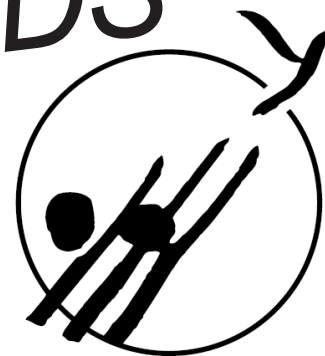


# LETTER TO FRIENDS AROUND THE WORLD

Permanent Forum on Extreme Poverty in the World



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

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## EDITORIAL «INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE AND COMMUNICATION»

Throughout history, turning points have marked progress and setbacks in the development of humanity. Events and people have symbolised them: Averroes (Ibn Rushd), Johann Gutenberg, Leonardo da Vinci. Close to our times, there have been Gandhi, Mandela, and many more as well. These people brought cultural, spiritual, political and economic innovations to their time, transforming relationships among people, and with their environment. They helped shape the gradual evolution of the human race, and for this they often paid the price of being misunderstood or even excluded. Throughout these eras, history has virtually never remembered the contributions of very poor people toward the advancement of humanity. Nevertheless, they have often been the ones who revealed the necessity of integrating our lives together, of recognising the equal dignity of each human being in order to advance toward more justice and brotherhood. As Joseph Wresinski<sup>1</sup> continually emphasised, people living in extreme poverty have often been at the forefront of education, legislative and scientific innovations. He summed up this conviction by saying: “The ideals of humanity originate with the poor.”

Are we now at a major turning point with the onset of the newest forms of communication? As radios and televisions are joined by computers, cell phones and the internet, upheavals are created in learning, communications, human relationships, and economic, social and cultural development. It is our responsibility to ensure that the most disadvantaged populations have their place at the heart of today’s debates about our society’s knowledge and information, and about intercultural dialogues. So many experts are working on these questions, while very little is expected of the people living in abject poverty.

Nevertheless, these people are part of intercultural dialogues every day, in the neighbourhoods where they

live alongside people of many different origins, cultures and experiences. What can we learn from them? Are we eager to learn whether and how the poorest people would like to use modern means of communication? To what end? Would they use the internet or cell phone to communicate with far-flung family members, to keep up with friends, to learn new skills, to look for employment? And if they do not use these means, is it for lack of access, or are there other reasons? What do they think about modern communication tools? Do these innovations provide the possibility of improving their living conditions, or of changing the disdain in the looks they receive? In what way? And what about the role of young people? Joseph Wresinski said, “*What the youth and children of the Fourth World need is to have the power to create, to enter into the world that is inventing the human race of tomorrow. This is how the young will build their own future.*” Will modern means of communication create ties among young people of all classes and backgrounds? Will they foster better understanding or new initiatives?

These are some of the questions that will be explored during a small seminar we are organising in September with correspondents of the Permanent Forum from the Mediterranean basin. The theme is: “The contribution of very poor people and families to the intercultural dialogue in this information society.” This special issue of the Letter to Friends focuses on new technology and intercultural relations as they are witnessed and lived by very poor people of the Mediterranean region.

There is so much to say about these questions, and too little is said from the point of view of the poorest. Would you, as correspondents of the Permanent Forum in the world, please mail us—or e-mail us!—your own reflections on this subject? Your contribution will enrich the work of the seminar and would link you to our friends in the Mediterranean region.

HUGUETTE REDEGELD,  
VICE-PRESIDENT

1. A priest and the founder of the International Movement ATD Fourth World, 1917-1988.

**Martine Hosselet, Delegate of the Permanent Forum for the Mediterranean region, spoke at UNESCO in Paris on 4 April 2003 on the theme of "Dialogue for peace between cultures". Below are some extracts of her message.**

"During the ATD Fourth World People's Universities<sup>1</sup> in Marseilles, the participants reflected on the theme 'Families of all cultures, of all colours', for the greatest mixture of cultures are found in the poorest neighbourhoods. Badly housed, living on top of each other, immigrant families and poor French families usually share the same conditions: fears of seizures and expulsions, social and cultural services that are poorly equipped and maintained, a run-down environment...

People live under constant stress because of the noise and the over-crowding, and there is a tendency to distrust one another. Opportunities for calm exchanges, to learn to respect each other are rare.

