

**EXTREME POVERTY AND HUMAN RIGHTS:
ESSAYS ON JOSEPH WRESINSKI**

Quentin Wodon, Editor

March 9, 2000

DISCUSSION DRAFT

Acknowledgments

This report is a product of the Poverty Group, Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Division (PREM), Latin America and the Caribbean Region, The World Bank. The work could not have been conducted without the financial support of the World Development Report team at the World Bank, and especially its Director, Ravi Kanbur. The work originated at the suggestion of Michael Walton, Director for Poverty within the Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Network at the World Bank. The editor expresses his appreciation to both Ravi Kanbur and Michael Walton. The editor is also grateful to Guillermo Perry, PREM Director and Chief Economist, and Norman Hicks, Lead Economist for poverty reduction, both with the World Bank's Latin American Region, for allowing him to take the time necessary for editing this report and writing the introductory chapter.

Part of the results of this report were presented at three World Bank seminars in Fiscal Year 1999-2000. One of these seminars took place as part of the World Bank's PREM week at the University of Maryland at College Park in July 1999. Although the World Bank sponsored this work, the opinions expressed by the various authors are theirs only, and should not be attributed to the World Bank, its Executive Directors, or the countries they represent. In other words, this report is the result of independent research. For a document reflecting the position of the World Bank on human rights, the reader is referred to "*Development and Human Rights: The Role of the World Bank*" (World Bank, 1998) published as a contribution to the commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: EXTREME POVERTY AND HUMAN RIGHTS: WRESINSKI'S CONTRIBUTION <i>Quentin Wodon</i>	1
I. POVERTY AND THE INDIVISIBILITY OF HUMAN RIGHTS	2
<i>I.1. Wresinski's definition of extreme poverty</i>	2
<i>I.1. The multidimensionality of extreme poverty</i>	3
<i>I.2. Extreme poverty and human rights</i>	4
<i>I.3. Extreme poverty and social exclusion</i>	5
II. SELECTED IMPLICATIONS OF WRESINSKI'S APPROACH.....	6
<i>II.1. Wresinski and the United Nations: two examples of collaboration</i>	6
<i>II.2. The study for UNICEF: Reaching the poorest, what does it take?</i>	7
<i>II.3. An approach to poverty research based on participant observation</i>	8
CHAPTER 2: THE VERY POOR, LIVING PROOF OF THE INDIVISIBILITY OF HUMAN RIGHTS <i>Joseph Wresinski</i>	12
I. A PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THE RIGHT TO INHABIT THE EARTH.....	13
II. PEOPLE WHO STRUGGLE TO CLAIM THEIR DIGNITY	15
III. A VISION OF HUMANITY AS THE SOURCE OF RESPONSIBILITIES AND RIGHTS.	17
IV. RESTORING HUMAN RIGHTS TO THE VERY POOR: A UNIVERSAL MISSION.....	20
CHAPTER 3: EXTREME POVERTY AND HUMAN RIGHTS: INDIVISIBILITY FOUR TIMES <i>Charles Courtney</i>	24
I. A BRIEF REVIEW OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL LITERATURE ON HUMAN RIGHTS	24
II. EXTREME POVERTY AND THE INDIVISIBILITY OF HUMAN RIGHTS	28
<i>II.1. The Indivisibility of Humanity</i>	28
<i>II.2. The Indivisibility of Community</i>	31
<i>II.3. The Indivisibility of the Person</i>	32
<i>II.4. The Indivisibility of Human Rights</i>	33
CHAPTER 4: EXTREME POVERTY AND HUMAN RIGHTS AT THE UNITED NATIONS <i>Leandro Despouy</i>	36
I. EXTREME POVERTY IN UNITED NATIONS DEBATES	37
II. THE LINK BETWEEN EXTREME POVERTY AND HUMAN RIGHTS.....	40
III. CHANGING THE PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE POOR AND POVERTY.....	42
IV. THE MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGES IN THE LAST YEARS	43
CHAPTER 5: REACHING THE POOREST: WHAT DOES IT TAKE? <i>Huguette Redegeld</i>	47
I. REACHING THE POOREST	48
<i>I.1.. Brief presentation of the study</i>	48
<i>I.2. Major Findings</i>	49
II. IMPLICATIONS	55
<i>II.1. An investment over time</i>	55
<i>II.2. Planning and evaluation</i>	55
<i>II.3. Building global partnerships</i>	56
<i>II.4. Support for training</i>	56
III. CHALLENGES TO THE NECESSITY OF REACHING THE POOREST	57
APPENDIX TO CHAPTER 5	60

CHAPTER 1
EXTREME POVERTY AND HUMAN RIGHTS:
WRESINSKI'S CONTRIBUTION

Quentin Wodon

Quentin Wodon is a Senior Economist with the Poverty Group, Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Division, Latin America and the Caribbean Region at the World Bank. From 1989 to 1993, he was a staff member of the International Movement ATD Fourth World, the organization founded by Joseph Wresinski.

INTRODUCTION

This report consists of a collection of essays on the relationship between extreme poverty and human rights, and on the implications of this relationship for programs aiming at reaching the poorest. The report places its emphasis on the contribution of Joseph Wresinski to the understanding of the link between extreme poverty and human rights.

Joseph Wresinski (1914-1988) was a French Catholic priest who founded in 1957 the International Movement ATD Fourth World (hereafter ATD), a non-confessional, non-profit grass-roots organization at the origin of the United Nations' World Day for Overcoming Poverty (October 17). Today, ATD runs projects with the very poor in twenty-five developed and developing countries. ATD also aims at representing the poorest in national and international forums. The organization has been granted consultative status I (the highest for NGOs) with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) at the United Nations. Its approach to poverty reduction remains anchored in the writings and life of its founder.

Born poor, Wresinski developed a line of thought in which extreme poverty is conceived as a multidimensional phenomenon which can lead to violations of human rights in their indivisibility. According to Wresinski, encompassing policies dealing with the various areas of deprivation felt by the poorest are needed to help the poor emerge from poverty. Moreover, beyond poverty, Wresinski believed that the social exclusion of the poor was as detrimental to their development as their lack of basic material security. Although Wresinski is very well known in Europe, at the United Nations, and in some developing countries, he remains largely unknown in the United States and within the World Bank, the organization which sponsored this work as part of the background research leading to the World Development Report (WDR) 2000-2001 on poverty.

