

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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The Convention on the Rights of the Child

Dear Friends,

Detailed information on the Convention on the Rights of the Child is presented in blue print, illustrated by the accompanying examples sent by Permanent Forum correspondents. On page 4, we invite you to join in the discussion through questions that are intended to be both broad and specific, in the hope that you will answer the ones relevant to you, based on your own experiences and knowledge. We also hope that you can use these questions to spark discussions around you, because the present and future of all children, as well as their parents, is worth doing our part for. Indeed, each individual effort made is like a stone that helps build the world that we aspire to, free from social injustice.

HUGUETTE REDEGELD, VICE PRESIDENT

Milestones of the Convention



In 1959, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, which recognized that children have rights, such as the right to protection against discrimination and the right to a name and nationality. It also enshrined the rights of children to education, to health care, and to special protection.

The UN declared 1979 to be the International Year of the Child (IYC) and created a working group to draw up a draft convention. Ten years later, on 20 November 1989, the UN General Assembly adopted the International Convention on the Rights of the Child. (www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm)

The Millennium Development Goals adopted by the UN in 2000 - with a target date of 2015 - include goals that are specific to children, in particular the reduction by two-thirds of the 1990 under-five mortality rate and the achievement of universal primary education.

In May 2002 the UN General Assembly held a Special Session devoted to children. Hundreds of children participated as members of the government delegations, and thus were present as decision-makers at the highest level pledged to build "A world fit for children."

Other Internet sites:
www.unicef.org
www.childrightsnet.org
www.tapori.org
www.crin.org

"We all have equal rights"

In life we cannot escape differences and we are naturally born differently, in terms of colour, shape and mindset, but what I believe is that the intention of us being created differently did not mean a difference in access to rights. Basically we all have equal rights: rights to live, eat, receive an education, enjoy life and rights to all necessities of life. Despite our differences we live on earth together with our fellow men, some who are extremely poor: who do not go to school, who do not know what to eat and drink, who have no home and who have lost hope, not knowing the destiny of their life. Personally, whenever I think of those who are in trouble and who are deprived of their rights, my heart is in pain and loses peace because I know I am responsible for their problems even if I am not the cause of their problems, and I always think of how I could support them.

Having asked myself that question, I thought about forming a student organisation through which orphans and vulnerable students would get support. I founded Tanzania Students AID for Orphans (TASAO) whose main activity is mobilising students to support orphans and vulnerable students, helping them pay their annual fees and other academic materials, because we know that education can rescue them from the circumstances they are facing.

Through TASAO we educate students, teaching them a humanitarian spirit, so that they recognise that you don't necessarily need a big amount of money in order to help others, but that helping others is a responsibility bestowed on us by nature. We thank God we have succeeded in convincing a majority of students to accept supporting their fellow students; and we are still continuing.

LUSEKELO NELSON M., TANZANIA
(FROM THE ATD TANZANIA NEWSLETTER)



According to the Convention, "a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier." The Convention is the first and still the only treaty which commits governments to ensuring that children enjoy all fundamental rights. It takes into account the interdependence and indivisibility of human rights, and includes civil and political rights, as well as economic, social and cultural rights. It is universal: it covers all children, in all situations, in all communities, wherever they are.

It is a text adopted by consensus, which takes into account the importance of traditions and cultural values.

The Convention entered into effect on 2 September 1990, when it had been ratified by 10 countries (States Parties); it has now been ratified by 193 countries.



Storytelling to share knowledge and rekindle local language skills

The project "Enriching Young Minds Via Storytelling" was part of *sirubar arangam* (children's corner). We believe the storytelling by grand parents is waning away due to many reasons. Storytelling is one of the strongest elements in a child's mind development, which was proven scientifically. We wanted to try this out and make the children motivated towards annual exams.

The whole event was in Tamil, the local language. Rekindling their local language skills needed care and improvement. We brought elderly women who were on the verge of neglect by their grown up married children. Each child was made to sit with an elderly woman as their surrogate grand mom, and each such grand mom was asked to share her stories to a grandchild for 20 minutes. Later each child was made to narrate what they had heard. The narrated story should have content, points of interest, and lessons to learn. Every child narrated their stories so wonderfully, the grandmothers were so silent in listening, and some of their stories brought tears.

The next session was every grand mom was supposed to describe the geography of the area, the economy, etc. Many stunning facts came out. One was the curse of rapid urbanization and ongoing neglect of rural living. It made us understand that descriptions in *Slumdog Millionaire* were the tip of the iceberg. Most of the children and grand moms were part of slum living. We had evaluators, Mr. Cheran and Mr. Sriram. Four children were evaluated as improved presenters and given gifts for their enthusiasm. We continued the session with children having activities like mind games to enhance their memory skills. It helped them to a greater extent as they would be facing their annual exams shortly.

