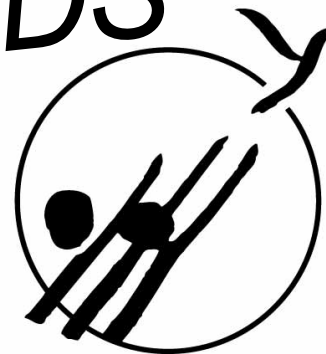


LETTER TO FRIENDS AROUND THE WORLD

Permanent Forum on Extreme Poverty in the World



International Movement ATD Fourth World
107, avenue du Général Leclerc - 95480 Pierrelaye - France

December 2005 – N° 62

== Happy New Year 2006 to all of you! ==

EDITORIAL WE ARE EQUALS

How can we eliminate extreme poverty without first and foremost recognizing as our equals those who live it on a daily basis? To recognize each other as equals, is to stand together against the excessive burden of suffering engendered by extreme poverty – made even worse by natural catastrophes such as the Tsunami. It is to understand the strength and the grandeur of the daily acts such as that of Fabio, who, in the hell of the sugar cane plantations, still manages to support his family as well as to study. It is to become committed to making such unknown acts the spearhead for building a more just and brotherly world.

“We continue to feel very small in the face of the enormity of the poverty here,” Gertrude from the

Democratic Republic of Congo states very humbly. *“We believe in the capacity of the poor to be agents of a new life,”* affirms the founder of the San Vicente Organisation in Uruguay.

Father Joseph Wresinki would tell the permanent volunteers of ATD Fourth World that *“To be a volunteer is not only to be at the service of the poorest of the poor in order to learn from them, sometimes with great amazement...it also means that we have become their brothers and sisters. Their children are our children.”*

Therein lies the difference between relieving the burden of poverty, and placing at the centre of our societies those who are now excluded.

HUGUETTE REDEGELD
VICE PRESIDENT

“FOR YEARS, we’ve been living in really disadvantaged conditions. Every year, famine knocked at our doors. In 1998, I decided to launch this group called “ELAVAGNON”.

Before that, I’d been meeting with a group of women to talk about our situation. They agreed with me, and then along the way, I included a few men. I raised the question: “What can we do to get out of poverty?”, for I wanted us to work together to cultivate land. And once we had our first harvest, we could eat one part and sell the rest in order to have a little money for other important needs, such as having uniforms made, getting care in case of illnesses or accidents, and especially, enrolling our children in school, paying the school fees, and buying school supplies every year. And that’s what we did.

During the holidays, we get ready for the arrival of the tourists; it’s easy to sell our produce during this period, because people come to us for supplies. Before, people weren’t interested in our produce, but now, they’re impressed. This is just a short overview.”

FÉLICIE L., ELAVAGNON GROUP, BENIN

“IN 2001, PAULINE SUBMITTED A REQUEST to the National Education Ministry for a small school created in Cibombo to be officially recognized. The school takes in young children who before were left by themselves all day while their mothers went to look for food 12 to 15 kms away, returning home only towards 7:00 or 8:00 in the evening. On 17 December, the Ministry granted us that authorization.

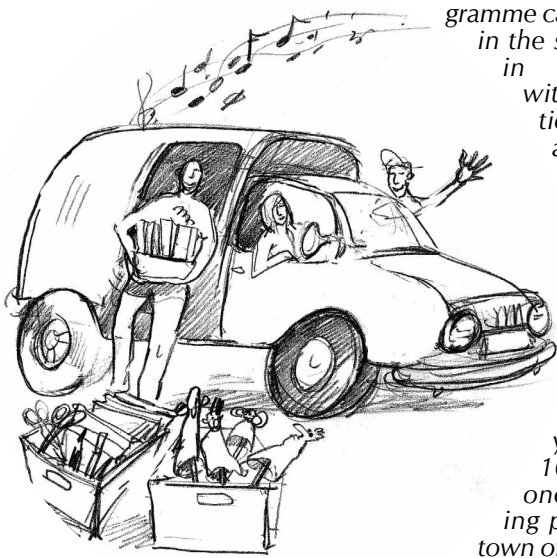
The school already has 5 primary classes and 3 pre-school classes. The parents are happy to see their children go to school on the site where they themselves made the bricks and bought the uniforms.

