the strong and ongoing relationship which has traditionally linked the Movement with the European institutions. In addition, people living in extreme poverty themselves had the possibility to participate and meet the President of the Commission for the first time.

In the first instance, a delegation of five members of the Movement was received by Mr Prodi. They asked him if during the last months of his Presidency he could strongly underline the necessity of **placing the fight against poverty at the heart of the Union's political priorities, and to insist on the involvement of the poorest Europeans needed for the construction of the EU to live up to its ambitions.**

At the request of the Movement, Mr Prodi received a second delegation from ATD Fourth World on **20 October 2004, to coincide with the World Day to Overcome Extreme Poverty.** It was composed of people living in poverty from Belgium, France, Italy, The Netherlands, Poland and the UK.

The delegates spoke on the basis of their own personal experience, or that of people close to them, and explained that in Europe today there are huge numbers of people who continue to live in unacceptable conditions and fight against poverty.

- *"I take every chance I can to speak with people who are responsible for housing policy, to help them understand what too many people must endure when they are forced to live in places that do not allow them to live in dignity"* (**Jan Bulens**, Belgium).

- *"In my neighbourhood, I try to give confidence back to people (...) because if we can do things together, then we can all make progress in life. And it becomes possible to trust again. I want everybody to have the same rights that I have"* (**Lucienne Soulier**, France).

- *"So often the systems intended to offer support become an oppression to people in poverty. We need to change so that support services are delivered in a way that respects the rights of everyone and makes them accessible to all"* (**Moraene Roberts**, UK).

Mr Prodi and his officials were very attentive in making sure that the delegates felt welcomed and in creating an atmosphere of trust with them in which they were listened to.

Mr Prodi promised to pass on to his successor, **José Manuel Barroso**, their hope that Europe be an opportunity to fight against extreme poverty and ensure dignity for all.

After the meeting, the delegation were joined by MEPs **Martine Roure, Anna Záborská, Proinsias De Rossa, Jan Kulakowski, et Iñigo Mendez de Vigo**, several MEP's assistants, the deputy leader of Mr Prodi's cabinet, **Anne Houtman**, the President of the European Economic and Social Committee, **Roger Breisch** and the leader of his cabinet, **Thomas Jansen**; for a gathering around the Commemorative Stone alongside the European Parliament.

During the **Round Table on Poverty and Social Exclusion held in Rotterdam on 18 and 19 October 2004, Bea Roberts**, a young activist in ATD Fourth World UK, expressed her opinion on the policies aimed at fighting poverty amongst young people:

- *"Above all, I want to stress that poverty is about people. The most excluded young people should not be seen as problems, but as part of the answer to overcoming poverty"*

- *"Too often, when initiatives are started, the authorities view poverty as a disease and end up treating the symptoms of it – the poor – rather than the sickness. Therefore, I hope you will take with you one thing: that as societies we have to fight poverty, not the poor"*

All of these meetings show that the participation of the weakest amongst us is essential in the construction of the European project. It is imperative, possible and a unique opportunity for all of us to create real partnerships with people living in poverty. In doing so, their experiences, thoughts and aspirations help all those involved to choose and use the best tools for building a European society without exclusion, where everybody lives in dignity and the fundamental rights of all are respected.

At a time when the European institutions are engaged in the mid-term evaluation of the **Lisbon Strategy**, it is essential that all those concerned be implicated if the ambitious but necessary objectives of this strategy are to be met.

The Lisbon Strategy should be viewed and used as an instrument to build a citizenship where everybody can be involved and heard as well as a means "to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty" as it was emphasized in the Conclusions of the Lisbon Summit in March 2000.

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