During the Peoples' Universities, the participants began by showing on a world map their countries of origin: Italy, Portugal, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Senegal, Reunion, Comoros, Lebanon, Iraq, Kurdistan, Vietnam... Many gypsy families came from Spain or North Africa. Several people explained why they had left their countries: for the first wave of immigrants (Italians and Portuguese), it was to seek work in order to escape from poverty, in response to an invitation for workers launched by France. The Comorians came to escape from poverty after the archipelago's independence. For the more recent immigrants (from Kurdistan, Iraq, and Lebanon), it was armed conflict that put them on the move. The participants next tried to better understand the family traditions of each of the cultures from which they came: the importance of grandparents, the different customs regarding marriage, ways of raising children who had been "transplanted" into France, approaches to death. (...)

To return to the subject of dialogue between cultures, I would like to mention a unique association called 'Hope Marseilles'. Its objective is to demonstrate that it is possible for us to all live together. This association encourages dialogue between all those living in Marseilles, in the aim of better mutual understanding. Between 1996 and 2000, a small group of people participating in the People's Universities met regularly for in-depth discussions along the lines of the appeals launched by Hope Marseilles.

In the course of some 15 encounters, they shared the stories that their parents had passed down to them, and that continued to give them the strength to carry on today. They talked about the different gestures of mutual support that neighbours from different spiritual communities made- for example, turning off the television after the death of a neighbour, whether that neighbour was Muslim, Christian, Jewish or Buddhist, and going to spend time with the family; they thus learn in a very natural way how things are done in other cultures.

In the course of one of these meetings, an Algerian woman said : *'Every culture has its traditions. I can't make you change your way of seeing things, and you won't change mine, but we can respect each other. We are brothers and sisters. We all spent nine months in our mother's womb...'*

<sup>1</sup> Fourth World People's Universities provide an opportunity for dialogue and sharing of knowledge between people living in extreme poverty and

**W.K. is a co-founder of a small co-operative in a Cisjordanian refugee camp. Three members of the Permanent Forum's team met her in December 2004. Here is what she said:**

"Now that we of the second generation in this camp are adults, we must react. Some of us have thought about what we could do. Thus a co-operative of about twenty women has at present been set up. After a while we decided on a project: to make olive oil soap."

She went on to say "What we wanted to do with this soap production is of course to create work, and earn a little money. But it is also to live in a co-operative, that is to say do something together within the camp itself, and group together our experiences (I, for example, know how to manage and undertake things, others have other qualifications and manual abilities, others have specialised knowledge). Then there is the ambition, which is also to give the women of the co-operative the chance to get out of the camp, to see other things and meet other people. It is to give them an opening."

The group was only at the beginning of the project. The women had informed themselves through the Internet how



they should go about making an attractive product, how to make the soap, how to mould the bars of soap and give them a perfume. They had already visited a plant-perfume factory in Galilee; but they had to go through a lot of administrative procedures to get the necessary permits to cross the border. They found this address by using their computer.

M<sup>rs</sup>. W.K. said that the Internet had been in use in Palestine for about five years. "That allowed us to instruct ourselves, and also to open up to other people and other realities: not to remain preoccupied with our own sufferings." She noted that children learn quickly and that often she asks for help from her own children how to understand the use of her computer.



**In January 2005, Sister Thérèse Ricard of the Borj Hammoud Fraternity in Lebanon, explains the inauguration of the project « Participation by the very poor in cultural meetings ». For many years her Order has been living in the middle of a particularly destitute district in Beirut. Its presence and activities aim essentially at the creation and renewal of links of solidarity between families of all origins, based on their experiences, their efforts and their hopes.**

“As can be found in the destitute districts of most of the world’s great towns, many foreigners, mostly illegal, live around us. Without any difficulty we can count about thirty nationalities, from Africa, Asia and the Near East amongst our neighbours. There is a spontaneous reflex of unease in the face of this foreign presence amongst the inhabitants of the district who are worried by this new reality; even we feel it a little...”

Our vocation and solidarity with refugees throughout the world, have incited us, bit by bit, to accept the cosmopolitan aspect of our district as a positive reality. This cultural diversity seems to us to be a mine from which we can extract lessons. So we have set up a project called “The Nabaa International University” from the name of the district where we live and which has a reputation of great poverty.

It simply involves the monthly organisation of a meeting about one or other of the cultures presented by people from the country. The twofold aim is: -to live the presence of all these foreign nationals as rich cultural activities in a poor district, -to give the immigrants a chance to be better appreciated. During the preparation, some of them have written to their parents asking for documents, cards, etc. Several have tried to obtain documentary films.

