

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

Together Now and in the Long Run

ATD Fourth World has been present in Haiti since 1981, committed alongside families in hillside hamlets and urban districts, joining forces with communities and local partners, working together for all people to have access to knowledge, health services and training, and creating places for people of all backgrounds to come together in the struggle against poverty.

Just after the tragedy that shattered Haiti and the world, Eugen Brand, Director General of ATD Fourth World, entitled his press release, "Haiti: Together Now and in the Long Run." By doing so, he expressed a hope and expectation held by Haitian people and all of us. He wrote: *"Once again, Haiti has been battered in its progress towards a better future for all. We know the Haitian people, and we know that they should be a guiding reference for the world. Their courage, wisdom and solidarity are stronger than the misery and catastrophes gripping their country."*⁽¹⁾

A guiding reference for the world: According to Dany Laferrière, that's the very role of Haiti's poorest people. In an interview granted on January 15, 2010, to an AFP journalist (Agence France Presse), he stated: *"What saved this city is the energy of the poorest people. Trying to help, to*

look for something to eat, all these people created a great energy throughout the city. They gave the sense that the city was alive. Without them, Port-au-Prince would have remained a dead city. (...) It's time to go directly to the people and to finally do something audacious for this country." Dany Laferrière, Haitian writer and winner of a major French literary award, le Prix Médicis, in 2009, was one of the guests at a literary festival to take place from January 14 to 21 in Port-au-Prince.

In Haiti as elsewhere, families living in situations of the most extreme poverty show solidarity with others, day-in and day-out, despite the countless tragedies they have been through. Will they be at the heart of their country's reconstruction and future?

The testimonies included in this edition of the Letter to Friends confirm a central point: In Haiti and around the world, the poorest people are inviting us to take part in a historic occasion to shape the future of our common humanity. Let's seize this opportunity.

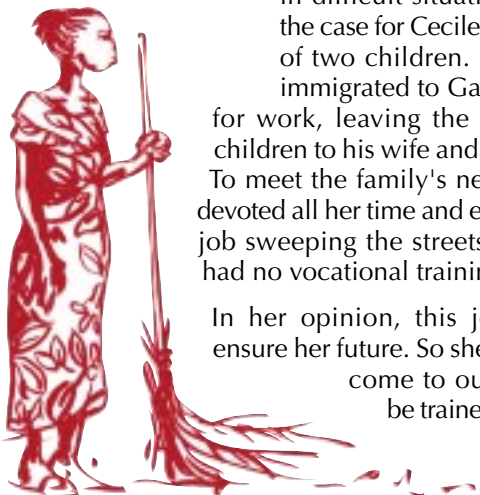
HUGUETTE REDEGELD

(1) News from Haiti and ways to help can be found at: www.atd-fourthworld.org

• Together, ensuring the future

One objective of our association is the reintegration into the employment market of youth, women and men living in difficult situations. This is the case for Cecile, 26, mother of two children. Her spouse immigrated to Gabon to look for work, leaving the care of the children to his wife and his parents. To meet the family's needs, Cecile devoted all her time and energy to her job sweeping the streets, since she had no vocational training.

In her opinion, this job did not ensure her future. So she decided to come to our Center to be trained in sewing.



From the start, she explained her situation to the people in charge and they granted her an extra day off each week, on top of the weekend. That way, she could keep her job sweeping the streets to avoid any extra hardship on the children.

After four months of training, the responsibility of caring for the children seemed to overwhelm Cecile's in-laws. They decided that she should abandon her training and devote all her time to her work sweeping the streets.

Those of us in charge of AMAF-BENIN approached the family as soon as we learned of their decision concerning Cecile's fate. We tried by all means to convince them to allow the young woman to resume her training. We also submitted the sponsorship of her children to several NGO's and the examination of our request is underway.

