



ALL TOGETHER IN DIGNITY

ASIAN FORUM

ATD Fourth World Regional Team :
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Dear friends,

We extend our New Year's greetings to you with the noble wish of Professor Anisur Rahman in Bangladesh, who writes:

"I wish that we work not just to end extreme poverty, but to see everyone entitled to a fair share of the fruits of human civilization, and witness the full creativity of every human being liberated."

*For a world that is rich
because
no one is left out !*

A New Kind Of Wealth

News from ATD Fourth World Regional Team (Marie-Claire Droz, Patricia and Claude Heyberger)

Over the past months, we had the opportunity to visit Vietnam, Philippines and to take part in a forum held in Beijing, China. "Do you plan to start projects in our country?" was the most frequent question we were asked by those in charge of peer organizations in these countries. Indeed, being members of an international NGO, people often expect from us to expand our organization by implementing new projects. Once we think about how widespread and entrenched poverty is around the world, this expectation is understandable. However, our teams in Asia, as well as in the other regions in which we work, are very small! Most often there are only two or three full-time volunteers at a time, and while we are graciously supported by the ongoing efforts of members and friends, these individuals take upon many responsibilities and are limited in number.

Another reason is that ATD Fourth World's full-time volunteers choose to dedicate a part of their time and their experience in joining other organizations instead of initiating only action programs. Extreme poverty, as we know, is both an economic and social condition: effective action therefore cannot be based on material support alone. ATD Fourth World's choice has always been to focus on the long-term human investment, building trust and friendship among people. Members of ATD Fourth World are willing to join the ranks of those who are trying to create a better life within their neighborhood, their society, and their country. ATD Fourth World is always very eager to understand and to learn from other people committed to fight extreme poverty and injustice.

How do these encounters contribute to the efforts to overcome extreme poverty? We have witnessed that this approach works to facilitate an open and trusting dialogue among people, groups and organizations. This exchange can lead to new ways of learning and taking action, towards building social wealth for the good of all.

In this Newsletter you will read short testimonies of ATD Fourth World friends. In their writings these modest individuals recount their frustration about having to witness the unnecessary suffering of people living in poverty, often while

facing the additional injustice of social programs which do not properly take their needs into account.

Maew is one of these observers. It is not necessary to identify the country she is speaking of, because unfortunately the marginalization of populations living in extreme poverty occurs in almost every country of the world. Our purpose is to highlight the people who do not resign themselves in the face of these realities. Maew, Aizhen, Adonis and Noi are all individuals who have struggled to confront extreme poverty where they have found it. These ATD Fourth World friends and members are aware that progress is by necessity a slow process, which involves reestablishing severed human relationships, changing mentalities and reforming institutions that have been shaped for centuries by discriminatory attitudes towards people in extreme poverty.

People like Maew, Aizhen, Adonis and Noi work to build peace by standing up against poverty. If you know other people you also consider to be peace builders, please assist us in meeting with them. We need to know each other, so that we can build a greater solidarity among people of various backgrounds and interests in the fight against extreme poverty.

Tapori Silhouettes workshop with partner organizations
at Museo Pambata, Manila (Philippines, 2007)



"Who Cares?"

Ms. Maew, South East Asia:

"So many problems have happened here and many poor have been pushed into acute poverty, particularly landless people from rural areas who came to the capital and stayed in the slums to earn their living as daily wage laborers. International investors from richer countries invest in real estate with an expectation of high profits. These foreign investors are able to persuade corrupt government officials to evict the poor from their homes in slums located in places of high potential investment so that they can build high rises or commercial buildings on those grounds.

Here, poor slum people were taken to a new site 20 km from the capital where they were given no land, no housing, no electricity, no clean water and no sanitation. It was reported that those who were HIV positive could not afford the cost of traveling to the hospital in the capital to receive their regular medicine and as a result began to die. But the general attitude is, who cares? Moreover, the number of people losing land and becoming poorer in rural areas has increased sharply because the government has granted large land concessions to special interest groups. These land concessions affects rural people who lose the land where they have been both living and earning their living from. I feel hopeless about

alleviating poverty in this country. If you examine the country's GDP, it has gradually increased, which assumes that mostly everybody has had their income increase as well. The truth is that income has only increased for a small handful of people, and not for the vast majority whose income has actually decreased”.