Others have displayed objects from their homelands, photos, holy pictures, etc. There were samples of local produce, the many different kinds of rice from Sri Lanka, tea, Egyptian dates, Armenian cognac; etc. And always a small sampling of these... In spite of the difficulties of expression in Arabic, they all speak with pride about their countries and cultures.

And in return the Lebanese evoke the reality of the departure of so many Lebanese during the war or because of the economic crisis, with the trials of life as expatriates. We also noticed the interest of the Palestinians in our vicinity. A Lebanese neighbour remarked “I saw people from elsewhere but I had no idea that I could mix with them. I am pleased with these fraternal meetings”. Later she began to visit a Philippine mother, Ethiopian neighbours, etc.

In the autumn of 2004 a film was shown concerning the refugee dramas throughout the world. It was followed with great interest and emotion; afterwards there was a discussion and prayers. “What you can do” is the title of the pamphlet which each one took home; this gives all the ideas and suggestions for better solidarity.”

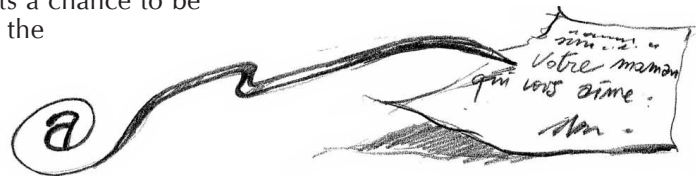
**On our last trip to Israel, we met a young woman, Mrs. D. S.-A., living in a kibbutz in a fast-growing city with some very poor neighbourhoods.**

Mrs. D. S.-A. took us to visit a young mother and her three children, who live under very difficult conditions in one of these neighbourhoods. Mrs. D.S.-A. met her through the kindergarten to which they both take their children every day. Over time, the two had developed a friendship.

In our conversation that day, this young mother told us that her father had wanted to give her a small sum of money. She had immediately confided in Mrs. D. S.-A. her plan to use the money to buy a computer for her children. Together, they had gathered information, looked through magazines, compared the possible options and prices. The thought that her children would learn how to use a computer brought Mrs. D. S.-A. a great deal of hope. Unfortunately, in the end her father was not able to give her the promised sum of money, and she was not able to buy the computer. She nevertheless continued to hope that one day it would be possible.

That evening, Mrs. D. S.-A. took us to the home of H. and her family, who were other members of the kibbutz. In the warm atmosphere of the evening meal, we described our meeting with this young mother and her desire to prepare her children for the future. H., who is at the head of a parents’ association in the neighbourhood, told us that, after 20 years, she had begun to write again to her children, who are far away. It was the possibility of sending emails that had “reconciled” her with the idea of writing.

ANNELIES WUILLEMIN,  
PERMANENT FORUM



**In Dakar, as an experiment we have recently started introducing computers into the Street Libraries we run in the districts and also for children and young people living in the street.**

We are only at the beginning of this experiment. Last year, as a test we introduced a CD-ROM with a story: KIYEKO. This was greeted with such enthusiasm by the children, who were eager to touch the machine and discover it, that we renewed the experiment by incorporating photos, manipulation of the machine and also the “Webcam” electronic camera. The most remarkable facts observed are as follows:

- When we went to see the children and young people living on the street and on a beach at Dakar, who many people say have no desire to learn, a large number of them were present and were jostling to see and touch the computer. We had to find ways of allowing each child to approach and touch it. Clearly, in this kind of situation, the children who already know about computers and who are the most dynamic quickly get hold of the machine. Therefore it is necessary to be vigilant and take great care to ensure that

