

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

Living means helping others to live

"The hopes of these children...a right, not a dream." This is the last sentence of an article published in a journal that enables children from different backgrounds to express themselves. "A right, not a dream", this isn't decreed by law, it is built up through links at the grass-roots level, friendships, links of understanding, trust and compassion, links through action too. The articles in this Letter express this in different ways and in different contexts.

"When it rains at night, my heart sinks and I have trouble sleeping as I think of families in very poor neighbourhoods."

"They've learned to defend their rights...and they've committed themselves to defending the rights of other women."

"People are beginning to stand up. Our struggle will not be in vain."

"Brigitte (a 4 year old girl suffering from cerebral paralysis) is, for me, a strong example of perseverance in her struggle for life."

"Despite all the difficulties, the community has succeeded in creating and maintaining an ambiance of friendliness, and is organized towards building its own future."

The reactions we received to the International Convention on the Rights of the Child (page 4) are in the same vein. Although they describe serious, painful, unacceptable situations, they reveal the courage of the men and women experiencing them, who refuse to accept them and lead others to do the same. "Nothing is possible in this world without solidarity; living means helping others to live." Through this plea, young people lead others to act in favour of children in difficulty.

Living means helping others to live, having ambitions for everyone.

HUGUETTE REDEGELD

• "People are beginning to stand up."

"Today, August 30th, I went to visit the Dandara Camp. I came back home full of hope. I saw Joviano who was welcoming a long line of families who had just arrived at the Camp, desperate with the urgent need to find shelter. I walked throughout the camp, congratulating the people who are building houses, and encouraging everyone to do the same. There are already about 30 houses under construction. People are not afraid anymore. They are bringing bricks in on bikes, in cars, on motorcycles, in wheel barrows, in prams and strollers, in basins, etc. I had lunch in a small house that's been completed, with running water and electricity. The home belongs to Mrs. Maria, a very intelligent elderly woman, Mr. Joaquim, Eduardo, and Luisa, who is 15 years old and four-months pregnant. The lunch was delicious. I could really feel that



people are beginning to stand up. Our struggle will not be in vain. All struggles are worthwhile when you have a big heart. But I do think that we should also start to build a community center."

FREI GILVANDER M., BRAZIL

● **"They have found new meaning in life."**

The town of Ilo, located in southern Peru, counts more than 70,000 inhabitants, the majority of which are immigrants from the high plateau region. The economic situation in Peru, and in Ilo in particular, is very difficult. There are few possibilities for finding work, and it's even more difficult for women, youth, and unskilled workers.

In Ilo, about 4,000 of us are domestic workers, the majority being immigrants without a trade. Domestic work only brings in enough money for mere survival because the wages are low. They pay us an average of 50 to 70 euros for more than 320 hours of work per month. Our situation is worsened by several facts: we don't have a designated day off each week, we don't receive social benefits, and within the homes we work in, we're mistreated, exploited, marginalized and sexually abused by our employers and their children. Since 2004, a new law gives us some advantages but no one respects this law and our rights are violated.

● *"CEPRODETH is a place of encounters, friendship and sharing with other companions, a place to learn about our rights and to learn how to be citizens in society."*
Elizabeth, age 27



- *"Every Sunday, all of us get together. We've learned how to knit, sew, embroider, do manual things, make chocolates, plus so many other things. We feel useful."*
Maria, age 21
- *"When we hear about a friend who is exploited and mistreated, we spread the word to let her know that she can come to CEPRODETH to learn what her rights are. We let her know that we are going to support her because her employers abuse her."* Jesusa, age 24
- *"I used to live like a slave. They made me do everything in the house. I didn't have any days off. I never left the house. I lived shut in like that for over six years because the lady had brought me there from the sierra when I was 12 years old. They told me that I had to learn to not be lazy. They abused me and didn't pay me anything."*
Alicia, age 21

Elizabeth, Maria, Jesusa, and Alicia are CEPRODETH companions. They have found new meaning in life. They've learned what friendship and trust are. They've learned to receive kindness from each other. They've learned to defend their rights. They feel responsible for becoming better people and citizens, and they've committed themselves to defending the rights of other women who are domestic workers like them.

