

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

OCTOBER 2010 – No. 75

It goes without saying

Every edition of Letter to Friends is packed with people who represent wonderful examples of humankind! As we read the articles, their faces appear before our eyes, we hear their voices in our heads, we can imagine these young people and adults on the move, joining together with each other, never to keep hard-won rights just for themselves but on the contrary to share them with others. Although they are not teachers, they hand on to us lessons of humanity, based on an astonishing conviction: for them, the actions they undertake are perfectly unremarkable.

It's perfectly normal "to give others the same help I received", to return to school when you're an adult "to learn more about yourself and how to take care of your family", there's nothing extraordinary about "relieving not only physical hunger but also invisible hungers", about inventing ways "to succeed with even the poorest children", about "showing his unbinding love for his children", and it goes without saying that

this homeless man understands people "who've left everything and don't even know what's happened to their children". It's also perfectly normal for young people to assert in a poem "We will fight you (poverty) To create a better world Yes, youth is on the move".

So it is also perfectly normal to launch a web site to make known our commitments to combat poverty, to learn about ourselves and to learn from each other.

This site called www.overcomingpoverty.org is to be revamped in 2011 and will be your site, as participants in the Permanent Forum. It will be the site for everybody who celebrates the 17th October every year, the International Day for Eradication of Poverty, and for everybody who wants to build a fairer and more fraternal world.

We will tell you more about this site in the next edition of Letter to Friends.

Huguette Redegeld

● A father will not give up

Roger is an Aboriginal Australian man of 50 years old. He is currently unemployed. His parents lived in rural Australia, working as farm labourers. His father died two years ago and his mother is still living, aged 77. She lives in a nursing home. Roger lives in Canberra, all by himself. He has done occasional work as a road worker; but recently he had been very much focused on seeing his 3 children – whom he had not seen for 3 years – so he had not been able to work for a while. His beautiful children are 7, 4, and 3 years old. Roger is now separated from his partner. The children live with her, a white woman, in rural Australia.

Roger had tried so much to establish contact with his children; however, for the last 3 years, all his efforts were futile. He changed solicitors three times until he could find a solicitor who will work for him with sheer dedication and commitment.

Roger had a simple victory in courts recently. After a vigorous fight, the court granted him limited contact with his children. He had first contact with them last week, after 3 years! He was the happiest man on earth that day.

He will not give up and he states that he wants full residence of his children. He wants to show everyone that he is an excellent father, who loves his children. His unbinding love for them is most praiseworthy.

Roger comes from a chronic poverty-stricken generation of rural Aboriginals of Australia. But his desire to succeed in life is incredible, though very few actually know this. There is a lot of prejudice against people like Roger in Australia. It is very difficult for them to come out of the 'glass house'. But Roger will succeed in life given that his determination has no bounds.

CHANAKA B., AUSTRALIA

● **"Being educated is the only way to be free"**
José Martí

Here is a testimony by Gisele Antunes R., a student at the Havana Higher Institute of Medical Science, which many Brazilians attend:

I left home when I was 9. We had nothing to eat, not even enough to survive. When I ran away from home I tried to tell people's fortunes in squares, and I got to know other children who were living in the street. I became like them. A little boy showed me how to get to a children's reception centre. But I just went there to eat, wash and play a little. On the 5th day of my new life I started sniffing glue, and straight afterwards I started taking drugs.

Some youth workers at the centre tried to help me, but it was no use. I met Sister Ana Maria who was able to get me into a new reception centre called "Sol e Vida" (Sunshine and Life). I spent 3 years there and stopped taking drugs. But this institution did not have government funding and had to close down. I heard about the municipal "shelters". I stayed in one of these shelters, called the Bosco Institute, until I was 17.

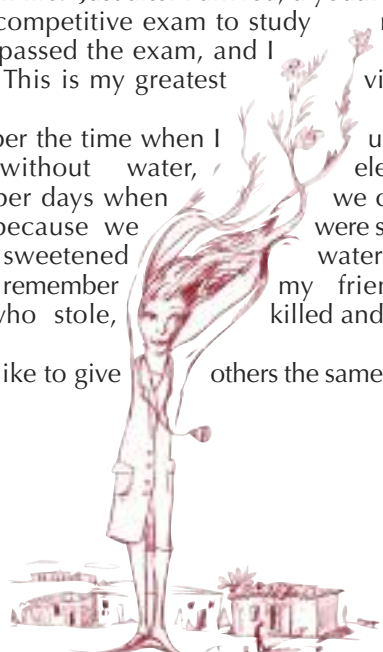
It's difficult for drug addicts to follow rules. Thanks to the patience of the youth workers, I managed to stop taking drugs, to eat properly and to cure myself of severe anaemia.

When I was little I was rebellious, I didn't want to accept my fate. I just wanted to have a family. But I used to dream about something: school and education. When I was 14, I began playing football, and I got my first wage. When I was 16, I entered an institution that gave training to young people living in the street and which funded my training to become a nursing auxiliary. However I was unable to finish my training because public institutions in Brazil are not permitted to assist people aged over 17 years and 11 months. You have to manage by yourself. When I reached the age of 17, I was desperate.

