

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

JANUARY 2009 – No. 70

Editorial The Everyday Artisans of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child

"In this third millennium, let no child be abandoned to hunger and ignorance, excluded from the feast, regardless of their sex, language or religion. Each child embodies the future of our human race."

Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio, Winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature 2008, in an excerpt from his speech before the Nobel Academy, on 7th November 2008

We often read and hear that the consequences of the economic and financial crisis threatening the world are now and will in the future be heaviest for people already living in situations of vulnerability, extreme poverty and exclusion. History is littered with these key moments when people collectively realise that those most seriously affected by disasters - regardless of their cause - will be the most underprivileged. Has this awareness therefore radically transformed the bonds that people create between each other?

The twentieth anniversary of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child should be an opportunity to take stock of the transformations brought about thanks to the commitment of the everyday artisans of the Convention, who are active at many levels, and to rediscover with them what it means to build a common humanity.

Some of these people are correspondents of the Permanent Forum. They tell us about the real lives of children with no legal existence, street children, children not attending school, working children, children called "sorcerers", exploited children, beggar children, children in prison, children excluded for all kinds of reasons. They do not isolate these children from their parents or their community. They bring to light their many complex situations, and make them the

starting point for their action. They highlight the potential and the acts of resistance of both children and adults, including those who are completely excluded.

Through their creativity they seek to enable all children to remain with their family, to attend school, to express their artistic talents, to participate in play activities, using any means no matter how small. They set up learning schemes, and organise meetings between children with different backgrounds.

So, wherever they are based, with the possibilities available to them, driven by the conviction that poverty is not inevitable, Permanent Forum correspondents are in action and are mobilising others too, to eradicate it. From their point of view, the aim is not just to relieve or reduce poverty but to totally eradicate it. Through their daily commitment working with very underprivileged children and families, they pinpoint the fundamental changes that implementation of the Convention must bring about for all children, without exception.

Haven't there always been people (and more recently associations) who within their community have risen up to unite and take action with the victims of hunger, ignorance and violence? No doubt. What is new, and certainly a source of hope, is a worldwide movement that is emerging and becoming more visible, a movement made up of lots of small currents; currents that are sometimes peaceful and gentle, and others that are turbulent and chaotic, but all drawing their inspiration from the recognition that every human being has the right to live in dignity and to be an integral part of our human community.

HUGUETTE REDEGELD, VICE PRESIDENT

• ***In the State of Minas Gerais in Brazil, there are many people living in the street who are frequently attacked. A small book has just been published by associations, to try to help them and to arouse public opinion. Extracts:***

Living in the street is painful. There are many risks and much humiliation. Where we live many passers-by think they are different from us. This embarrasses us and we know also that our presence embarrasses people. Efforts must be made so that, one day, we can live like everyone else. Passers-by who think they are different must join us to struggle together for a just and brotherly society. But there are people who also say: "The street is not a place to live in, nor in which

to do business. It hinders the traffic. People who live there should be expelled." So the authorities attack those who live in the street, confiscate their belongings and their papers, which are practically impossible to recover.