**ANA H, CEPRODETH,
PERU**

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

● It's important to me to receive your letters because I learn what other people are doing in their area to improve life for disadvantaged people. I think my humanitarian spirit is developing more each day. Here in Abidjan, it's the middle of the rainy season. When it rains at night, my heart sinks and I have trouble sleeping as I think of families in very poor neighborhoods like Mossikro and Abobo. I think of parents who didn't have the strength to leave their homes because they don't know where else to go. I think of families who are filled with sadness and powerlessness as they see their homes being flooded by rain water. I think of children and adults who are buried alive by landslides or carried away by floodwater. I would like to make an appeal to everyone - the Ivory Coast authorities, local and international humanitarian organizations, and individuals of good will: that these people in difficult situations who are temporarily being housed in schools be given access to a home where they can live safely and carry out their plans for the future.

O. Siaka, Ivory Coast

● The work carried out by "Casa Seis" relies on the participation of all the members of the community, who need to get involved in finding solutions to their problems. Since there are frequent personal contacts and a permanent presence, it's easier to earn people's trust and to create a collective and very real sense of responsibility on the part of the teenagers and children, but also of the adults. The work being done with 600 families requires means that are not always available. However, despite all the difficulties, there are visible results, because even though a large number of the inhabitants experience problematic situations, the community has succeeded in creating and maintaining an ambiance of friendliness and inter-cultural exchange, and is organized towards building its own future.

Rui A., Portugal

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

● "Listening to dreams"

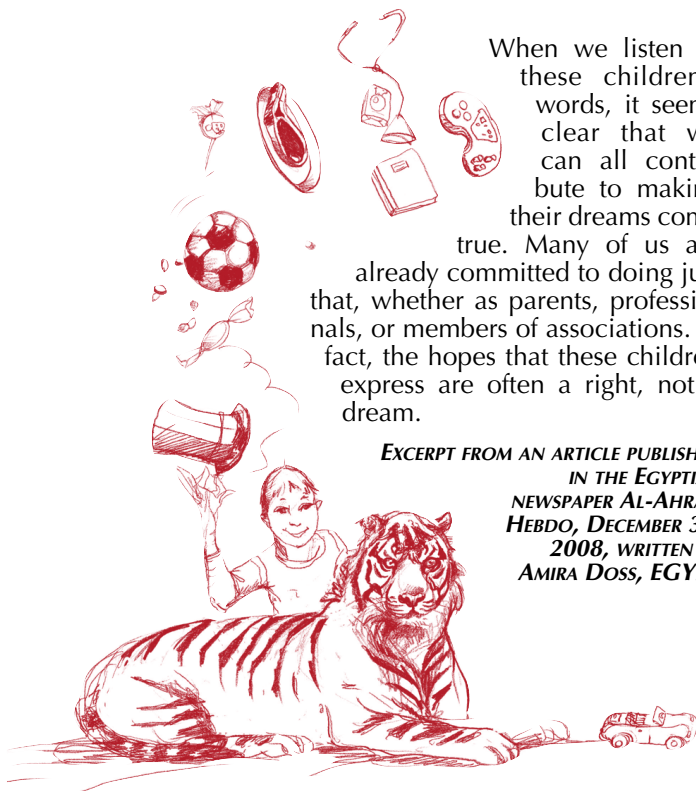
After seeing two small silhouettes under a blanket at the foot of her apartment building, one reader was moved to send us the following article:

They are Egyptians between 6 and 12 years old. They come from very different backgrounds, whether it be a home in a residential or working-class neighborhood, or the streets where they sleep and work. They all have dreams. Let's listen to them.