M.R. HUBERT, SHABNAM RESOURCES, INDIA

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

The STEP (Striving Together to End Poverty) demonstrates, from one October 17th to the next, that an increasing number of men and women want to be able to count on each other in their search for justice and solidarity. Let's hope that more and more people will STEP up to the challenge and join us! Sign and invite others to sign at: www.oct17.org/en

• Despite concerted efforts towards the eradication of extreme poverty by both the government and non-governmental organizations, we have decided to create a local NGO to contribute to the struggle against poverty by coming to the aid of the population that is victim to it. (Niger)

• It is the responsibility of all dignified men and women to commit to ending extreme poverty so that it no longer exists on our planet. (Brazil)

• I want everyone to know that I care about everything that happens to people all over the world. All I have to say is: Never give up. (New Zealand)

• Sun, when you shine, it's for each and every one of us. (Portugal)

• I believe that nothing differentiates one human being from another. Each one of us must be able to rise up and be part of Humanity. For that, we need to pool our strength and knowledge. (France)

In what way is the Convention relevant to children and families living in poverty?

The States Parties to the Convention have committed themselves to respecting the rights of every child, without any form of discrimination. The Convention aims to ensure that all children enjoy all human rights, by emphasizing the special assistance that the child, as well as his or her family, need in order for these rights to be respected, protected, and fulfilled. Examples of relevant rights are the right to a name and identity, the right to live in a family environment, the right to participate, the right to education and to enjoy the highest attainable standard of health, as well as the right to be protected against all forms of violence.

The word "poor" does not appear in the Convention. Its Preamble, however, stresses the need to grant special attention to children "in exceptionally difficult circumstances."

And in its "General Comments" on the implementation of different rights, the Committee on the Rights of the Child has underlined in a number of places the State's obligation to grant special attention to disadvantaged children. In addition, in its guidelines for periodic reports, the Committee recommends that States Parties provide information on the situation of children living in poverty.

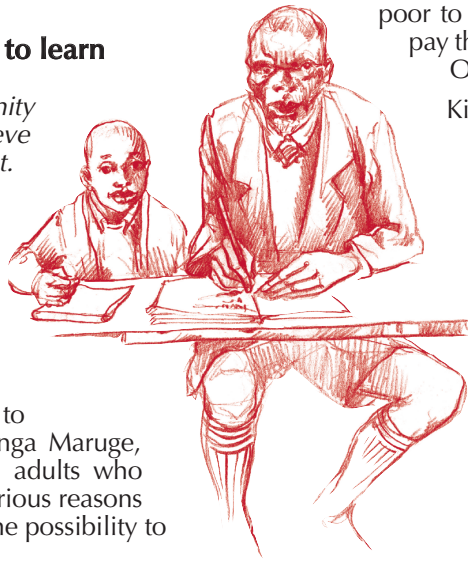
Whether for adults or children, it's never too late or impossible to learn

In 2000, the international community asserted its commitment to achieve Education for All by 2015 at the latest. The objectives included provision of free obligatory primary school education for all children, promotion of learning for young people and adults, and improvement of the level of literacy among adults and the quality of education. ()*

It is never too late. This is the lesson to learn from the story of Kimani Nganga Maruge, and the story of young people and adults who never gave up learning, even if for various reasons they were deprived of the right and the possibility to attend school.

Kimani Nganga Maruge is profoundly happy at the age of 85 to have achieved his dream of going to school, thanks to education becoming free of charge in Kenya. He was so pleased that he even wore the uniform: shorts, sky blue shirt and white socks. But let's not forget that this dream come true in 2004 was for many long years of his life a source of frustration and an emptiness.

Kimani's case was so emblematic that the UN chose him to go to New York. There he reminded the United Nations representatives that more than 115 million children are too



poor to go to school. They don't have the money to pay the enrolment fees or the time to attend school. Often they have to work to help their families.

Kimani is not the only adult to have dug deep within himself to find the strength to realise his dream of learning to read and write. In Bolivia in November 2008, 6 prisoners at the Cobija Penitentiary obtained their baccalaureate, thanks to the CEMA adult education scheme. Three of them expressed the desire to go to University. Other prisoners were subsequently motivated by the example of these 6 individuals, and 13 of them enrolled for the 2009 session.

In this prison, 15 children live with their parents. They don't have the resources to pay for transport to the school six miles away. To resolve this situation, the national authorities were

asked to recruit a teacher to provide schooling for these 15 children in the prison.

These examples show how urgent it is to do everything we can to ensure that children not attending school today at least have the opportunity to learn to read and write, and that adults, once they are literate, have access to high quality vocational training.