Fifteen kms away, we obtained a plot of land measuring 100 by 200 meters to relaunch the hope of a community garden with a group of 12 mothers. They will be initiated into the project, and can then bring in others. Little by little, they will be able to provide their children with basic foods.

Here in short is our modest struggle against extreme poverty; we continue to feel very small in the face of the enormity of the poverty here.»

GERTRUDE T.-K., DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

The "Instituto de Apoio à Criança" is a Portuguese association that works with and for children. It runs a programme called "Learning in the street", which, in collaboration with local institutions, organizes activities for children in social welfare housing in order to motivate them to do better at school. This text comes from Ricardo T., a young man of 16 who lives in one of the housing projects in the town of Odivelas. The translator has tried to convey the spontaneity of Ricardo's language.



"THE INSTITUTE FOR CHILD Assistance comes every Thursday to Famoés with a van and three instructors – Mario, Alexander and Sao – and sometimes Sonia comes instead of Sao. But those who come the most often are Mario, Alexander and Sao.

They're all super! Some like them a lot, some don't like them as much, because each one has his own personality! For example, Mario is really funny and outgoing! Alexander is also funny and really cool – he's the oldest. Sao is very sweet and soft-spoken – I wish there were more people like her!

They've never skipped a single Thursday, and keep us company; we play games, we listen to music, we prepare collages and plays on all kinds of things...They should come more often – for example, twice a week! For example on Mondays and Thursdays. And then we could do activities that they chose as well as others that we chose, which isn't really the case now because when they arrive, they've already planned everything for us. But if we finish early, we can do the activity we have in mind.

What's too bad is that they have to leave so early. I have to say that they stay here from 2:00pm to 5:00pm, they already spend three hours in Famoés, and that's the best thing that's happened to us here, especially for the little ones in 5th grade. When there's no one at home, they can stay in the Institute's van."

RICARDO T., PORTUGAL, FOLHA INFORMATIVA IAC – PROJECTO RUA, N° 41

"AT THE MOMENT THE YOUNG PEOPLE FROM HERE ARE VERY BUSY with their studies and the manual work which helps us live (in the cowshed, the dairy – butter, cheese – the bakery, with ceramics). We are also hoping this year to finish the construction of the guest house which we started at least two years ago, delayed due to lack of resources.

Usually the young people don't work outside but Fabio, who comes from a very poor family, absolutely has to help his mother. Whilst still staying at Noah's Ark, he works cutting sugar cane and also continues his studies in the evening. He gets up at 3.00am. After a quick breakfast, he heads out into the darkness, dressed in his work clothes which are

clean but marked for ever with patches of charcoal because the sugar cane is burnt before being cut. The 'raw' leaves cut like razor blades and the insects are awful. He carries his terribly sharp little scythe, his 'boia fria', ie a cold lunch which heats up (and can also go off) in the harsh sun which blazes from sunrise. He often has to walk 2 or 3 km on foot to get to the field. Sometimes it's even further: then a bus, or rather a sort of cage on wheels, carries the workers. All the work is done by hand because the slopes are steep. Often the cane is covered in undergrowth, which of course slows down the output.

Fabio is usually back by 2.00 or 3.00pm. He can rest a little, and do his homework. At 6.00pm a bus takes the students from Jucara to Vitoria de Santo Antao from where they will return at about 11.00pm or later. It's 20 km, but there are lots of potholes for the last 8 km of the dusty path – "impossible to sleep", Fabio tells us...

For several months of the year, it's thanks to this 'sugar cane hell' as people call this 'safra', that each worker can support his family."

COLETTE C, NOAH'S ARK, BRAZIL



"OUR PARTNER, Sólo Para Mujeres, directs the girls to one of our two hostels...

The "Terminal" Hostel: breaking down the vicious circle from generation to generation.