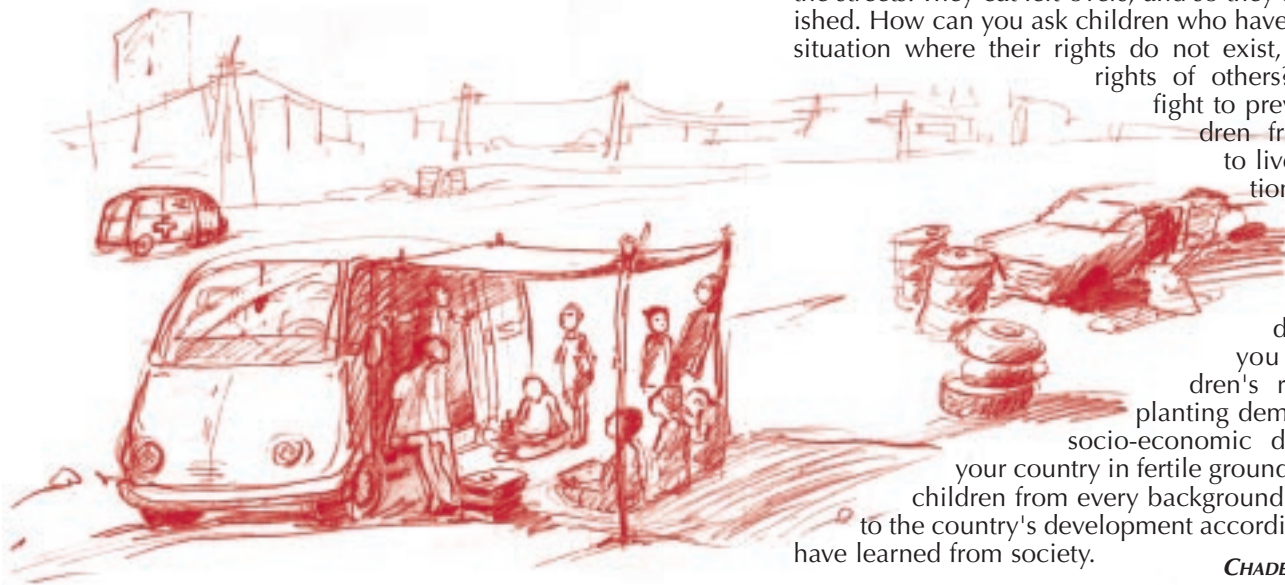
For this reason the group defending those who live in the street demands, amongst other things: the creation of lodgings for street inhabitants; the development of projects to rehabilitate public buildings in order to create lodgings; putting empty buildings in city centres at our disposal; the guarantee of the creation of infrastructures for transport and work wherever new lodgings are built. Above all we demand real lodgings, not just shelters!

FABIO A.S., BRAZIL

• *In our discussion on the reintegration of children living in the streets into their families, the head of the Exchange Network for Street Children (REPER) shares some thoughts:*

For quite a long time, the associations who make up the REPER network have realized that the best place for a child is at the heart of his or her family, if the conditions for living together are met. They have multiplied efforts to rediscover the families, to make the child's return possible both for the child and the family. However, for the past two years the conditions of life (survival) have been such that many children leave their families again a few days after their return. Why? Because they are hungry. They avoid meeting the educators who had taken them home. The associations then recognised that it was not enough to bring them home, but it was also necessary to help the mothers to keep the children with them. Some give the mothers a kind of family allowance. Others support them by launching a small economic activity. Still others are organised differently: the educators, after training, relay each other every 24 hours in the street living there with the children. Small vans transformed into infirmaries or schools circulate according to an itinerary with the same stops every day. School equipment has been created and made for this particular purpose. I am always surprised by such extreme poverty on the one hand and by such generosity on the other.

MARTINE B., COORDINATOR OF THE REPER NETWORK.



• *Chadefi J. is the Coordinator of JEUNE (French acronym for "Committed Young People United for an Exemplary Nation), created in 2004 with the aim of training and educating young people. He focuses on educating children and young people in democratic citizenship "because it concerns my humanity" he says. But how can this be done if children's rights are not upheld?*

JEUNE/Haiti believes that Haitian children need society in order to become honest citizens. According to the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Haitian Constitution and Haitian laws, all children have the same rights regardless of their origin or the colour of their skin. Children have a right to good health, leisure, and to live - if at all possible - with their family. They have a right to life (children must enjoy the best possible conditions for their development, never go hungry, and must have a roof over their head). They have a right to good health: in other words children must be able to benefit from the best possible state of health. Right to education: all children must be able to learn to read and write. The right to protection against exploitation in all its evil forms... But look at these children: do you think their rights are upheld? They are living in the streets and have nobody to give them an education and teach them good manners, or give them a sense of civic responsibility so that they can become good citizens. Their rights to education, health and housing are scorned. They have no-one to teach them self-respect and respect for others. These children live in the streets. They eat left-overs, and so they are under-nourished. How can you ask children who have lived in such a situation where their rights do not exist, to respect the rights of others? Society must fight to prevent these children from continuing to live in such situations, which cause profound and long-lasting psychological and social disorders. When you uphold children's rights, you are planting democracy and the socio-economic development of your country in fertile ground. In this way all children from every background will contribute to the country's development according to what they have learned from society.