In this introductory chapter, my aim is to present a few ideas developed by the authors of the following chapters. While some arguments presented by the authors are

straightforward, others may be unusual. In providing my own interpretation of Wresinski's contribution to the debate on extreme poverty and human rights, I hope to give an analytical framework that will facilitate the reading of subsequent chapters. I will concentrate my attention on two topics. First, I will discuss the definition of extreme poverty proposed by Wresinski, and the relationship between this definition and human rights on the one hand, and social exclusion on the other (section I). This will provide an introduction to chapters 2 to 4 in this report. Next, I will build on the analysis in chapter 5 of what it takes to reach the poorest. This will enable me to explain in some detail aspects of ATD's special methodology for conducting research on extreme poverty together with the very poor (section II). The authors of the chapters in this report deal with many other topics, but it is not feasible to cover them all here. I do hope, however, that after reading the contributions presented in this report, the readers will want to learn more. For that, they may turn to the writings of Wresinski and the members of his organization.

I. POVERTY AND THE INDIVISIBILITY OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Three of the four chapters that follow are devoted to an analysis of the relationships between the concept of the indivisibility of human rights and the reality of the life of the very poor.

Chapter 2 was written by Joseph Wresinski. Entitled "*The very poor, living proof of the indivisibility of human rights*", the chapter is a translation of a text originally written in French for the French Commission on Human Rights at the occasion of the bicentennial anniversary of the French revolution. Using examples from both developed and developing countries, Wresinski suggests that extreme poverty can lead to violations of human rights in their indivisibility.

Chapter 3, entitled "*Poverty and human rights: indivisibility four times*", was written by Charles Courtney. According to Courtney, Wresinski's claim that extreme poverty can lead to a violation of human rights poverty can be explored through the concept of indivisibility, and by giving priority to *who* (the individual within her community) over *what* (her material possessions and entitlements). Courtney distinguishes four potential levels of indivisibility in the human rights discourse. First, the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms the indivisibility of humanity. But the poorest are excluded and their humanity is in question. Second, the Universal Declaration says that we are a "human family". So there is an indivisibility of community, according to Courtney. Each person, born helpless, needs the support of others. But the poorest are denied support. Third, all of the articles of the Universal Declaration apply to the individual. So there is indivisibility of the person. Extreme poverty affects the whole person – it is not just a lack of income. Fourth, if all human rights apply to the human person, then there is indivisibility of human rights. A human rights approach to overcoming poverty must be comprehensive and coordinated.

Courtney concludes by noting that the capabilities approach to human rights proposed by Sen and Nussbaum fits well with Wresinski's approach and all of the above because it gives priority to persons (that is, being able) over resources, and because it calls for cooperation among all persons of equal dignity, which refers to the indivisibility of the community and the humanity.

Chapter 4, entitled "*Extreme Poverty and human rights at the United Nations*", was written by Leandro Despouy, a Former Ambassador from Argentina to the United Nations' Commission for Human Rights in Geneva. In 1987, Wresinski made an intervention at a session of the United Nations' Commission for Human Rights. In this intervention, Wresinski discussed the relationship between extreme poverty and human rights, and he called upon the United Nations to take into account the point of view of the very poor in its thinking and programs. Wresinski's intervention was instrumental in leading the Commission for Human Rights to adopt a series of resolutions on extreme poverty and human rights in the following ten years. Following these resolutions, at the request of the Commission, Despouy wrote a report on the topic for the Commission in close collaboration with ATD. In his paper for this report, Despouy recasts his main findings in the light of recent developments. He also provides the reader with an insider's view of what it took for the United Nations to begin recognizing the link between extreme poverty and human rights.

To help the reader go through the next three chapters, I would like to give some background on the approach to extreme poverty proposed by Wresinski and used by ATD. Although I will present an analytical framework, it is important to say at the outset that Wresinski's approach was not the result of a theoretical investigation. Rather, the approach emerged from forty years of grass-roots involvement with the very poor in both developing and developed countries.

I.1. Wresinski's definition of extreme poverty

To shed light on Wresinski's approach, one can start from the definition of extreme poverty presented in a report that he prepared for the French Economic and Social Council¹:

"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. Extreme poverty results when the lack of basic security

¹ Wresinski, J., 1987, *Grande pauvreté et Précarité Economique et sociale*, Rapport du Conseil Economique et Social, Journal officiel de la République française, Paris. English version available: Wresinski, J., 1994, *Chronic Poverty and Lack of Basic Security*, Fourth World Publications, Landover MA. See also De Gaulle-Anthonioz, G., 1995, *La grande pauvreté : Evaluation des politiques publiques de lutte contre la pauvreté*, Conseil Economique et Social, Journal officiel de la République française, Paris.

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 in the foreseeable future."

This definition is complex. It emphasises the continuity existing between poverty and extreme poverty, and in so doing, it relies on three main references². The first reference is that of a lack of one or several basic securities which may have a cumulative impact and lead to an insecurity affecting new dimensions in a poor person's life. The second reference is that of time: poverty is associated with the persistence of this insecurity over possibly long periods of time. The third reference is that of the inability of the (extreme) poor to exercise their rights and assume their responsibilities. Although the third reference is of higher interest for this report, I discuss all three references below because an understanding of the first two references will help for the third.

1. The multidimensionality of extreme poverty

The first reference is laid in terms of basic securities. According to Wresinski, poverty results from, and even consists in, a lack of basic securities which include not only financial resources, but also education, employment, housing, health care, etc., as well as in some cases civil and political rights. Beyond some threshold, the insecurity endured by the poor is such that the lack of basic securities have mutually reinforcing impacts. When the consequences of the insecurity are severe, they lead to deprivations in new life areas. The poor are then prisoners of a vicious circle. With no basic security left as a solid foundation to rely upon, they cannot emerge from chronic poverty by themselves. This cumulative deprivation does not refer to the juxtaposition of characteristics associated with the inhabitants of, say, inner-city ghettos, urban slums, and remote areas. It should not be confused either with the high incidence of poverty which can be found in these areas. The cumulative lack of basic securities is to be understood as expressing the situation of individuals and families who cannot emerge from poverty without the help of others because the pressure of deprivation is just too strong.

The second reference is related to the chronic character of poverty, to its persistence through time. While a key characteristic of the so-called new poverty (a term used mainly in developed countries) is its novelty, a common feature among the extreme poor is the permanence, or at least the recurrence of their situation (this has also been referred to as chronic poverty). Apart from the plurality in areas of life affected, the chronically poor share a history of deprivation. As poverty is associated with social exclusion from mainstream society and, for the poorest, from their community in many cases as well, the chronically poor suffer from a high degree of economic, social, and

² See for example Wodon Q., 1992, *Logement, le droit des exclus*, Editions ouvrières, Paris; Wodon Q., 1993, *Marketing contre pauvreté*, Editions de l'Atelier, Paris; and Wodon Q., forthcoming, *Pauvreté et Justice sociale: Essai sur Rawls et Wresinski*, L'Harmattan, Paris.

cultural isolation which may be transmitted from one generation to the next. The longer the experience of poverty, the harder the emergence out of poverty.