Not all our actions are a complete success: girls addicted to the hardest drugs often suffer severe relapses, using solvents, alcohol, medicines, crack, cocaine, etc. According to the lady who runs Sólo para Mujeres, a good third of the girls die, another third return to live in the street, and the last third succeed in radically changing their lives. This is an encouraging result bearing in mind that even those who suffer a relapse will have benefited from material and psychological support and their suffering will therefore be lessened. A high proportion of the girls who go back to the street allow their young children to continue to live in one of the hostels. Here the children benefit from maintained family bonds (mother and other family members) and also from pre-school and school education. They will not be street babies, destined to become street children; the vicious circle has been broken. Although we do not always succeed in saving the mother, very often we can save her children.

Our monthly meal at the "Terminal" hostel.

We have started inviting the girls to share a lunch. At the first meal there were 3 girls, at the second 11, and at the third 24... The discussion group we organise during these lunches is an important way of exchanging information and advice, and is unique in this district with a reputation for its extreme poverty and violence."

EXTRACTS FROM LETTER 61, DECEMBER 2005, THREE QUARTERS OF THE WORLD ASSOCIATION, FRANCE-GUATEMALA

TSUNAMI: FOR A LONG TIME, SHOCK, GRIEF, COMPASSION, SOLIDARITY

"The Tsunami has left in its wake much more than the complete devastation of those living in the periphery of costal areas. It has left behind a sharp fear (...) Most important of all is that the Tsunami affected people are in the category of displaced people, exposed again to migration and to resettlement if they are lucky (...) As you enter the village you notice the destruction immediately. Most of the houses including concrete houses have been flattened (...) The village is totally deserted, like all the villages on the shore line. We distribute rice to each family, a kerosene stove, a bottle of kerosene, some groceries, cooking utensils, buckets, plates, drinking water tumblers, some new clothes for women and children (...) Almost two weeks after the Tsunami people are still dazed, shocked and disheartened (...) There were twelve missing and a few women died. Almost all boats and catamarans are either lost or badly damaged. How do we start life from scratch? We promised to come again and left with our heart full of sorrow and grief."

FELIX N.S., ASSOCIATION FOR THE RURAL POOR, INDIA

"Yes, we are affected by Tsunami. 50% of our beneficiaries have expired. Our camp office washed away. In our coastal service area, we are doing: (1) Mobile health service supported by an individual donor; (2) Mini health centre; (3) Awareness education on HIV/Aids; (4) Training and education on computer, tailoring, type writing."

MRS. N. NIRMALA D., HEALTH EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY, INDIA

"The Fishing Industry in these areas is fully destroyed. ...Nearly 50,000 houses are fully damaged and nearly 30,000 are partially damaged. The schools, hospital and infrastructures are damaged. (...) Immediate accommodation was provided in churches and temples. The necessary food was provided. Large number of tents were donated by several countries. The Government passed regulations prohibiting construction of new structures less than 100 m from the sea. Several NGOs, local and foreign, have come forward to construct houses... Fishermen were provided with fishing boats and nets. Most of the fishermen commenced fishing again (...) It will take a fairly long time for the people to overcome their pain (...) With the demand for a large number of houses, there is a shortage of skilled labour such as masons, carpenters, electricians, plumbers, etc. Hence Government and several organisations have started training programmes."

JOE R., THIRASARA FOUNDATION, SRI LANKA

Martin C., Founder of Brotherhood of Hope Trust in Sri Lanka, welcomes very poor children to his Centre, offering them learning and training opportunities. Fortunately, the area of the Centre was not hit but the children, their families, the staff and friends were deeply shocked by the disaster. Martin invited the children to

express their feelings, their fear, their compassion through drawings. He has sent to us and to others some of these moving and forceful drawings.

"At the New Year, we have spoken about the catastrophe and felt very moved by the difficulties that the people touched by it will encounter to lift up their heads. The idea to offer one's time, to create beautiful things to decorate, for instance, a school or a children's centre little by little came about. We have learned a special technique of creation with light paper- and we created a mural composed of three panels."

ATD FOURTH WORLD GROUP, IN BREST, FRANCE
P.S. This splendid creation has now been forwarded to Thailand to be offered to an NGO working with Tsunami victims.

"The number of families affected exceeds thousands in over 300 villages, thousands washed away, cattle hit, livelihood lost (...) We, our associates and volunteers with our limited resources, have tried to reach to all the possible villages with relief items including cooked food, dry rations, condiments, cooking oil, cooking stoves, bed sheets, water storage cans, medicines, clothes, utensils, floor mats, toys for children, books hygiene kits, sanitary kits for women and baby food, and tarpaulin plastic sheets and tents for temporary dwelling and we have been giving them the much needed social and emotional support for those who are in the state of trauma (...)"