CHADEFI J., JEUNE/HAITI

Striving Together to End Poverty... Every STEP Counts!

After signing the STEP call for action on Internet (see Letter to Friends no.69), Aimé M., from the Congolex-populus NGO in DR Congo, sent the following message to his friends and relations: "Please download the STEP and sign it to fight against poverty throughout the world. Your signature will help to save people living in total poverty."

After sending twenty signatures or so, Father Antoine T. from the Congo Brazzaville wrote this comment: "At the beginning of the next school term, other young people familiar with our parish will be told about your initiative and other signatures will be added. Thank you for continuing this large-scale awareness-raising action to make as many people as possible aware of this situation, and to ensure that together, each in our own area, we take action."

Don't lose heart! P.S. Suggest an octogenarian's club should be created!!"

And here are just some of the comments from the many received, in which the signatories express their agreement:

- Today more than ever, poverty should no longer exist. Let's all continue together. *(Canada)*
- Our families are fighting against poverty, and we know these people are suffering. We want to be with them and listen to them. *(Mauritius)*
- Dignity is the opposite of poverty. It is inherent to every human being and we must defend it at all costs. *(Spain)*

• **The town of Uvira is 80 km from Bukavu in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Over the last few years a number of Tapori groups have been created, aiming to foster friendship between all children. Here are the impressions of one of the group leaders.**

I've been a midwife for the last 12 years. I do this job to help people who don't have much money. I work at home, and I have an authorisation from the local health authority. Every day I deliver 6 or 7 babies. In principle the charge for a normal delivery at Uvira hospital is 15 USD per woman. But I only charge 6 USD. Because of the poverty caused by war, some of the women giving birth in my home are unable to pay their bills. Others can only pay less than half the amount. And even worse, some women, after bringing a baby into the world, don't even have any clothes for their child, and don't have enough food during the maternity period.

Faced with this situation, I cannot help but provide some clothing and food for the baby. This situation means I do not earn very much money, since I have to pay for the medicines I use. To cope with the demand, I have trained two other mothers in the district to become midwives, and today they are earning their living by delivering babies.

I got my training as a midwife during the years when I worked in the delivery room. This is why I share what I have learned with others. Thanks to my work with the Tapori children, I have consolidated this solidarity, this way of working and living.



**THÉRÈSE M., TAPORI GROUP LEADER,
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO**

• **The Ministrels Rhythm of Hope is a group of talented young ladies who are themselves from depressed areas of Manila. They have experienced what hardship and suffering are all about. Today, they are in a privileged position to assess the situation and generate support for themselves and for people living in poverty in their community.**

In partnership with one of the organizations that supported us in our childhood, we have established a program to share with children from difficult family backgrounds, with the hope to give back a little bit of what we have received. We gather these children regularly to build their interest in theater, creative movement/dance, singing, visual arts, etc... We also provide literacy tutoring and extra help with school work. Alternative education and arts projects offer Filipino youth the chance to acquire knowledge, to express themselves creatively and create works of beauty in what can often be a depressing environment.

Some friends ask why we use our time working for free or for very small allowances. Actually, eating every day, being able to support some members of our family and studying are a better goal for us than a meaningless and unproductive life in a job that doesn't fit to our ideal.

