



ATD FOURTH WORLD

INTERNATIONAL
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FOURTH WORLD

Friday, 20th March 2009

Founded by
Father Joseph Wresinski
(1917-1988)

NGO in consultative
status with Ecosoc
Unesco, Unicef, ILO and
the Council of Europe

MOUVEMENT
INTERNATIONAL
ATD
QUART MONDE

Fondé par
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auprès de
l'Ecosoc, de l'Unesco
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MOVIMIENTO
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CUARTO MUNDO

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To the participants in the G20:

In the current global economic and financial crisis, we are particularly concerned that the reforms and stimulus plans seem aimed mainly at protecting the middle classes.

This is why we are sending you the enclosed statement highlighting several principle recommendations for ensuring that the fight against extreme poverty finds itself at the heart of stimulus and economic reforms.

In the spirit of equity, we ask that these reforms be ambitious and daring enough to reach people in extreme poverty, in order to end the waste of human lives entailed by abandoning the most vulnerable. In countries in every part of the world, they are crushed into slums, neglected in disadvantaged areas or forgotten in isolated rural areas. They have no prospects and policy-makers do not hear their voices.

By way of their resilience to the injustice of extreme poverty, these families and individuals have acquired the unique experience and knowledge essential to ensure that the equal dignity of all human beings be respected.

This crisis is a historic turning point for all the G20 members, with those living in the most chronic poverty. Can we count on you to ensure that they will be included as stakeholders in the reforms that you are preparing to draft? *“Whenever a nation or the international community is designing its future, it is important that the most disadvantaged people take part. If they do not take part today in the design, neither will they be part of tomorrow's changes.”*¹

If the international community and national governments manage to create multi-dimensional and far-reaching policies by using the quality of life of the poorest and most excluded people as a key indicator, then they will also be protecting populations which are most at risk of succumbing to extreme poverty in times of crisis.

Sincerely,

Eugen Brand
Director General

¹ Joseph Wresinski, founder of the Movement ATD Fourth World (1917-88)



**Ending extreme poverty should be the main goal of policy reform
led by national governments and the international community**

For people living in extreme poverty, there is nothing new about conditions of crisis.

Now that the crisis has struck the heart of finance, the world is mobilising. But for decades, in the global North as in the South, millions of families have been barely surviving for one day to the next, or facing premature death: death from starvation, from violence, from being abandoned due to a total lack of the most basic means.

The financial crisis comes on top of the climate change crisis, the food crisis, the rise of nationalism and of violence. Relying on free markets growth alone, to ensure everyone's well-being and to eradicate extreme poverty has led to the deadlock in which our societies find themselves today.

It is imperative that we think about the world's future in a renewed ethical framework.

Amartya Sen¹ denounces the fact that development is founded on an over materialistic point of view. Better to conceive it as an increase in individual freedom and the opportunity for the individuals, to choose their way of life. Similarly, Paul Bouchet² stated: "Rules of ethics require that the international legal order be subject to the supreme right which is the respect of equal dignity for all human beings."

Structural changes are essential. "The impact of the crisis on developing countries and on poor people everywhere,"³ must be taken into account.

The aims of decent work, the fight against extreme poverty and respect for the environment should be integrated into the economy. It is high time to end the international legal imbalance by inscribing in the charters of the World Bank, the IMF or the WTO the obligation to respect and promote all human rights covenants and conventions. Questions of tax systems and access to basic services need to be tackled. For instance, the ILO, with its conventions and its standards, needs the means to counterbalance, the prestige, power and wealth that the IMF and the WTO have at their disposal.

The fight against extreme poverty and social exclusion must be at the heart of these reforms.

Will these reforms primarily target the middle classes or will they take into account all people in all countries? Only multi-dimensional policies that aim to reach the most vulnerable people will enable effectively the fight against the discrimination and stigmatisation that victimize those who currently benefit from nothing more than humanitarian assistance and aid policies.

These reforms need to tackle multiple facets of poverty⁴. To ensure that they are global in nature, it is no longer possible to accept as a definition of poverty "an income of less than \$1.25 per day". Situations of extreme poverty within the context of poverty should be taken into account, as defined by Joseph Wresinski:⁵

"A lack of basic security is the absence of one or more factors that enable individuals and families to assume basic responsibilities and to enjoy fundamental rights. Such a situation may become more extended and lead to more serious and permanent consequences. Chronic poverty results when the lack of basic security simultaneously affects several aspects of people's lives, when it is prolonged, and when it severely compromises people's chances of regaining their rights and of reassuming their responsibilities by themselves in the foreseeable future."

In all these policies, people living in extreme poverty have an essential contribution to make, given their experience resisting despite extreme poverty.

It is essential to promote new forms of governance and participation, at local, national and international levels, for such populations often have no legal existence and are poorly represented.

If the international community and national governments are capable of creating multi-dimensional, coherent policies to fight extreme poverty, they will equally protect populations that are most at risk of succumbing to extreme poverty when crises arise.

References:

"*Eradicating Extreme Poverty: Democracy, Globalisation and Human Rights.*" edited by Xavier Godinot, to be published in 2009

This book has already been published in French:

"*Eradiquer la misère : Démocratie, mondialisation et droits de l'Homme*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, November 2008. 435 pages

Notes :

- 1 cf. Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, Oxford University Press, 1999.
- 2 Paul Bouchet, Honorary President of ATD Fourth World-France, at the First World Forum on Human Rights, Nantes (France), 19 May 2004.
- 3 Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, President of the General Assembly of the United Nations, 23 January 2009.
- 4 For the countries of the North as for those of the South, such policies need to rely on the Draft Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights which the Council for Human Rights is currently examining (cf. the A/HRC/7/L.32 resolution adopted on 25 March 2008).
- 5 The definition put forward by Joseph Wresinski, in his report "Grande pauvreté et précarité économique et sociale", adopted by the French Economic and Social Council (CES) (Official Journal, Avis et rapports du CES, February 1987, p. 25)
Also published in English : "*Chronic Poverty and Lack of Basic Security*", Fourth World Publications, 7600 Willow Hill Drive, Landover, Maryland 20785, USA
The definition was used by Leandro Despouy, special rapporteur to the United Nations Subcommittee for Human Rights in his report on Human Rights and Extreme Poverty (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1996/13 Annexe III) 28 June 1996