REV. FR. JOSEPH A., NATIONAL MISSION CO-ORDINATION SERVICE CENTRE, INDIA

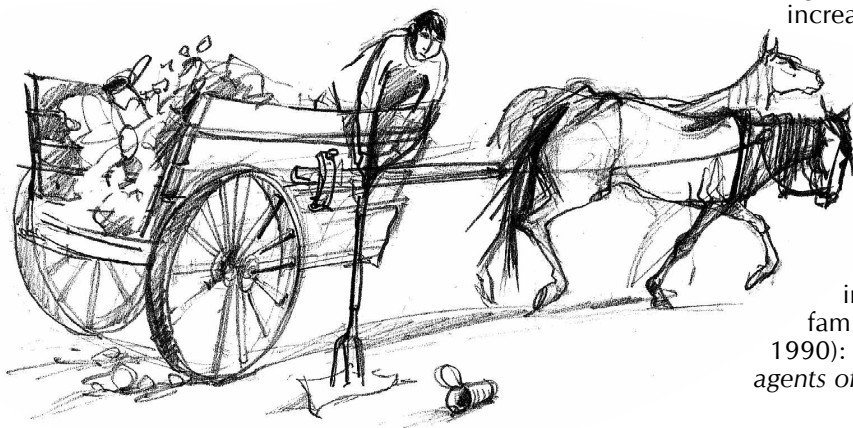
Very poor people taking part in the art-in-the-street workshops run by ATD Fourth World in Belgium, had the idea of constructing bricks with cardboard to symbolise the necessary reconstruction of people, buildings, countries. Children and adults created these bricks during the street workshops. Messages were written during the Fourth World people's University. The bricks and the messages have been forwarded to persons close to Tsunami victims, in different places. A testimony:

"I have very gratefully received five works of art about the Tsunami catastrophe and your very lovely letter. I cannot fully express how much I am moved to hold in my hands paintings which have been made by people in a very poor neighbourhood of Belgium. Thank you, Jean-Luc, Christelle, from Tournai, Diana and two others who have been too modest to sign their names. I love you all. When I have carefully studied these constructions (...) I will fill them up with sweets specially chosen, and give the gift boxes to refugee people. They will be interested in this gesture when I simply say that friends from Belgium have sent them."

REG M. NEW ZEALAND

The 'San Vicente Organization', created by Father Cacho (who has now passed away), is run by the residents of a slum in which reign all of the forms of precarity which lead to extreme poverty. Teams of volunteers have been working there for a long time with the families. Here is what H el ene de B., a member of ATD Fourth World, has to say after a recent trip to this region:

“Significant advances have been made within this very poor population: there are self-managed kindergartens, theatre groups for young people, etc. Especially striking are the changes in the social status of the 'garbage collectors' in a project which is recognized by the town of Montevideo and called 'Hope recycled'. In this project, they are recognized as full members of the workforce, who therefore



benefit from training and have regained their human dignity. You can see them on the streets of the capital, with their carts drawn by skinny little horses. They have obtained the right to collect garbage in certain neighbourhoods, and are paid to do it. Long past is the time when they were called 'garbage scavengers', and looked down on by the rest of the town. Father Cacho sometimes went with them on their nightly rounds in order to share their experiences, and fought all his life for them to be recognized as workers like everyone else. Veterinary students continue to look after their horses, just as they did when Father Cacho was alive.

Today, their recycling workshops continue to expand: workshops for recycling computers, washing machines, refrigerators. As the volume of recycled materials increases, the amount of unusable garbage decreases.

The latter is loaded into sacks by young people, thus also providing them with a job. The sacks are then picked by the capital's garbage-collection services, considerably improving the environment around the residences – the piles of garbage have disappeared from the streets and the sewers no longer become clogged. It is obvious that this work – which is recognized and paid for – improves the living conditions of these very poor families and confirms Father Cacho's statement (in 1990): 'We believe in the capacity of the poor to be agents of a new life'.