Fighting poverty is a long process! We have outgrown many of our illusions... but not our sense of hope. We are hopeful for our family and for our future. In turn, we hope that the group can effectively reach out to underprivileged children and youth and to assist them in gaining greater hopes and aspirations as well. We believe that we can make a difference in children's lives. Indeed, nobody is too poor to have nothing to give, and nobody is too rich to not need anything. As the song goes: "What will life be, what are we without a song?" And without hope? Let's face our fears, live our dreams. No more broken dreams. Tomorrow belongs to us.

**EXCERPTS FROM THE DECEMBER 2008
NEWSLETTER OF ASIAN FORUM: ALL TOGETHER IN DIGNITY**

Striving Together to End Poverty... Every STEP Counts!

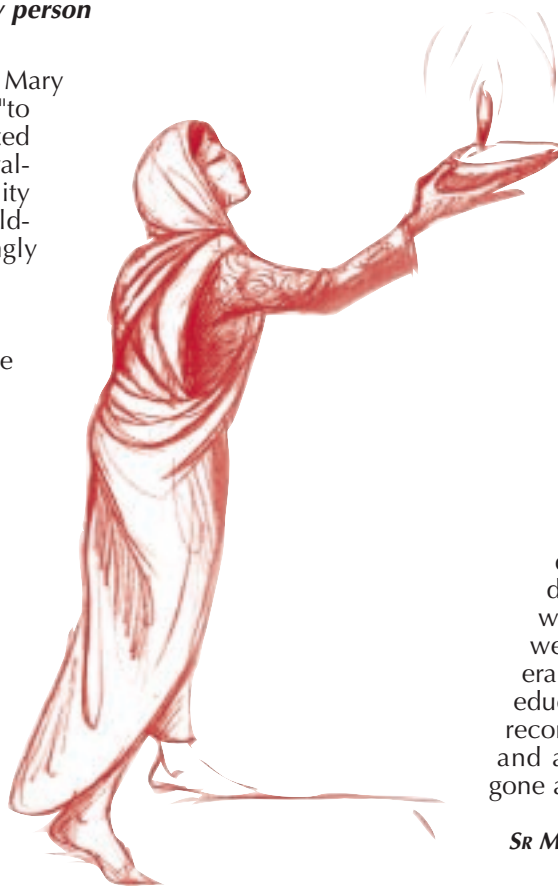
- The same opportunities for all. It's a question of equality. *(Finland)*
- It's poverty that should be excluded, not the poverty-stricken. Let's unite to vanquish poverty! *(Belgium)*
- I also wrote it in my blog. Students are committed to the same cause. I believe that together we can change the world. *(Portugal)*
- Poverty is an evil epidemic. It discriminates against families, and children my age. That's why I don't want to see poverty in this world, so that peace can reign. *(Algeria)*
- I am very impressed by this call for action, especially the recognition of all human beings as equals. Let's fill the gap between rich and poor. *(Pakistan)*
- I agree 100%. It is undignified to leave the underprivileged or entire peoples suffering in poverty. *(France)*
- I think the best way to help is to give people the tools that will enable them to fight against poverty to achieve liberation and not fall back into poverty. In addition it is our duty to maintain a social awareness. *(Costa Rica)*
- Poverty is a worldwide problem that can be solved by everybody uniting together. *(Tunisia)*
- My motivation is essentially a solidarity with people who, for various reasons, find themselves in a situation of complete disadvantage in a world which could quite easily prevent this from happening. *(Bolivia)*

• **We believe in the inner capacity of every person to think, reflect and react**

The thrust of the Society of Daughters of Mary Immaculate & Collaborators (DMI) is "to enable the poor especially the marginalized women and children to enjoy the human values such as love, justice, peace and equality through an empowerment and capacity building process." The Society of DMI strongly believes in the inner capacity of every person to think, to reflect and to react. By mobilizing the collective power of people, DMI fulfills its mission to help the poor to be fully human and fully alive. The DMI extends its developmental work in five Indian states... It also started its developmental activities in the countries like Tanzania, Zambia and Brazil. The society covers almost 60,000 families through its various programs.