Together, these two references result in an approach to poverty which is multidimensional in that it does not consider financial deprivation as the only characteristic of the poor. Following Amartya Sen's work on capabilities and functionings, there is now some sympathy for conceptualizations of poverty similar to that of Wresinski. Still, it could be argued that the assimilation of poverty to the lack of several basic securities results from a confusion. Poverty when conceived as a unidimensional monetary phenomenon may result from the above deprivations, or it may cause such deprivations. But this is no rationale for identifying the causes and/or consequences of poverty with monetary poverty itself. By lumping together people with various deprivations, such as the jobless, the homeless, the illiterate, etc., in the joint category of the poor, the resulting multidimensional concept of poverty would lose its precision and usefulness for policy, the argument would go. The concept of multidimensional poverty could also lead to the possibly mistaken impression that a vaguely defined and articulated concept of global or comprehensive policy for poverty reduction might be more effective in bringing an end to the various deprivations mentioned than more specific and targeted interventions by life area.

This objection is important, and it has some validity. Yet the fact that the multidimensional view of poverty might be misused as a catch-all but empty motto does not detract from its relevance to describe existing phenomena. To take just one example, there are clear relationships between homelessness and joblessness among the very poor, with both phenomenon reinforcing each others and leading to a vicious circle. That is, there is something fundamentally true about a multidimensional approach to poverty, and the adequacy of this approach is more evident when one considers extreme poverty rather than poverty. The multidimensional concept in which the cumulative lack of several basic securities limits the possibility for people to live decently and emerge from their condition of deprivation by themselves does provide a faithful representation of the situation of many very poor individuals and households around the world. If the situation of these individuals and households were one of financial deprivation only, it could be referred to as such, and dealt with through public transfers. But it is not, and the concept of multidimensional poverty enables the analyst/policy maker to capture what goes on in the life of very poor individuals and households beyond the lack of income. Beyond helping in designing appropriate safety nets, a multidimensional approach to poverty can also be used for prevention, that is for avoiding that extreme poverty repeat itself from one generation to the next. More could be said, but we will get back to policy issues in section 2.

1.2. Extreme poverty and human rights

The third reference in Wresinski's definition, and the most important one for the purpose of this report, is related to the concepts of human rights and responsibilities. I would argue that this third reference rests itself on two articulations.

The first articulation highlights, for each human right at a time, the existing link between the access to that right and the exercise of a corresponding responsibility. This link is broken when, due to a lack of access to the right, the individuals or families in poverty cannot fulfill their corresponding responsibility. In turn, because they cannot demonstrate their ability to fulfill their responsibility, the poor are not in a position to claim their right. Parents whose children are in foster care in rich countries have a hard time recovering their parental authority because once they have lost their parental rights, they are not any more in a position to demonstrate the benefits that could result for their children from a return at home. Another example is that of a jobless person who cannot acquire the credentials that would enable her to demonstrate an ability to work. In short, while economic and social rights are often needed to assume responsibilities, these rights tend to be denied to the poor who, deprived from basic securities, are perceived as living short of their responsibilities toward their family or society.

The second articulation does not refer to each couple of right and responsibility, but to the interdependence or indivisibility between various rights and responsibilities. This is emphasized by Wresinski. Although it could be possible to examine three cases of interdependence (between rights, between responsibilities, and between rights and responsibilities,) it will suffice here to mention the interdependence between rights. A dichotomy has been established by the United Nations Human Rights Charter and other international conventions between civil and political rights on the one hand, and economic, social, and cultural rights on the other. The experience of the poor challenges this dichotomy. Not only does the absence of civil and political rights undermine the enjoyment or exercise of economic, social, and cultural rights, but conversely, the lack of economic, social, and cultural rights undermines the exercise of civil and political rights³.

Because of the variety of human rights, an approach to extreme poverty based on them is necessarily multidimensional in scope. The multidimensionality of human rights is a source of complexities. It is not easy, for example, to establish a hierarchy between different types of rights. Programs for the poor are implemented in many areas related to economic and social rights, including housing, education, job training, employment, and health care. While the programs in all these areas complement each other, they are also

³ Within the French context which has influenced the work of Wresinski, this has been discussed in Pettiti, L., 1991, *Pauvreté et Convention européenne des droits de l'homme*, in *Droit social*, 1: 84-87; Sudre, F., 1990, *La première décision "quart monde" de la Commission européenne des Droits de l'homme : une "bavure" dans une jurisprudence dynamique*, in *Revue universelle des droits de l'homme*, 2: 349-353; and Commission nationale consultative des droits de l'homme, 1992, *Rapport Grande pauvreté et droits de l'homme*, Paris.

competing with each other not only for funding (both private and public), but also for the attention of law and policy makers, and the public at large. At the same time, this multidimensionality provides for the identification of issues which would not be revealed under an unidimensional focus on the lack of income on the part of the poor. In Belgium for example, the communication to the municipal social services of the names of the households in default of payment for their electricity bills was criticized on the basis that it constituted a violation of the right to privacy. This argument was rejected by a high court on the rationale that the communication of the names served, and was not disproportionate with, the purpose of the law by enabling the social services to protect the households in default of payment from an electricity shutoff. Still, this example shows how in practice, there may be interactions and trade-offs not only between economic, social, and cultural rights, but also between these rights and civil and political rights.

Once the debate on poverty reduction is framed in terms of human rights, the critiques of social programs based on negative incentive effects or on an assumption of undeservingness on the part of the poor lose some of their strength. Consider first negative incentive effects. In the U.S., with cash welfare benefits in mind, Murray⁴ has claimed that several "laws" pervert social transfers. The most important law is the law of unintended rewards which states that transfers increase the value of being in the condition that prompted the transfer, thereby creating a poverty trap. While this is true, does it mean that social programs for the poor should be abolished? Not if these social programs aim at implementing a basic right, because the principle of human rights would remain and take precedence over the difficulties associated with their implementation (this is not to say that the implementation should not promote the respect of specific responsibilities on the part of the poor associated to the granting of rights, which may help in limiting negative incentive effects). The same precedence of the principle of human rights applies to the issue of undeservingness according to which the poor do not deserve the support of society because they may appear as not willing to assume the responsibilities expected from all members of society. Under the assumption of undeservingness, the ethical duty would be on the part of the poor to improve their behavior. Redistributive transfers and social policies would be unjust when they reward reprehensible behavior and impose an undue burden on the non-poor members of the community respecting its core values. Again, the argument of undeservingness is weakened as soon as extreme poverty is conceptualized as leading to violations of human rights in their indivisibility because once rights are recognized as such, they may be granted independently of the potentially contradicting opinions of various groups in society as to the deservingness of the poor.