- "I was told that my grandfather was a tiger tamer. When I grow up, I hope to be one too. The circus fascinates me. I also dream that my brothers and I will have a roof over our heads where we can sleep in peace, without being scared of the future."
- "My dream is to become a diplomat so that I can travel around the world, discover other cultures, and learn foreign languages."
- "My dream is to become a doctor."
- "My dream is to get locked in a toy store all night long. I'd play with all the toys and eat all the candy I could find."
- "My dream is to become a football player and score goals just like Abou-Treika."
- "When I grow up, my dream is to become a butcher so that I can eat meat every day."
- "I dream of having teachers who smile in class, who talk to me without screaming. I dream of fully enjoying going to school, of coming home without being overwhelmed by a pile of homework. I dream of a life without "have to's", a life where I can free myself from all these burdens. I dream of people listening to me attentively before speaking to me, of people touching me gently when they touch me. That's how I could really grow up."

When we listen to these children's words, it seems clear that we can all contribute to making their dreams come true. Many of us are already committed to doing just that, whether as parents, professionals, or members of associations. In fact, the hopes that these children express are often a right, not a dream.

**EXCERPT FROM AN ARTICLE PUBLISHED
IN THE EGYPTIAN
NEWSPAPER AL-AHRAM
HEBDO, DECEMBER 31,
2008, WRITTEN BY
AMIRA DOSS, EGYPT**



● "This sharing makes us more understanding"

"NUESTRO HOGAR" ("Our Home") was created and facilitated by the AMI Foundation. It is a home dedicated to welcoming children from birth to age 5 who've been wounded by life. Some of these children are taken in by other structures, then entrusted to Nuestro Hogar because of a disability, developmental delay or other problem, or are referred directly by the authorities (hospitals, police, judges, etc). The reasons for their arrival at the home are different for each child. They come to the home with painful past experiences: abandoned by their natural parents or family, physically and emotionally mistreated, abused, battered, or severely ill. The AMI Foundation is responsible not only for the children who arrive at the home, but also for the follow-up of those who return to their families. **Reintegrating these children into their families is a constant preoccupation of the Foundation.**

My name is Liliana and I'm a pediatric nurse at the AMI Foundation. I provide treatment to the children and accompany them in all their activities. I find this work fulfilling because it gives me the opportunity, day after day, to get to know the children better, to listen to them and to understand them. This sharing makes us more understanding. It enables us to join them and help them get their joy, happiness and innocence back.

In this home, each child receives attention, protection, respect, gratitude and other values from all of the adults around them.

Brigitte is a little girl suffering from cerebral paralysis. She works each day to try to move a little bit more, and manages to make impressive movements. For me, it's very painful and sad to see Brigitte's despair at not being able to go outside and run like the other children. Nevertheless, for me she is a strong example of perseverance in her struggle for life.

The presence of this little four year old girl is a great opportunity for the home because she enables it to stay faithful to its mission. In fact, one of its fundamental values is the respect of each person's rhythm. The progress that Brigitte has made since her arrival is impressive. She has shown an astounding capacity for communication and has shown much happiness, made easier thanks to her integration among the other children, who show her much affection.

It is quite an enriching experience to meet such special human beings because, while being so young still, they already know what it means to suffer and to be denied a home. And despite that, they keep an impressive amount of strength. The most important thing for me is to know that, here, their first judgments and values will be built in a positive way. The knowledge that I gain each week and each month enables me to understand in-depth the particular attention that each child needs, while it also trains me to become a guide for these children.

Each child is a unique being, filled with values, happiness and, above all, a big heart with much love in it.