CHARO C., PERMANENT FORUM, BASED ON CONTRIBUTIONS FROM MONIQUE R. (MEXICO) AND JORGE M. (BOLIVIA)

(*) <http://portal.unesco.org/education>

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

• I believe that all those who shared their stories that day (October 17, 2008) deserve to have their struggles against poverty acknowledged. We must do what we can to end those struggles. *(Ireland)*

• I am convinced that only together can we change the situation, by listening to those who live in poverty and social exclusion and by supporting them in their struggle to get out of it. *(France)*

• It hurts me that in this world that is so developed for certain things, human beings are still dying of hunger today. *(Chile)*

• I take inspiration from Articles 25-26 of the Declaration of December 12, 1948. Extreme Poverty is like an octopus. To succeed at defeating it, we need to be numerous enough to destroy its arms and suction cups. The best method for ending extreme poverty is to prevent it from passing from one generation to the next. "I live in extreme poverty", a poor person said. "I want to be helped so that my descendants won't have to." Stop extreme poverty. *(Mauritania)*

• I am sick of being cold all the time in my tiny run down flat. I don't get enough benefit to even heat one room properly. I don't like relying on the kindness of good people to eat right. *(United Kingdom)*

In ratifying the Convention, States Parties commit themselves to submitting a report every five years on its implementation.

These reports are entrusted to a group of 18 international human rights experts, who constitute the Committee on the Rights of the Child. (www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc)

They meet in Geneva, at the Office of the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights, which functions as the Committee's secretariat. The Committee's mandate is to examine and comment on the reports submitted by the State Parties - a monitoring process which includes a session in which the government must respond to their questions. The Committee submits a report to the UN General Assembly on its work, and publishes its interpretation of the articles of the Convention in the form of "General Comments." It also organizes "General Discussion Days" on specific themes.

The States are obligated to make public the Concluding Observations that the Committee issues on their reports.

What's the next step? We're eager to hear your reactions, observations and input.

Committee on the Rights of the Child: Citizens have a role to play.

In a spirit of dialogue and encouragement that takes into account the particular situation of each country, the Committee on the Rights of the Child (see text at left) examines the reports written by each State that has ratified the Convention. *Do you know if your country has written such a report? Do you know if NGO's in your country have contributed to it? Drawing from your own knowledge and experience, what points do you think should be priorities in your country's report? Why?*

Children's Rights: Built From the Bottom Up!

What better way to raise awareness on the subject of Children's Rights than by giving visibility to children and young people from all socio-economic backgrounds who take initiatives to ensure that the rights of their peers are respected. (See the example of young people in Tanzania, page 1.) *What about you? Do you have examples and observations, however modest they may seem, of the ways that children and youth are taking action to enable all children to exercise their fundamental rights? Please tell us about them!*

Respond to the Permanent Forum by post or at: permanent.forum@atd-fourthworld.org

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

■ How do I use the Letter to Friends? I glance through it and see right away what will help me move forward in my own personal and spiritual thinking regarding my concern for the poorest people. I read it with particular interest during the two and a half years when I was reduced to carrying out my mission on foot, sometimes in scorching heat. After having initially used the newsletter myself, I make it available to my visitors before archiving it, which I do because certain issues have experiences or meaningful phrases that I cite in my homilies. *Abbot Bernard Y., Burkina Faso*

■ We thank you for having sent us this interesting document, and we send you our greetings from Honduras. Hopefully we will stay in contact with you and you will keep us up to date on what's happening in other countries! Here, the street libraries are going to start next Sunday, successfully we hope. *Ivan C. O., Honduras*

■ I acknowledge receipt of Letter to Friends #70 in which I discovered little gems. These newsletters enable us to hear testimonies from around the world that bring us closer together in the struggle that we are jointly leading against extreme poverty in the world. *Aimé A., Democratic Republic of the Congo*

■ I haven't heard from you for two years now, and I don't know if you continue to publish your newsletter with testimonies coming from all the "world's villages". I currently live in a marginalized neighborhood of Quito, known as "poor people's struggle". In it, there is a catholic community from the indigenous church of Riobamba. So far, there have been baptisms, communions, confirmations and marriages, with ceremonies specific to their culture. That's my new role. I don't want to lose contact with you. *Segundo A.J., Ecuador*

■ We do have assorted legal provisions and policies to address child rights. However, what is lacking is a human rights approach in policy and planning. Human rights remains a residual benefit that may occur in certain cases. Former UN Secretary General Kofi A. Annan had said that "a set of programmes and activities that only incidentally contributes to the realization of human rights does not necessarily constitute a human rights-based approach to programming, where the aim of all activities [is] to contribute directly to the realization of one or several human rights". Thus, for realizing the rights of children, it is essential that the basic approach and focus of all policies should be on restoring rights to all children. Not by showing the increase or decrease of certain indicators here and there. *Nanban, India*

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