1.3. Extreme poverty and social exclusion

The issue of deservingness naturally leads to a discussion of social exclusion. In his paper on extreme poverty and the indivisibility of human rights, Wresinski highlights how the extreme poor suffer from being excluded. I would like to continue to present

⁴ Murray, C., 1984, *Loosing Ground: American Social Policy 1950-1980*, Basic Books, New York.

here my own interpretation of Wresinski's approach by explaining how, apart from distinguishing extreme poverty from a mere lack of income, it is also important to distinguish extreme poverty from social exclusion. While extreme poverty is a condition, social exclusion is a process which implies a dynamics: one is excluding others, or one is being excluded by others. More precisely, social exclusion includes a double dimension: procedural and moral⁵.

Consider first the existence of procedural exclusions. Literally, to exclude means to banish, to send somebody away from a place where she had the right to stay before. By extension, to exclude means to deprive somebody from any right previously granted, or normally granted, to the individuals recognized as members of a given community or society. Under this interpretation, social exclusion is directly linked to Wresinski's definition of extreme poverty in terms of human rights, where human rights may be understood in the sense of Freedén⁶:

"A human right is a conceptual device, expressed in linguistic form, that assigns priority to certain human or social attributes regarded as essential to the adequate functioning of a human being; that is intended to serve as a protective capsule for those attributes; and that appeals for deliberate action to ensure such protection"

Freedén's definition highlights the two requirements that candidates to the status of human rights must meet. Human rights must be recognized as such by others than their most direct beneficiaries. They must also be essential to our functioning as human beings. These two requirements are linked to each other as only key human attributes stand a chance to benefit from a consensus for their recognition as human rights. Of course, talking of attributes regarded as essentials amounts to grounding human rights in cultural, historical, and perhaps even geographical settings. The ideal of human rights has been constantly revised over its two centuries of existence. The rights granted to the members of specific societies, or to all members of the international community, have been contingent upon time and space. Yet, whatever their content under specific circumstances, human rights have been judged as a necessary protection by contemporaries to function in a normal way, that is to be able to meet one's responsibilities toward oneself, one's family, one's community, and society as a whole. That is, it could be said that human rights are contingently necessary.

When human rights are recognized as above, only the community or the society can grant them. Conversely, the non-attribution of a human right should not be regarded within society's context: this non-attribution expresses a sanction, an exclusion, be it explicit or implicit, of some individuals by their peers. When it is explicit, the exclusion

⁵ Wodon Q., 1993, *Marketing contre pauvreté*, Editions de l'Atelier, Paris, and Wodon Q., forthcoming, *Pauvreté et Justice sociale: Essai sur Rawls et Wresinski*, L'Harmattan, Paris.

⁶ Freedén, M., 1991, *Rights*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, p. 7.

from the benefit of the protection granted by a human right is operated through codified procedures for the denial of the right. But the exclusion can also be implicit. For the extreme poor, a difficulty arises when they cannot perform the tasks needed to benefit from a right, these tasks being also regulated through procedures. In effect, the mechanisms for the attribution of rights are regulated by rules that are operational for the great majority of the citizens, while enabling the majority to reject those it feels unworthy of the same protection. The rules for the enjoyment and the exercise of human rights skim the beneficiaries, thereby ending in denials of rights for who cannot comply with these rules.

Beyond what could be referred to as the *procedural* exclusions that prevent the poorest from benefiting from or exercising their human rights, there exist other exclusions which do not take form through rules, but through prejudices and preconceptions which are all the more difficult to eliminate as they are more subjective. These are *moral* exclusions, that is exclusions relying on moral judgements with respect to the extreme poor. These moral judgements may result in the refusal by society to grant rights to the poorest, but they may also result in the granting of rights of a lower quality, especially in economic, social, and cultural matters. While moral exclusions have been present throughout history, they may have become more severe nowadays as the charitable, communal values of many societies' heritage have faded away.

Moral exclusions do not, strictly speaking, result in a denial of human rights. But conversely, the implementation of human rights does not necessarily imply the elimination of moral exclusions. If extreme poverty is conceived in terms of human rights, as in Wresinski's approach, its eradication requires the break down of those rules and procedural exclusions which act as barriers to the enjoyment and exercise of rights and responsibilities. Still, this progress may leave intact the moral exclusions which affect the very poor. In some cases, the implementation of human rights may even result in a worsening of moral exclusion.

To sum up, among the three references of Wresinski's definition of chronic poverty, the reference to rights and responsibilities is the most important one. While the conceptualization of poverty as a multidimensional phenomenon is not new, Wresinski's link between the absence of basic securities for the very poor and their inability to meet their responsibilities and to enjoy and exercise their rights is more novel. Again, when several basic securities are lacking, we may observe an insecurity which has three characteristics: it can be more or less severe, permanent, and multidimensional in terms of affected life areas. Extreme poverty develops as a chain reaction when all three characteristics are combined. At that stage of deprivation, it becomes impossible for the poorest to regain by themselves their rights and to assume their responsibilities. At that stage, therefore, the poorest need the support of others in order to emerge from chronic poverty. Wresinski sees the restoration of the human rights of the poor as a universal mission, which requires the active intervention of all, rather than that of the Government only.

II. REACHING THE POOREST

II.1. Learning from a study on Reaching the Poor by ATD for UNICEF

The last chapter of this report deal with selected policy implications of Wresinski's approach to extreme poverty. This chapter, entitled "*Reaching the poorest: What does it take?*," was written by Huguette Redegeld. The key message from Redegeld is that there is a fine line between reaching the poor and the poorest. The poorest are in such a state of deprivation that traditional policies which may be effective for the poor may not work for the poorest. Helping the poorest emerge from poverty requires extra public resources and time. As importantly, at the grass-roots level, standing by the poorest for sufficiently long periods of time requires special commitment and faith in their ability to build a better life for themselves. Redegeld has thirty years of experience in trying to reach the poorest. She recently led a study prepared by ATD for the UNICEF on this topic. The study's objective was to identify key factors which can enable development agencies to reach the poorest and allow them to be full partners in the agencies' programs. Seven grass-roots projects were investigated in Burkina Faso, Haiti, Guatemala, Thailand, Peru, Canada and Uganda. In her paper, Redegeld provides a synthesis of the results of this study. In so doing, Redegeld discusses topics which have not received much attention in the literature on poverty, such as how cultural and artistic programs may help in breaking the vicious circle of deprivation which prevents the poorest from fully participating in the life of society.