Fortunately the Bosco Institute created "Aquece Horizonte" (Warm the horizon), a young people's "republic", a place where if you come from a "shelter" they look after you until you're 21. The basic rules are: work, study and want to succeed in life. Just after I arrived, a youth worker told me about a competitive exam to study medicine in Cuba. I passed the exam, and I arrived in Cuba in 2007. This is my greatest victory!

I remember the time when I used to live in a house without water, electricity or food. I remember days when we couldn't get out of bed because we were so weak, and we drank sweetened water to stave off hunger. I remember my friends from the streets who stole, killed and took drugs...

Now I'd like to give others the same help I received.



● **Who is the most lost?**

For several years Claire E. has been accompanying Jacques, a homeless man, in his attempts to obtain a fixed address, without which he cannot obtain identity papers, rights, income support, and above all his own accommodation.

The association that is authorised to give this fixed address is on the premises of an association supporting migrants and undocumented foreign nationals. This is written on a sign at reception, with "and for the homeless" written in very small letters underneath.



When we arrive, there are about thirty people there, mainly young men from African countries, Rumanians, Roma, etc. Jacques is the only person of French origin... and also the only person who has clearly lived in the street for several years, wearing a series of coats on top of each other, a dirty pair of jeans, clodhoppers caked with earth from the track to his caravan that he has been living in for too long.

These young men call out to each other in foreign languages; they don't speak French and there are interpreters to translate and help them. I know about their difficult circumstances, their travels, the journey they have made, the problems they are experiencing today to integrate, to gain their rights, to have somewhere decent to live.

But it seems to me Jacques is more lost than they are, and has more difficulties. Yet he is the one who finds the right words to describe the situation and gives me the answer: "Just look at these poor youngsters who've left everything to come here, a country that's not even capable of welcoming them properly! They're all by themselves. They've left their family and don't have any news from them. At least I know my daughter is beautiful, that she's growing up nicely and is in good health! Their parents don't even know what's happened to their children."

CLAIRE E., ATD FOURTH WORLD, FRANCE

● **The will to succeed with even the poorest children makes us inventive**

Impressed by a community project which he had seen in a neighbourhood of Bangui (Central African Republic), Georges L decided to open a small school on the island of Mbongossoua, whose population until then had been completely neglected. Here is his story.

Every day, I crossed the river that flows along the outskirts of Bangui. I made courtesy calls on all of the families and children, in order to get a good idea of their living conditions. Slowly, I gained the families' trust, as well as that of the district chief.

As a result, I know who can pay [the school fees] and who cannot. And if I see that a family is unable to keep its commitment, I consider it a welfare case.

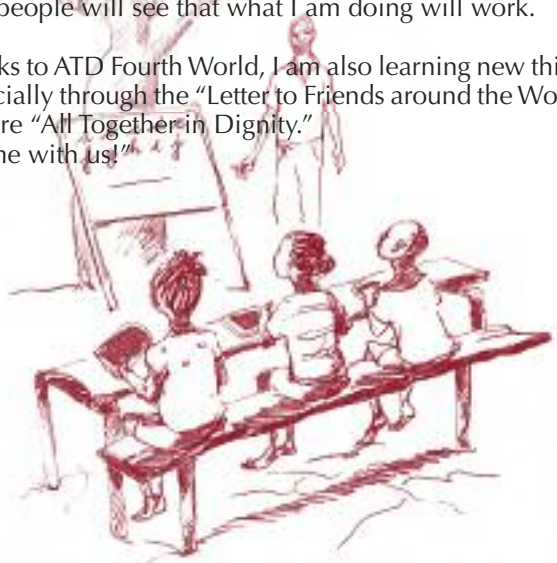
The will to succeed with even the poorest children makes us inventive.

From the beginning, there were problems, like how to make sure that the children completed a school year. Some families, because they were poor, had to leave for their fishing camps, and took their children with them.

But in spite of the school's difficult situation, and the teasing of some of the parents, I was never discouraged. To the contrary, I am very happy to see the children learn in spite of their parents' problems and the school's difficulties.

I have neither the strength nor the material to equip the school, but I do have the strength that God has given me. And people will see that what I am doing will work.

Thanks to ATD Fourth World, I am also learning new things, especially through the "Letter to Friends around the World." We are "All Together in Dignity." "Come with us!"



● **The beautiful thing about education is the power to offer new possibilities**

My name is Yuri. I am 32 years old. Since I was very young, I have been asking myself questions about poverty, and even more so when I started to notice, in my own society, the degradation of human beings for various reasons. So I decided to work in the field of education, but not just any education: education offered with Love, following the basic principle that "the beautiful thing about education is the power to offer new possibilities".

My first dream was to create an "ecological preschool", but that required too much money so I began more modestly. During my studies, I worked to earn the necessary money for my project, which no one believed in at first. After six years of work, I was ready. A friend helped me to officially create the "Aldea Yanapay not-for-profit civil association". A small alternative school was opened in 2004; starting the following year, over 60 children were welcomed each afternoon. Mid-2005, I began a volunteer program through our website.