LILIANA A., AMI FOUNDATION, EQUADOR

Children's Rights are Human Rights, Universal and Inalienable

Here are a few responses to the questions on children's rights put forth in the last edition:

⇒ Thousands of immigrants continue to arrive by sea on the southern coast of Italy, and hundreds of others die trying to reach my country. Among these people there are many children accompanied by parents and many others come by themselves. Amnesty International has defined these children as "the invisible". Many of them elude control of their identification and then fall into a trap of criminal activity and prostitution. In the world there are millions of children and young people who, because of wars and poverty, are forced to leave their homes to seek asylum in another country. The way is still long to us all realizing that children's rights are human rights and therefore universal and inalienable.

Sergio P., Italy

⇒ Our country has been implementing the mechanisms necessary for gathering, analyzing, and publishing - in a regular and timely fashion - the data that enables them to monitor the social indicators concerning the well-being of children. Such indicators include the neonatal and infant mortality rate, maternal mortality rate, birth rate per woman, nutritional levels, vaccination levels, death rates from diseases considered significant for public health, and rates of school enrollment, educational success, and literacy.

Each year, the Congo is invited to review its budget in light of its particular situation and, in the case of donor countries, to review their development aid budget, so that the programs intended to implement objectives concerning the survival, protection, and development of the child will be considered priorities during the allocation of resources. Children need special protection and attention due to their vulnerability.

*A. B. A,
Democratic Republic of the Congo*

⇒ One must never be born in places that are isolated from everything. No matter how often we evoke the right to a free education, health care, and special protection, all of these priorities have been and remain illusions. It has been statistically proven that the school drop-out rate and child mortality rate are still rising because children cannot overcome hunger. The path to education is inaccessible for those who live in extreme poverty. Children spend their entire lives morally wounded by the fact that they were born into poverty.

Stephen Serge T., Madagascar

⇒ The peace of the world comes from the child of today (...). In some parts of Ghana, child trafficking is on the increase as well as child labour. Some children are even involved in prostitution all because parents cannot afford their needs due to income poverty. I remember before we undertook a fund-raising with respect to the victims of the Ghana 2007 floods, I addressed some "kayayie". The name kayayie stands for some girls, mostly children, who migrate from Northern Ghana to Kumasi in the Ashanti Region in search of greener pastures, but basically carry goods on their head for money. They have no permanent home but sleep in uncompleted buildings. My topic to them was on child prostitution, sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS. In 2006, I had been among some press men from Fox FM radio who had rushed to a place where most of the kayayie sleep to have a recording of one of these children involved in sexual intercourse with a grownup for money. I was very sad. In this act, if she had contacted HIV/AIDS, what would have happened? I will continue to serve youth and the entire community wherever I find myself.

*A. Justus Triumph, University
for Development Studies, Ghana*

⇒ My husband, who has been working for ten years with street children, first in Rwanda and then in Congo, was happy to read the May 2009 edition of the Letter on the subject of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child. We shared an article with the AFIA-FEV team: "Whether for adults or children, it's never too late or impossible to learn." We talked about how so many countries in Africa, and especially our own, should learn from the experiences in Kenya and Bolivia on making education free of charge, and also from Mr. Kimani Nganga Maruge's courage.

*Beatrice K-B for l'AFIA-FEV,
Democratic Republic of the Congo*

⇒ We the young people of the association "Let's Save the Orphans for an Integral and Better Development" (ASODIM), would like to share an atypical activity in support of destitute children. This operation called "A Thought for Them" consisted of going into local administrative services and towards the local population with a form for collecting donations, thoughts and funds for aiding children living in extremely difficult conditions. This operation advocates the promotion of the Rights of the Child based on the philosophy of development through education and solidarity, meaning that without solidarity, nothing is possible in this world.

During the operation, when a person turned a deaf ear to our appeal, those who were collecting thoughts and donations would wisely respond: "Living means helping others to live." In other words, each person has their share of responsibility in improving the living conditions of struggling children. By the end, the association had collected school supplies, clothing, food supplies, funds and thoughts intended for orphans and other vulnerable children.

*Rodrigue G,
ASODIM Association, Burkina Faso*

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