Redegeld's starting point is that identifying the poorest members of a community is difficult. Moreover, even if the poorest are identified, there is not guarantee that they will actively participate in the programs which could improve their current living conditions and future prospects. Redegeld highlights a number of findings that must be taken into account when aiming at reaching the poorest (this synthesis is adapted from Redegeld's handout at a World Bank seminar):

- Building and sharing knowledge with the very poor. Often the poorest are excluded and out of reach. This exclusion means that typically, the poor's situation and their own efforts to emerge from poverty will not be known to an outsider. For the outsider to acquire a fine knowledge of the very poor, tools are needed. For example, a close proximity for a long period of time may be necessary for acquiring a genuine knowledge of the aspirations of the very poor. But for proximity to work, the very poor need a clear understanding of the intentions of those who want to help them. That is, reciprocity and mutual understanding are basic conditions to establish trust on which knowledge can be built and shared.
- Basing actions on the aspirations of the poorest instead of their problems. The projects which are the most successful in reaching the poorest tend to be those which are based on their aspirations rather than their problems. An example from a village in Guatemala will help make the point. The poorest families of the village were the

hardest hit by malnutrition and the death of children. A project initially dealing solely with malnutrition failed in part because it accentuated the parents' feeling of failure. Reorienting the project's objectives around a pre-school with a link with to nutrition rescued the project because it sent to the parents a strong message that others had, like themselves, faith in the future of their children.

- Recognizing the value of cultural actions. Human beings require beauty and creative expression as much as they require food, clothing and shelter. Artistic and cultural projects emphasise each person's natural creativity. Through them, the poorest may be able to discover their capabilities and potential. They may gain the confidence necessary to dare speaking up and contributing to the well-being of their communities and to broader society. Cultural activities may also provide an atmosphere allowing people from different backgrounds, poor and non-poor, to express and share experiences as equals.
- Strengthening the family. Threats to family life are serious because the family is the first line of resistance of the poorest to deprivation and social exclusion. While extreme poverty is destructive to family as well as to social life, a poor person's family nevertheless remains a powerful means of personal and social identification. Because human beings tend to care first and foremost for the development of those closest to them, family life is also important for the poor to be able to assume their responsibilities (and to show to society that they can do so). Hence a basic question to be put forth when evaluating programs is whether this or that particular action reinforcing the family or breaking it apart.
- Providing a role for the poor in identifying others poorer than themselves. People living in precarious conditions are well aware of the existence of others, around them, who are poorer than themselves They can lead outsiders to the most hidden and most downtrodden families. They can act as a the bridge that will build confidence and trust, leading to mutual respect and partnership. This role for the poor is unique, and it constitutes a key element in the development of actions aimed at reaching the poorest.
- Building on the potential for communities to unite around the poorest. Within each community, there are people who consistently express their solidarity with the poorest. These people are not necessarily leaders, but they are essential in establishing a consensus within a community to help those who are left out. They are also indispensable actors in the development of specific programs. One project with children living in the street in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, illustrates the role of those who already have relationships with the children. Rather than helping the children, the staff of the project asked them to whom they could rely for help. This led the staff to uncover an existing network of support upon which they later built their own project. Such existing networks of solidarity should be sought before starting new projects because they constitute a strength on which to build new projects.

Redegeld also highlights a number of more general considerations in her paper. Reaching the poorest requires an investment in terms of time. Building trust and confidence takes times. This must be recognized at the onset by institutions aiming at

reaching the poorest, and it implies that extra financial resources must be made available. Beyond time and financial resources, flexibility and the ability to question one's own actions, values, and knowledge are important as well. Now, recognizing the fact that reaching the poorest takes time does not imply that no time constraints should be introduced on projects. To the contrary, it is important to set intermediate goals which can be evaluated as the project moves along.

Another point raised by Redegeld relates to the implications for training of the importance of building projects on the values and aspirations of both the poorest and the communities they live in. Reaching the poorest requires a significant human investment not only from outsiders, but also from the poorest themselves. In the same way that outsiders require training, so do the poorest. As for the mobilisation of local communities, it often begins with the detection of local groups such as community centers and schools. The dialogue with the persons and institutions who will support a program for the poorest must make it clear from the beginning that partnering with the poorest does not mean entering a short term cooperation. Since the poorest have an important role to play, they must not only be reached, but also empowered. Hence project evaluations should be anchored in a very simple question: Did the poorest have through this project the opportunity to advance towards more autonomy and freedom rather than remaining in a cycle of deprivation and dependency?

II.2. ATD's Research Methodology

One of the first points made in Redegeld's paper relates to the importance of giving value to all sources of knowledge, including the knowledge of the very poor and those who work with them at the grass-roots level. This may seem obvious, but in practice, it is seldom done. For example, the analysis of poverty conducted by international organizations remains dominated by research of an academic bent. While this type of research is fundamental and necessary, according to Wresinski, it is not only from academics (and the staff of international organizations) that we should learn about extreme poverty. Social scientists have forged powerful tools for the analysis of poverty. But they live in a world that is diametrically different from that of the extreme poor, and this makes it difficult for the academic to grasp the life experience of the poor and their aspirations⁷:

“The University is in all matters at the opposite of extreme poverty: it is characterized by the security and the tranquility of the mind, diverted from the daily anxieties of men, all devoted to the discovery of lasting realities that transcend daily life. The University is a haven for orderly thoughts, as opposed to the constant improvisation from which the life of the extreme poor is made[...] The University is populated by men mastering the laws of nature and the rules of all human creations. The extreme poor are monitored, oppressed by nature and by

⁷ Wresinski J., 1983, *Echec a la misere*, Conference a la Sorbonne, Paris.

their fellow men, they lack the means and opportunity to control their body, their thoughts, or their life. The scholar of the University is at the antipodes of the man living in chronic poverty [...] How could they meet each other?"

Wresinski's indictment of the University scholar as an individual likely to be unable to understand the extreme poor is too severe, but it highlights a real potential problem. To solve this problem, ATD has relied over time on a special research method based on participant observation. Introducing this method may shed more light on some of the arguments made by Redegeld in her paper on reaching the poorest. The research method used by Wresinski and ATD is characterized by (a) the daily writing of participant observation reports, (b) a long term commitment of staff members to the eradication of poverty, and (c) the interaction between these two dimensions.