Finding The Way

Ms. Aizhen, from Taipei (Taiwan):

“Whenever I see homeless people, I would like to help them, but I always wonder first: How can I do it without hurting them? One day I met an older lady who was sitting at the doorstep of the grocery store at the entry of the Mackay Hospital in Taipei. She didn't have family to turn to for help. At that time I couldn't understand why my simple question: “Do you have family?” hurt her so much that she burst out in tears. After that experience I didn't dare to talk or act as freely with people living in difficult situations, because I was afraid that I would hurt them.

After several months of thinking about it, I discovered how to approach them. Today, if I see an older woman, I say to her: “Auntie, please, allow me to help you, because I wish I could do the same for my mother. This situation is not your fault, you don't have a choice. As soon as I saw you, I couldn't help but remembering the respect I owe my mother, but, unfortunately, she has passed away. My heart is full of regrets, because now it is too late to show her my respect, as she is no longer with us. Please, accept that I help you, so that it will help me overcome my regrets.”

Tapori Silhouettes for October 17th celebrating in partnership with UN/ESCAP and the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, Bangkok (Thailand, 2007)

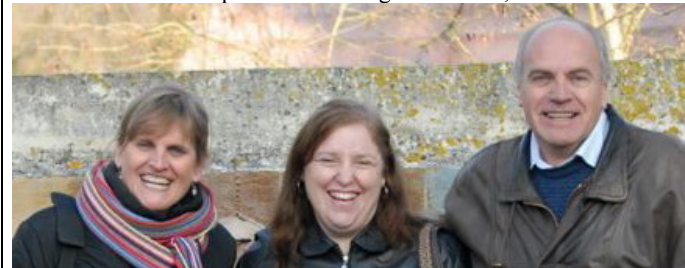


Fear: an Obstacle to Solidarity

Ms. Noi, living in a very deprived area, Bangkok (Thailand):

“In our community, there is a sense of solidarity but when it comes to undertake administrative procedures, this does not exist. For instance, people can't manage to make the decision of going to the district to ask for registration so that we can have access to running water and electricity. People are afraid of the landlord; they're afraid of the police. They think that if we get involved in something like that, we might get evicted even though we've been living here for a long time. Because our future is uncertain, fear is one of the main reasons why there is no solidarity in our community. If we weren't afraid of being evicted, our sense of unity would probably grow stronger. It's hard to make plans for the future, to build on a land that belongs to someone else. Just imagine if the landlord came up, we would be evicted by the police and it would be the end of our story! This is why we are scared, why we continue to live here as we do, without ever claiming anything. We just hope that we can stay here, that's all.”

NEWS FROM OUR HEADQUARTERS: Since January 1st, 2008 we are pleased to welcome Ms. Isabelle PERRIN (L) and Ms. Diana FAUJOUR as new deputies of Mr. Eugen BRAND, General Director.



Gaining The Status Of Citizen

Mr. Adonis, living in North Cemetery,

Manila (Philippines):

“In the Philippines, each neighborhood belongs to a *barangay* or small district comprising the local level of government. All legal arbitration is conducted within the *barangay*, such that if you don't have a *barangay* in which to live then you do not belong to any community. If the police arrests someone, the chairman goes to the police to identify whether that person is living in his *barangay* or area of responsibility. Likewise, if you do not belong to any *barangay*, you cannot register to vote and you are not counted in a census. The chairman of the *barangay* provides different certificates that we use to enroll children in school, to receive police clearance and to register to vote.

Living in a cemetery is illegal. For many years, we were not part of any *barangay*. We didn't have postal addresses and we could not vote legally. We had no identity. At first, we did not have a group and so each of us were on our own. Then, little by little, we organized ourselves to become accepted as member citizens, through which we were eventually allocated a district to vote in the elections.

Now things have changed and we are part of a *barangay*. We can ask the chairman for help at any time. We are recognized as citizens and will be given the right to vote.

As a citizen you are entitled to the right to vote and children are afforded a right to receive an education. For this you need help and support from the local authorities and need to be recognized as belonging to a community. The help and support you can receive includes *barangay* clearance, voter's permit, a recognizable school place for the children, medical assistance and the right to be treated as a citizen. Being a citizen means having rights.”

**Are you one of the numerous people
from 152 countries who signed the
« Call to Action »?**

Do not hesitate to keep in touch through :

● atdfwbkk@atd-fourthworld.org in Thailand

● atdmnl@skynet.net in the Philippines

or visit : www.atd-fourthworld.org