Faïti A., AMAF
(FRIENDS OF FRANCOPHONE AFRICA), BENIN

● "My thoughts and my heart are over there"

This week we are leaving for the province of Chaco. There is so much to do! I would stay there if I could. I have a great desire to help. I have a lot to do where I live and work, but since I discovered this other reality, my thoughts and heart are over there. I couldn't believe this was happening in my own country, since Chajari where I live is a large citrus fruit cultivation area where there is plenty of work.

At the moment in our parish we are conducting a major campaign on water and food for the Chaco province, and in particular the "Impenetrable" area. This is a mountainous region where native communities live without any protection. The place is called Misión Pompeya. Two Marist friars live there and are doing remarkable work in favour of education and human development, but they need help. They travel the region supplying the inhabitants with food and water.

The villagers live in small huts or cabins made from earth and straw, which are



very fragile. They have no work, and suffer a great deal from the lack of water, since the rivers are severely contaminated by arsenic, meaning that the water is not fit for human consumption. There is a major drought at the moment and the pools where rainwater collects are all dry. It is very sad to see the extent of malnutrition of the children and adults, and even worse to learn that it can be fatal. I discovered all of this when I brought food, water and clothing (in November 2008) with the priest in charge of the region.

What really breaks my heart is that there is no water here, as is the case in many other parts of the world. Yet in the region where I live, millions of litres of spa water are used every day. This situation is giving me lots of ideas about how we could try to transfer water to the places where it is most needed.

MARIA ANGELICA C.,
ARGENTINA

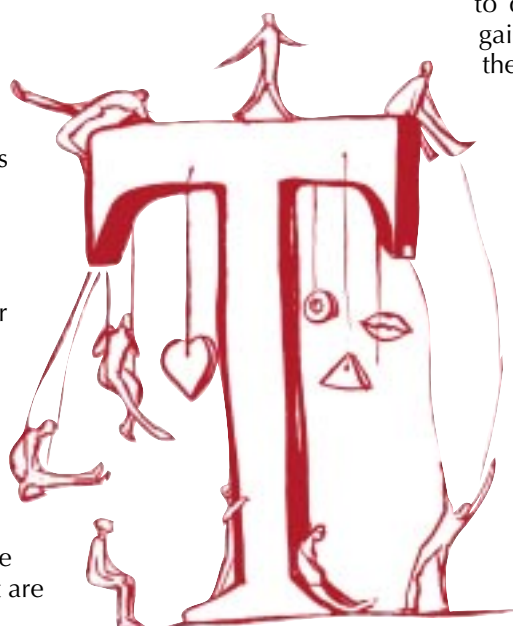
● Art, an Ideal Tool for Communicating

Espaço T ("a place for everyone") struggles against the exclusion of physically and/or mentally disabled people, and the exclusion of anybody made vulnerable by their material or emotional situation. There are roughly 300 "pupils" and among them are drug addicts, people who are HIV positive, people with Downs syndrome or mental illnesses... and also so-called "normal" people. We try to build up their self-esteem and creativity by means of workshops, courses and exhibitions. We use art to improve people's health and integrate them into society. How?

Espaço T was set up in 1994 in a social context where the need for new tools to combat exclusion had become urgent. A group of healthcare practitioners and professional artists got together to fight against exclusion by using art - the language of emotions - as an ideal communication tool. One part of our work consists in supporting the users by means of artistic, cultural and educational activities, to stimulate their capacity to express themselves and strengthen their desire to take part. By developing creativity as a common language, our aim is for them to participate in society in a way that is active, fully aware and freely chosen. The artistic expression workshops are accompanied by daily psychological support. In parallel we try to change society so that it accepts differences, by organising cultural operations to make the general public aware of social problems and what are known as "groups at risk".

In December each year, Espaço T's seven drama and dance groups present the result of their work for that year to a very broad audience. These performances also incorporate the participation of other guest groups carrying out work similar to ours.

The "employment" section focuses on vocational integration of people who are unemployed. The "training" section enables adults with little or no education to develop, improve and gain official recognition of their skills. There is also a telephone SOS service.



Espaço T's activities also include bi-annual international conferences and a magazine (also published in Braille and in an audio version), as well as frequent art exhibitions.