Consider first the participant observation reports. Each staff member is supposed to write every day about its encounters with low income households. Reporting what the poor did, said, and meant is of special importance. Because the organization has known some of households for many years, these (confidential) reports form a chronic of the life of the members of the household. Different points of view or rather sensitivities are represented in the reports because different staff members write either at the same time, or over time, on the same households. Finally, the reports are based on participant observation in that the writers are actively involved in their attempts to support the households in their efforts to emerge from poverty. From a scientific point of view, the collection of these reports provides a unique material to investigate the complex dynamics of the life of the poor. It should be no surprise that they led Wresinski and ATD to adopt a multidimensional approach to poverty.

Consider next the long term personal commitment to the poor of staff members writing the reports. Because of this commitment, the households share feelings and stories with staff members which they do not tell to other outsiders such as social workers. Beyond words, the households live events with staff members which provide insights into their lives of a quality which cannot be matched by the information that a social scientist would gather in an interview. From an ethical point of view, the proximity of staff members with the poor progressively enables staff members to perceive the requirements of social justice from the point of view of the poor rather than from that of the non poor. The staff members and the poor may also discover prejudices or discriminations which would not be perceived by outside observers.

Consider finally the link between the daily reports and the long term commitment. These two characteristics are related to each other. The knowledge that slowly emerges from the reports enables staff members to share the aspirations of particular households and to see their potentialities beyond the daily difficulties. This knowledge nurtures the long term commitment of staff members not only to the broad objective of poverty alleviation, but also to the support of particular households. In turn, the long term commitment of the staff members ensures that the observation reported in writing results

from an active participation in the life of the households. As staff members are not in the position of power of social workers, this participation is freely agreed upon by the households rather than forced upon them or simply accepted by them. In practice, the poor end up trusting the staff members in virtue of their commitment to them (and not only to the generic goal of poverty alleviation.) As a side benefit, because of the history of the households with the organization, the legitimization of a new staff member among a group of households is easier than that of a newcomer.

The above approach to research adopted by Wresinski and ATD is not without limits. From a policy point of view, because of the commitment of its staff, ATD is likely to systematically consider the safety nets as insufficient and to recommend that ever more generous measures be taken to close the gaps between the poor and the rest of society. From a scientific point of view, ATD may lack impartiality and objectivity. The feasibility of reproducing of the information and experience obtained by ATD's methodology is open to question. Other researchers who do not share the same commitment may not come up with the same observations or findings. In a nutshell, the method used by ATD is at risk of being emotional while science must, in the end, be critically cool. As far as participant observation is concerned, a researcher should certainly attempt to feel what the condition of the poor is like and see the world through their eyes. But after doing so, the researcher should stand back and pull away to sort out what it is that the poor are experiencing and doing. ATD does this when one of its researchers writes a monograph on the life on a family on the basis of the observation reports written over the years on this family. Yet, there is always the danger that in such a monograph, relevant experiences will be screened out because of the negative effect that they may have on society's vision of the poor. Personal commitment may induce a bias in reporting and interpretation.

Despite its potential weaknesses, ATD's methodology has the merit to lead to new sources of knowledge on poverty based on the experience of the poor and those engaged at their side. These sources of knowledge should be complementary with more traditional scientific methods of inquiry. As noted by Fontaine⁸, it is through the use of our two eyes that our vision achieves its quality. It is also through the confrontation of different perspectives that we may improve our understanding of, and programs for, the alleviation of poverty. Among all these perspectives, that of the poorest is key, but the hardest to get.

CONCLUSION

⁸ Fontaine, P.J., 1991, La double description : une vue binoculaire, in *Misère, science et démocratie : reconnaître l'autre comme chercheur*, Revue Quart Monde 140: 31-35.

In this introductory chapter, and to some extent in this whole report, the issues of the relationship between extreme poverty and human rights, and of what it takes to enable the poorest to exercise these rights, are only discussed at the surface, so to speak. Much more should be said, but only so much can be said in one report. Apart from his paper reprinted in this collection, Wresinski has written a number of other papers and books in which he details his vision of extreme poverty. The reader who may want to deepen his knowledge of Wresinski's thinking is referred to these other writings, as well as to the writings of ATD Fourth World.

There is however one more important feature of Wresinski's approach that must be emphasized. It relates to the possibility for the non-poor to learn from the poorest. In Wresinski's paper, this is an important theme. According to Wresinski, it is the poor who can help the most in understanding what the concept of the indivisibility of human rights actually means in practice. This can be discussed conceptually. But ultimately, learning from the poorest cannot be an intellectual exercise. It must be a personal experience. Wresinski lived this experience first hand because he was born poor. For the non-poor, going through this experience is not obvious. Thanks to my own work with ATD Fourth World before joining the World Bank, I have had the opportunity of meeting very poor families. I hope the reader gets this opportunity as well.

CHAPTER 2

THE VERY POOR, LIVING PROOF OF THE INDIVISIBILITY OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Joseph Wresinski

Joseph Wresinski (1917-1988), a Catholic priest, founded the International Fourth World Movement in 1957 in a shanty-town near Paris. Today, the organization, which is not confessional, has poverty projects in 25 countries. It has the consultative status of category 1 with the ECOSOC at the United Nations. This paper was prepared by Wresinski for the French Commission on Human Rights at the occasion of the bicentennial of the French revolution.⁹

INTRODUCTION

Today more than ever before, human nature and destiny are the center of attention. For aren't they the real subject of all debates and struggles that focus on human rights throughout the world?

Yet forty years after the United Nations' Universal Declaration on human rights, achievement is more limited than many had hoped; more limited, too, than we had long imagined in our Western democracies. The world is not, as we had thought, divided into countries where human rights prevail and countries where they are less fully, or not yet, respected. The extreme poverty which has resurfaced in rich countries where its existence had been forgotten is now understood as a systematic violation of all fundamental human rights. There are therefore serious infringements of human rights in every country, which are not accidental but inherent in the way people organize their lives in the national and international community.

It is understandable that the National Advisory Commission on Human Rights, which was set up to examine a great variety of specific situations and laws, was not prepared to leave it at that. Moreover, reflection on the very foundations of rights said to be inalienable was called for since it had not been attempted in present times, either in France, or anywhere else. I would like to try to contribute to that effort by setting out the main lines of what the poorest have taught me. I have had the privilege of sharing their lives and their struggle in Western Europe, in Africa, in the Americas and in the Far East, both as a man born to a very poor family and as a priest of the Roman Catholic Church. What follows is a sketch of a lifelong inquiry prompted by people deprived of all

⁹ This paper is was translated by Kathleen Fingleton and Charles Courtney from Wresinski J., 1989, *Les plus pauvres, révélateurs de l'indivisibilité des droits de l'homme*, in Commission nationale consultative des droits de l'homme, 1989: *Les droits de l'homme en questions*, La Documentation Française, Paris, pp. 221-237. The text is reproduced with the permission of ATD Fourth World.

rights.