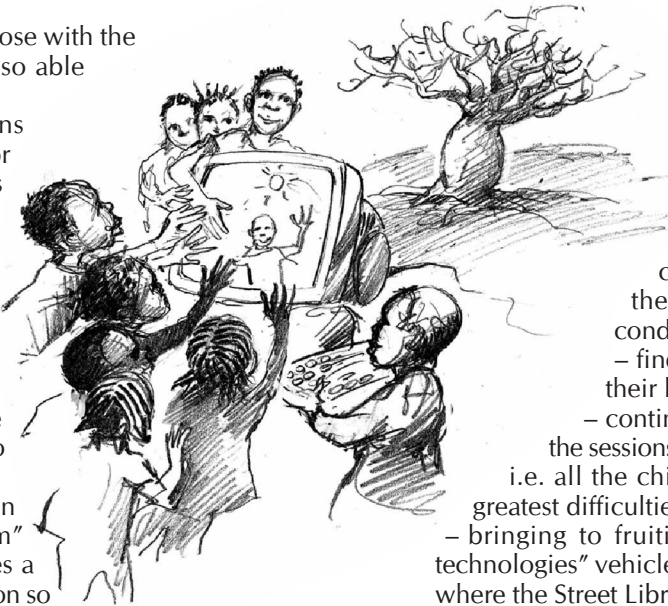
the shyest children and those with the greatest difficulties are also able to have access to it.

- Outdoor conditions

– whether on the beach for those living in the streets or the districts – also make it difficult to advance very quickly. We are most often perched on a rock or a bench, with a piece of cardboard around the computer to protect it from the light, and jostled by the children who want to touch and see it.

- With the street children in particular, the “Webcam” electronic camera requires a dialogue and an explanation so that they understand what we are doing.

We are in a context where images of these children are often used by the media in a way which they find unsatisfactory, and which always makes them bitter. In fact,



this was also an opportunity to talk with them about their own responsibility in allowing or preventing use of such images.

So these are just the first steps in this sharing of computer technology.

Future plans include:

- renewing the invitation to the children to come to our office so that they can use the computer in better conditions;

- finding friends who would agree to share their knowledge with the children;

- continuing to try to find ways of organising the sessions so that the children can make progress, i.e. all the children, including those who have the

greatest difficulties;

- bringing to fruition the idea of a “culture and new technologies” vehicle which could go to the different places where the Street Libraries are held, so that we can continue to go to the districts, which is vital to ensure each individual can use the computer.

MARIUS ILBOUDO, PASCAL LALLEMENT,  
ATD FOURTH WORLD, SENEGAL.

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***After several years outside of my country, I went back to Egypt on behalf of ATD Fourth World and met with a number of associations working with people living in very difficult circumstances. I was impressed by the country’s openness to organised civil society and its efforts to bring development to the country as a whole. During this trip, as well as through research on the Internet, I thought about the role of new technologies in Egypt. Here below are some of my thoughts.***

### **What is the role of new technologies in the educational system in Egypt?**

The new technologies are used in private schools within the framework of laboratory classes (for example, in chemistry) and are integrated into the program as one of the subject matters. There is one class per week. But they are not yet integrated into the program as an approach to studying, nor used as an aide for homework. In the public school system, due to lack of funds, new technologies are studied only from a theoretical point of view, without any hands-on practice. And yet today all employers require a mastery of computers, the Internet, etc.

In order to get a job, you have to know how to use a computer. Young people from poor backgrounds who are entering the job market are thus often automatically rejected. If you add to this handicap the constant increase in unemployment, due to the decrease in work opportunities and the high level of demographic growth, you can imagine

the consequences on the lives of the poorest population groups...

Recognising the importance of the new technologies, several organisations are attempting to provide training opportunities to young people with parents of little means, by setting up computer training centres in mosques and churches, or in selected private schools.

In addition, within the framework of the national mobilisation program launched in 2001 by the United Nations Development Fund, a community centre for access to new technologies (CCAT) was opened in the Governorate of Sharkia. The centre’s facilities are available to the population for free. A new CCAT will soon be opened in the town of Luxor.

### **And what role do cell phones play in the lives of the poor?**

Cell phones can play a very important role in the lives of some members of the population: for example, independent workers who do not have a fixed place of employment and so cannot be reached on a regular phone, or people looking for jobs who cannot stay at home all day next to the phone. The cell phone also facilitates contact between workers and civil society organisations.

The national communications company is preparing a free telephone card for the deaf mute and the physically handicapped, so that they can use a cell phone to send and receive messages. They can thus also benefit from the new technologies to make their lives easier.

HANI KHALIL, PERMANENT FORUM

HÉLÈNE 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](mailto:forum.permanent@atd-quartmonde.org) Internet : [www.atd-quartmonde.org](http://www.atd-quartmonde.org) Subscription \$8 / 8 € per annum - Support subscription: \$10 / 8 € per annum. © International Movement ATD Fourth World - Printed by ATD - Méry-sur-Oise - May 2005.