One example of our work, the Self Help Groups:

Fatima - a woman leader of Keelnedungal, a village in Pallipat Union, India - records the growth of the village: "Today, our village is looked up to as the model village by the surrounding villages. But twenty years ago, ours was a very backward village. Most of us, being people



belonging to scheduled castes (untouchables), were working as bonded laborers for years together. The foundation for the development of our village was laid by the DMI in 1986. The DMI's started women sangams and today there are 26 Self Help Groups in our village. Under the stewardship of DMI, we the women could meet government authorities, discuss with them and derive benefits and facilities which are our rightful due. (...) Village developmental activities like digging and cleaning of wells, erection of street lights were taken up. Literacy in general and female children getting educated saw an all time high record. (...) The entire village and all the villagers have undergone a metamorphosis."

SR MK TERESA, SOCIETY OF DMI, INDIA

Letters to the Editor – Letters to the Editor – Letters to the Editor

• In my opinion, education and training are fundamental to all lasting development. It is therefore indispensable to support the education of children and the training of adults in order to improve knowledge and mentalities so as to contribute effectively to the eradication of extreme poverty. For this reason I salute the mini-library project set up in certain poor districts (see Letter #69) and I hope to see the birth of this project in the poor districts of my country shortly. *(Siaka O., Ivory Coast)*

• In the eyes of the young people we deal with and with whom we speak about world news, it is difficult to define the concept of financial crisis. One of them said to me, pertinently, that the south of Madagascar has been in crisis for years. In this difficult period, solidarity should not be forgotten and its human values maintained. To-day we need you more than ever so as not to leave them forgotten and in extreme poverty. *(José*

Luis G., Newsletter #45 Editorial, NGO Bel Avenir/Agua de Coco Foundation, Madagascar)

• Thank you very much for sending the Letter to Friends Around the World. In reply to Nicolas O.'s letter published in issue #69, I congratulate him for so much initiative and indicate to him that the Programmes for Adult Education in Mexico seem very good to me, in particular those of the INEPJA which have been tried out in the State of Aguascalientes for the past ten years. *(Monique R., Mexico)*

• From here in the Dominican Republic, we marked the 17th October, International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, through the STEP declaration (Striving Together to End Poverty). *(Maria del M., GCAD-FD, Dominican Republic)*

• We regularly receive your Letter which is available to the whole community. It is read

or consulted by many of us. Our mission is one of religious instruction but we also have a good library open to the public, and your Letter is available for consultation like all other reviews. Clearly everything about Rwanda, Burundi and all neighbouring countries is of particular interest to us. *(Marius D. o.p., Rwanda)*

• It is wonderful to receive the newsletter and details about the STEP initiative. I am working at the Peter McVery Trust for the homeless in Dublin. The work concentrates mostly on drug addiction which unfortunately is a very real problem of homelessness here. For the past nine months, I have been attending to the need of the Lantern, a drug detox programme. Next week I will start at another programme of the Trust - the Withworth Road Residential Centre - which is really a hostel for the homeless. I love the work and find it very rewarding. *(Sr. Margo M., Ireland)*

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 poor and very poor people 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 to join a worldwide movement to overcome extreme poverty, to rebuild communities with people living in extreme poverty, 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, Spanish and Portuguese. The Permanent Forum is run by the International Movement ATD Fourth World, an international NGO whose headquarters are in Pierrelaye, France. Those who join the Forum do so in their own right, and do not have to become members of ATD Fourth World. Our e-mail address is: permanent.forum@atd-fourthworld.org Internet : www.atd-fourthworld.org Subscription \$8/8 € per annum - Support subscription: \$10/10 € per annum.

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HÉLÈNE PERDEREAU'S COMMITMENT IS TO ILLUSTRATE THE TEXTS OF THE LETTER ON A FREE-TIME BASIS

PAGE SETUP:
LYDIE ROUFFET