The very poor revealed to me the day-to-day realities of life which unite them across cultures and continents and which mean that they all live as outlaws, everywhere. These realities led them to choose the term «Fourth World» to designate themselves as a people outside all the worlds that others have fashioned for themselves. I also wish to bear witness to the active refusal to accept that situation, demonstrated both by its victims and by those who have chosen to stand with them. This refusal is based, in all parts of the world, on a concept of the human being endowed with the right to responsibilities and to the means of carrying them out for the good of all. It is a concept of the human person who is indivisible and thereby bearer of indivisible rights and responsibilities. And it is a concept of the human person who is indivisible, and part of an indivisible humanity, whose members cannot be dissociated and in whose mission and destiny the poorest must participate.

As Michel Mollat pointed out, all major advances towards a greater degree of humanity have been achieved, through the centuries, by turning back to the very poor. I would add that, unfortunately, what is owed to the poor from age to age is soon forgotten. Today we seem to have forgotten that it is to the poor that we owe the concept of the human beings born equal and free and therefore entitled to participate as an equal, free and indispensable partner in the life of their community.

This conception seems to be acceptable to all people, whatever their cultural or spiritual allegiances. In the view of the very poor, all human beings are invested with the same mission, namely to advance the right of all to receive the means to be and to act in accordance with their true grandeur.

I. A PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THE RIGHT TO INHABIT THE EARTH

From the very earliest time in my childhood to the present day, the poorest have always seemed to me to be families - a whole people - who were forbidden to inhabit the world of others, to inhabit cities, countries, the whole earth. For could we really use the term "inhabit" to describe the way they were obliged to huddle together, to dig themselves in, to find whatever shelter they could in a slum on the edge of which my own family lived in a hovel? These were people relegated to down-town Angers, occupying attics, a few rooms around a courtyard that never saw the sun, to a windowless alcove at the end of a hallway, to a basement never intended to serve as a home to human beings. By virtue of the very misery of their accommodation, they were regarded as unworthy to ever inhabit the neighboring community of somewhat less unfortunate families. *"Shut up. How do you expect anyone to take you seriously, living the way you do?"*

Later on, as a rural priest, invited to Sunday dinner with one of the more prosperous farmers of my parish, I saw seasonal laborers also invited to a meal but seated at a

different place. They came from the rudimentary lodgings lent to them only for the duration of their contract, to sit at the foot of the main table, where only soup was served, while the guests at the farmer's side were getting a full meal. These were laborers whose housing, wherever they went, was always temporary and whose very identity as Sunday guests was in line with their identity as poor people, to be accommodated and fed at the least possible cost, for just as long as they were useful. These were men and families who, in winter, had to seek refuge in a cabin somewhere out in the woods, in a shelter of earth and branches dug into a hillside to keep the water out, or in an abandoned barn...

I finally arrived at the camp for the homeless at Noisy-le-Grand, a forgotten outpost where several hundred families with over a thousand children between them lived in "igloos" of asbestos cement which, elsewhere in France, were reserved for pigs. Even there, they were allowed to live only temporarily, for how could these "lepers" be authorized to reside so close to the city of Paris for long? There, too, I found families treated as objects of official measures of assistance and control, rather than as people endowed with rights. They were families identified only in negative terms: "*asocial*", "*maladjusted*", "*difficult*", "*problem families*"; even the more or less neutral label "*homeless*" had finally been taken from them.

Then came the years when the ATD Movement began to spread around the world, and my travels took me across Europe and to other continents. Everywhere I found the same denial of the right of the poorest to inhabit the earth and to exist in the eyes of others: homeless families in major North American cities who had their identity as a family wiped out by being crowded together in « Welfare hotels », mothers and children on one side, and fathers on the other. Families in Latin America who had fled the countryside and famine to cling to the edge of a ravine near the capital. In some of these cases, births and deaths were not even recorded, since people should not dwell in these places where no residence was allowed. When tropical rains swept a cabin into the abyss, the children in it would have lived and died without ever having existed officially. Nor did the families living on marshland on the edge of a bay somewhere in the West Indies exist in national records or international statistics. They were committing an offence by being there at all, and when the bulldozer showed up to prepare the site for another purpose, nobody would ever know how many hundreds of huts and humble possessions were being reduced to dust. Nobody would know where these families, unwanted anywhere, were now roaming or hiding.

Nor would anyone ever know what had become of the poorest and sickest inhabitants of sub-Saharan villages ravaged by river blindness. Disabled for life by the disease of onchocercosis, they were temporarily forced into exile with their neighbors onto more arid land which could not provide enough to feed them. What had become of the most fragile among these families who, unlike their neighbors, were unable to return to their villages, once these had been freed from the disease by a vast international sanitary program? We know that some were pushed farther into the bush, that others sought refuge in town: blind men asking for alms on Friday at the mosque, children living

on the street...

What do we really know about these children who in all developing continents earn their own living, beg or steal their subsistence or sometimes that of their entire family? What do we know about the children who spend the night on the edge of a slaughterhouse and at dawn comb the city's refuse? Should we not admit that they represent the inevitable, final outcome of the inhuman refusal to let the very poor inhabit the earth, an outcome for which we, in rich countries, are perhaps not always willing to recognize our joint responsibility?

Is there any fundamental difference between the extreme poverty of those who are deprived of their rights in distant countries and the deep poverty endured by a family in Ile-de-France (Paris' region)? I am thinking of a family who in 1987 had spent the last four years huddled under the ruins of a derelict house in an abandoned, isolated village at the edge of the airport at Roissy-en-France. They had no recognized address, no work, no voting cards and no possibility of sending their children to school, yet they were hounded for squatting and the airport was demanding 10,000 francs in damages. The family was on record with the police, but did not even exist on the records of the school or housing authorities. In an effort to hasten their departure, the local authorities cut off their only water supply, which was in a nearby cemetery.

In short, the poorer people are, then the smaller is their hut, the flimsier their shelter, the more cramped and unhealthy their shack in the most vermin-infested part of a shantytown, the farther they are from any source of water, however stagnant and polluted, and the lower they must bend in order to enter the crowded living space where overpopulation rules out any possibility of a harmonious existence. Insecure living conditions generate unstable relationships; friendship among neighbors, love between couples and between parents and children become equally insecure. This is how disorder and violence spring up and how, little by little, through their misery, families become undesirable, a source of repugnance and fear for the surrounding society. If they haven't already taken flight, they are hounded down and they have no chance of gaining any right of occupancy, however temporary or precarious.