CLÁUDIA O.,
ESPAÇO T, PORTUGAL

● Working to Bring Hope

The Association for the Promotion of the Family (APROFA) gave itself the mission of carrying out development activities for the well-being of families and vulnerable populations - including women, youth, and children - as a way to contribute to the defense and protection of their rights.

The fundamental problem identified is the inharmonious development of children due to the denial of their rights and needs in the areas of health, education, protection and participation. The low income earned by their parents, the violation of their rights as children, and the absence of a comprehensive policy for the protection of children are some of the causes of this problem.

Since 1996 (beginning of the armed conflict that has shaken the eastern region), other factors have made the situation worse: acts of rape, sexual abuse and torture of populations already traumatized by disasters and by appalling socio-economic conditions. The result of these vile acts is the spread of HIV/AIDS, the emergence of orphans who are victims of this virus and of armed conflict.



These marginalized children have difficulty getting enough to eat and attending school. They lose all hope of living.

APROFA plans to support the schooling of 73 vulnerable orphans. The orphans began their school year with worn-out uniforms and with notebooks that they assembled from leftover paper in used notebooks. Since the uniforms are mandatory all week long, the children have to wash them on the evening of the third day so that they can wear them

on the morning of the fourth day, sometimes still damp.

APROFA plans to buy them uniforms, pay their school fees, and help widows who are heads of households to have an income-generating activity. By paying school fees for these orphans, there will be a snowball effect that will increase the family's income and thus reduce poverty.

That is APROFA's objective: working to bring hope to this segment of the population.

*RICHARD B., APROFA,
(NON-PROFIT ASSOCIATION),
EASTERN DEMOCRATIC
REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO*

● A Small Peace Laboratory

In Burundi, the Kamenge Youth Centre is striving to overcome ethnic barriers through joint activities.

The Centre was created in 1992, and today has around 25,000 members aged 16 to 30 supervised by 80 instructors, many of whom are unpaid. Everything a young person dreams of - music, dance, drama, sport, movies, Internet, classes in computing, sewing, languages, reading, religious activities - is accessible provided the young person "plays by the rules", i.e. they must do things together and treat other people as their companions, without any ethnic, political, social, religious or gender-based discrimination. Even during the most difficult periods, there were no problems between the young people. One of them said this: "When you come here, you don't know who belongs to which ethnic group. We are like brothers." The Centre is very much open to international influence, via the summer camps that foreign volunteers participate in.

Many cultural activities have been organised for the "Peace and Reconciliation" project. Today there was a big party to celebrate the world day against AIDS. We sang and proclaimed in a thousand different ways that AIDS is not a game and that it only brings death, especially in Burundi where medicines are scarce and expensive, and often completely lacking.

Yesterday, we finished two months of football tournaments with the primary schools. It's a positive thing to get children to meet up, who otherwise would be unable to do so. On Thursday, we finished the drawing competition for primary schools. The theme was "What does happiness mean to you?" Extraordinary drawings; simple ideas: a house, a table covered with food, a wedding, a car, a job, etc. And soon the holidays will start, with a whole range of activities, shows, concerts, plays, parties, bicycle races, open days, football matches, basketball, volleyball, etc. Plus: training courses, discussions, studies on the detrimental effects of alcohol and drugs; about democracy, elections and human rights. At the end of the year, a rap competition "*I vote because it concerns me... I want justice and development for all... I want justice and peace for all...*" and a concert by the groups from the Centre. They will bring to the world a cry of peace and fraternity, which is the cry of the Centre, the cry of Burundi.

The Centre is a place of peace, for a country that needs to be rebuilt from the inside and outside.

*FATHER CLAUDIO M., KAMENGE YOUTH CENTRE, BURUNDI,
EXCERPTS FROM LETTERS AND PRESS RELEASES*

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

● "Maybe I will be able to offer my help."