SAN VICENTE ORGANIZATION, URUGUAY

Letter to the Editor

• «After the Seminar in Mauritius (Reaching the Poorest Children, April 2000 *), I started a project for disadvantaged children in a small town about 120 km North West of Harare. This is in line with the Declaration we adopted in Mauritius. I am in the process of registration at national level. I was a teacher. Because of this project I resigned to give my full time to these children, their families and communities. With the help of friends, I have built a Centre, 'Tariro Children's Centre'. It's called Tariro which means: Looking forward/Hope. Children are saying: We are looking forward : - for assistance or help in basics; - for better living conditions socially, mentally and economically; - for an HIV/AIDS free generation. The project is aiming at giving children in difficulty circumstances HOPE.”

SR. SHANGAI C. ZIMBABWE

* See Letter to Friends n° 48, August 2000.

Echos of a theatrical visit to 11 prisons, to celebrate the Internatinal Day for the Eradication of Poverty, 17 October

“...In Dapaong the Procurator decided that the prison was too small to hold the show, so he took the responsibility to take all the 110 prisoners to the tribunal whose President

arranged the hall to accommodate the stage and over 200 spectators... In An eho, the prison Governor lent the prisoners uniforms so that they could do a sketch which made fun of... the prison Governor! The prison will never be the same again when such bonds are made between the men.”

RENAISSANCE VILLAGE, TOGO

• “We would like to express the wish to go on receiving the 'Letter to Friends Around the World', all the more so since it is now published in Portuguese. Our work with the poorest continues (...) Ana Isabel looks after a creche every day in a shanty-town, here in Porto Alegre, which receives thirty children, from birth to six years of age, of domestic employees (...) I, Jacques, continue with defence of landless peasants and poor people without accomodation. I have some judicial successes but unfortunately there are also many failures. (...) I wish you and everyone else of the Permanent Forum every success in the services which you give to the poor (...).”

ANA ISABEL AND JACQUES A., BRAZIL

• “Please accept my thanks for not forgetting to send me always the 'Letter to Friends' which allows me to keep in touch with deve-

lopments in the Permanent Forum, with the various acts of our friends who share with us their work with the poorest in different parts of the world. I keep all these Letters, because at the end of the week we have a meeting with a group of friends to re-read and discuss what is happening and what is being done amongst the most disadvantaged people (...). As for our concrete actions, we work with the poor mothers in rural districts ... Those women have organised themselves into committees of 12 (a total of 72 women). Once a month they buy wool in the market in Lima, and knit pullovers, first of all for their own families, but also for sale. They have a capital of 1200 new sols (400 \$U.S).”

RAUL C., PERU

• “The GICPED these days is having a period of joy and progress. Our piggery which had two pigs, now has five new piglets. Our new strategy to help the most idle is to give them two piglets (male and female) per village for which we finance the food and maintenance. Once these pigs have farrowed they will have piglets in compensation, for we think that this method will reduce extreme poverty.”

EMMANUEL E., CAMEROON

H EL ENE PERDEREAU'S COMMITMENT IS TO ILLUSTRATE THE TEXTS OF THE LETTER ON A FREE-TIME BASIS.

The "Permanent Forum on Extreme Poverty in the World." is a network of committed people who want to develop friendship and exchange knowledge about what the poor and very poor teach us, i.e. people who suffer from multiple disadvantages in the areas of education, housing, employment, health and culture; those who are criticised and rejected the most. This forum invites people who want to be part of a movement rejecting extreme poverty worldwide to join it, to rebuild communities with the poorest, inspired by their lives. This movement expresses itself in the Letter to Friends around the World, which publishes the texts written by its correspondents three times a year, in French, English and Spanish. The Permanent Forum is run by the International Movement ATD Fourth World, an international NGO whose headquarters are at Pierrelaye, France. Those who join the forum do so in their own right, and are not obliged to become members of the ATD Fourth World. Our e-mail address is: forum.permanent@atd-quartmonde.org Internet : www.atd-quartmonde.org Subscription \$8 / 8   per annum - Support subscription: \$10 / 8   per annum.   International Movement ATD Fourth World - Printed by ATD - M ry-sur-Oise - December 2005.