At the end of 2005 my savings were depleted, so I began to make frames and cards to help fund the school. So that the project would have its own funding, we then opened a restaurant in 2006: the "Cafe Restaurant Aldea Yanapay". Its aim is to be an example of fair trade, respect for workers, and a place for cultural exchange. In August 2007, our school had become too small. Without thinking twice, we rented the neighboring house and opened a second school, with help from many people. We now have the "Yanapitas" school for children ages 5 to 8, and the "Yanapasos" school for children ages 9 and up.

Until 2008, the alternative school and the restaurant were run entirely by volunteers. Since then, we have hired one person to manage the volunteer program. Thanks to a friend, we've started a theater workshop with 23 children. This experience has led us to create a cultural center—a library with computers—as a support to young people who thirst for culture. We plan to set up an art workshop, a reading club, etc.



I think that my country must alleviate not only material hunger, but also that invisible hunger that can be fed for free, and which many people have forgotten; it is called Values, Principles, Love.

YURI V. , « ALDEA YANAPAY », PERU

Anicet B. is the President of COPAJE, an organisation working with young people in the Republic of Congo. During a meeting about poverty, he organised a poetry competition in public high schools in Brazzaville. Here are some short excerpts:

***Can you not hear
All these cries of anguish,
Fear and sadness,
Created by poverty...
Poverty which makes us
Lose count of the days...***

***What kind of person are you
You who have no pity
Taking happiness from all these people...***

***Oh poverty in the world...
Your end is nigh
We will fight you
To create a better world
Yes, youth is on the move. ...***

● It is good to be educated

Rachel L. works as a Voluntary Counselling and Testing and Adherence support worker at the local health centre. She explains how—with the support of her family, the hospital's staff and People's Action Forum—she was trained and encouraged to go back to school and get many skills.

I live in the Southern Province of Zambia. I started getting sick on October 5, 2003 and because of the stigma about HIV and AIDS in my community, I decided to go for Voluntary Counselling and Testing (VCT) at Mazabuka District Hospital, where I tested positive. It was not difficult for me to hear that I was positive, but after one month it was difficult for me to accept because people were talking about me.

Then I was waiting to see the hour that I would die, maybe it would be in six hours or twelve hours... just like that for some months. Some were saying that I was dying and that there was no hope for me. I was a skeleton by that time because I had lost a lot of weight. I was saying that it was better to die, because of what people were saying about me.

In 2004 one of my brothers took me to Lusaka for 3 months and that's when I started on antiretroviral drugs. I had been taking some drugs without knowing what type they were because I couldn't read. My family took care of me and my children.

In June 2006, I went to the hospital to get my drugs and, while there, they told me that they had been looking for me and they wanted me to work with Centre for Infectious Disease Research in Zambia, which made me very happy. I worked there for 3 months without pay and then I was trained as a peer educator. At this time I did not know how to write in English and at the workshops I only wrote in Bemba.

When I went back to Mazabuka, I told a lady from People's Action Forum (PAF) what had happened at the workshop, and she encouraged me to go back to school. I did not want to because I thought I was too old, but in the end I decided to go to Ndeke Community School with my friend. Now I can write and read and have seen that it is good to be educated because you can learn more about yourself and how to take care of your family. Now my community and family are friends.

I am 46 years old, have 5 children and 4 grandchildren and I also take care of one orphan. I am in Grade 8 and next year I will write my Grade 9 exam. I say thank you to PAF because they helped make me who I am today. They helped me get many skills and now I can even make peanut butter for my family and no longer have to beg.

RACHEL L., ZAMBIA

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

• We have created the Institute of Higher Education and of Agricultural and Land Development. Its purpose is to fight deforestation in order to save the environment and to train qualified workers in agriculture and cattle raising, so as to help farmers to increase production, bringing relief against famine. Heavy use of woodlands has deeply affected agricultural production and left famine in its place. Training in water and woodland management will help protect the environment. Our environment is going down hill for many reasons, some to do with the local community and others more related to external factors, regional and even international.

Jean Godefroid B. Gerids Foncec,
Democratic Republic of Congo

• The Motherless Babies Home has started taking in more babies. When we are that cash-strapped, we go for a drive in the market to get things for the babies, and it yields some positive result. We have been working with the Ministry of Gender and Social Development on the Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC), and at times with the help of Global Health. UNICEF has just visited our office with the hope of being involved. We really hope more could be done for the children.

Josephine A., University of Nigeria

• We feel close to the people and organizations that pursue objectives similar to ours. The articles in the Letter to Friends bring solidarity and brotherly relations among us and with those who suffer from poverty and exclusion. We will soon be having municipal and regional elections here. Although there are many candidates, there are few proposals that genuinely take into account the point of view of the poor. Along with our colleagues from the Center, we are insisting that candidates offer proposals so that those who are exploited, mistreated or who suffer from the violation of their rights may obtain rights and live better.

Ana H., CEPRODETH, Peru



You too can share your observations and experiences through the website: www.atd-fourthworld.org/-Permanent-Forum-on-Extreme-Poverty or by email to permanent.forum@atd-fourthworld.org

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