I like the new meaning of ATD (All Together in Dignity); but how precious to me in 1984 was the meaning Aide à Toute Détresse (help for every hardship)! Many times in those years, I had to steal my food by night, under cover of darkness, from the garbage disposal services. I had to disguise myself under the very eyes of security guards, with the aprons and overalls of the very lowest cleansing workers. I had to keep myself washed and clean by stealing my way to underground facilities in the total darkness, sometimes surviving with counterfeited keys. I wrote my own guide-notes on how to live without any warmth at all through the winters.

Many correspondents to the "Letter to Friends Around the World" helped me to act "All Together in Dignity". I learned to cultivate my own legal food. I learned to live in my own warm bed-sitting room, which is an entirely legal shelter, where I can keep clean and safe. I no longer have to steal secretly through the streets in the darkness of the night.

The New Zealand army imported a fleet of all-terrain trucks and in the beginning there were several accidents with those trucks. One such accident paralyzed a young soldier, and also crippled his hands. The young man, aged 21, will never be able to walk again.

He has come to live in a house very near to me.

A prompting of compassion caused me to go and offer to look after the garden and lawn of the young man's house. The young man, Kahn, is damaged in his emotions and in his soul by the terrible accident. Up to now, he has talked to me very little. But I still work in his garden for him.

For many weeks, I have been fighting to understand what God is saying to me about Kahn.

Slowly we have grown a little bit friendly towards each other. Little phrases from Letter No.72 have been helping me to understand better:

"The courage of this young man."

"They have learned to receive kindness from each other."

The hopes that he expresses are "a right, not a dream."

He is hard to approach because he has been "wounded by life". "His rights are inalienable..."

"Living means helping others to live".

Kahn had to drop out from his first year at university law school. His dream is to study law at Canterbury University, but periods in hospital have prevented his attendance. Something has happened to make Kahn's hands bent in a claw-shape. Maybe I will be able to help Kahn with his written papers when he resumes first-year law studies in March 2010. Maybe I will be able to offer.

REG M., NEW ZEALAND



In the Press – In the Press – In the Press – In the Press –

● **Hungry to Learn Across the World**

At 16 years old, Babar Ali must be the youngest headmaster in the world. The minute his lessons are over at Raj Govinda school [in India], Babar Ali doesn't stop to play, he heads off to share what he's learnt with other children from his village. At four o'clock every afternoon after Babar Ali gets back to his family home, a bell summons children to his house. They flood through the gate into the yard behind his house, where Babar Ali now acts as headmaster of his own, unofficial school. Babar Ali gives lessons just the way he has heard them from his teachers. Some children are seated in the mud, others on rickety benches under a rough, homemade shelter. In every corner of the yard are

groups of children studying hard.

Babar Ali was just nine when he began teaching a few friends as a game. They were all eager to know what he learnt in school every morning. Now his afternoon school has 800 students, all from poor families, all taught for free.

Excerpts from an article by Damian Grammaticas, BBC website, Hunger to Learn series, 12 Oct 2009.

● **A Man and Two Donkeys: Rural Bookmobile in Action**

In a ritual repeated nearly every weekend for the past decade, Luis Soriano gathered his two donkeys in front of his home [in Colombia]. He strapped pouches with the word



"Biblioburro" painted in blue letters to the donkey's backs and loaded them with an eclectic cargo of books destined for people living in the small villages beyond. "I started out with 70 books, and now I have a collection of more than 4,800," said Mr. Soriano, 36, a primary school teacher who lives in a small house with his family, with books piled to the ceilings. "This began as a necessity; then it became an obligation; and after that a custom," he explained. "Now, it is an institution: one man and two donkeys." He created it out of the simple belief that the act of taking books to people who do not have them can somehow improve this impoverished region, and perhaps Colombia.

Excerpts from an article by Simon Romero, published in The New York Times, 19 October 2008.

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 PERDREAU'S
COMMITMENT IS TO
ILLUSTRATE THE TEXTS
OF THE LETTER
ON A FREE-TIME BASIS

PAGE SETUP:
LYDIE ROUFFET