For the poor who have become homeless, at the end of the road lie the wastelands, the woods, the temporarily unoccupied city fringes where the bulldozer may well arrive tomorrow. At the end of the road we find squatting, illegal occupation, and for children, nights spent under the stalls of a market or in a cinema entrance and days devoted to surviving on the streets, in the carparks, or on the beaches of the big cities.

The end of the road is, above all, this slipping from an identity that is already negative to a kind of non-identity, an administrative non-existence, the disappearance from every register, every set of statistics. Human beings, whole families then take on the appearance of ghosts: they have been seen somewhere, but nobody remembers where exactly nor how many they were. For them it is the end of all hope of still being among

those who once proclaimed themselves to be « We, the peoples of the United Nation, » that international community which chose the achievement of human rights as its ultimate goal. The loss of identity also sounds the death knell of any hope that, because one exists in the eyes of the world, one may join forces with others, in order to fight for one's rights together. The poorer people are, the more they are deprived of the right to inhabit the earth, and the more they need to join forces across continents. Yet, unfortunately, the poorer they are, the fewer rights they have, the less free they are to unite in common struggle. Without identity, they are deprived of a history of their own and excluded from the history of their people. They are prohibited from belonging to any group which, in the name of its past and present history, would have a common goal to pursue in the future.

These are the facts; but what is most important is the suffering that lurks behind these facts. Extreme poverty, since it cuts out all human rights, is an unbearable waste of human intelligence, inventiveness, hope and love. It means throwing away an incalculable capital of men, women and children who are banned from all justice, all administration, all communities and all democracy. And above all, behind the silence of our records and our statistics lie children mutilated in their heart and spirit, young people condemned to despair, adults driven to doubt their very humanity and human dignity.

For the very poor tell us over and over again that man's greatest misfortune is not to be hungry or unable to read, nor even to be without work. The greatest misfortune of all is to know that you count for nothing, to the point where even your suffering is ignored. The worst blow of all is the contempt on the part of your fellow citizens. For it is that contempt which stands between a human being and his rights. It makes the world disdain what you are going through and prevents you from being recognized as worthy and capable of taking on responsibility. The greatest misfortune of extreme poverty is that for your entire existence you are like someone already dead.

II. PEOPLE WHO STRUGGLE TO CLAIM THEIR DIGNITY

It was in rich countries that we rediscovered the extreme poverty which humiliates people, destroys their identity and turns their existence into unending heartbreak. It is true that for several decades, the West had seemed not to have recognized that extreme poverty still existed within its borders. The very poor had apparently become so insignificant a minority that society at large had wiped them out of its memory. Yet it is also true that during the same period some men and women have continued to bear witness to a Fourth World, trapped at the bottom of the social ladder. They were the ones who refused society's forgetfulness. As citizens of their times they have brought about progress in two ways. First, we owe them the redefinition of poverty in terms of human rights. Second, they forged new links with the poorest, based on the recognition of both their hardships and their hopes.

It is obvious that our countries can no longer claim the success they thought they had

achieved in ensuring inalienable human rights. Yet, in recognizing their failure, they have made significant progress in understanding the link between extreme poverty and the indivisibility of those rights. Let us recall here the definition adopted by the French Economic and Social Council in its report, "*Chronic Poverty and Lack of Basic Security*", on February 11, 1987: "*Situations of extreme poverty result from of a series of insecurities which persistently affect several areas of existence, jeopardizing a person's chances of reassuming their responsibilities and regaining their rights independently in the foreseeable future.*"

This definition is a milestone and, while there is still a long way to go before it will be reflected in political thinking and policy-making, its very existence represents an advance which cannot be undone.

Moreover, the establishment of more and more ties of solidarity and partnership with families who had ceased to count in the eyes of their country also seems to represent a remarkable step forward. Without it, we could have gone on for a long time ignoring both the suffering caused by the absence of all rights and the obstinate refusal of individuals and families to be deprived of an honorable identity. By continuing to reduce them to silence, we would have failed to understand that their very existence is a cry for help. The renewal of these special links, even if for the moment they are maintained only by ordinary citizens and their non-governmental organizations, means that our renewed efforts to establish human rights must begin with the poorest. We are bound to do so because they, who have been cheated of their identity as human beings entitled to rights and liberties, are the ones who have most to teach us. Furthermore, we now realize that they themselves are our most important allies in this new struggle, because they are the first to resist their exclusion and to understand the conditions under which it can be reversed.

In the member states of the European Community, when families are deprived to the point where they can no longer buy shoes for their children or detergent to wash their clothes, their acts of resistance often remain invisible to our eyes. How many times have I met men who no longer dare to present themselves at the employment agency because even their appearance precluded them from obtaining a job? I have seen them working for a pittance at filthy, illegal jobs (cleaning, digging, carrying loads far beyond their strength, rat-extermination...), crying with shame unknown even to their families. And do we realize how much courage it takes to endure the inspections and the unending question about one's own and one's family's private life which dependence on social assistance entails? Who, among the poorest, has escaped feeling that no one believes him? What man in deepest poverty has never been accused of playacting, what woman has never been told that she was making up a story when going through the inevitable administrative process to receive aid? What parents have never been suspected of having ulterior motives in not sending their children to school, when in fact they could not give them the breakfast they needed to walk the four kilometers to school from their rundown housing estate deprived of a school bus service? What children from the Fourth World

have never been called liars for telling the teacher that they stayed home to mind the smaller children because their mother was sick? What children in poverty have never been overcome with shame, because a teacher took it on herself to hand them clean clothes in front of their classmates?

Yet, sooner or later, the children return to school, the men go back to their distasteful jobs and the women turn again to the social services or the parish aid society. Even if nerves occasionally crack, or if some turn in despair to violence or drink, in no other section of society have I ever witnessed such an urge to do the right thing, so many failures for want of knowing how to do things right and so many efforts not to remain beaten for long. How can these families, with their obscure existence, devoid of any outward sign of dignity, owning nothing and finding it impossible to maintain any family or community life, avoid resigning themselves to despair and hatred? Knocked down and humiliated to such a degree, why do they not give up altogether? Yet every day in the run-down apartment buildings, the streets, the housing estates of the underclass, we see people get on their feet again, families take a new lease on life and parents face up to their difficulties again. To the rare onlookers who express admiration, they say that they do it *"for the children."* In a lower voice some will add: "We are human beings after all."

Are things any different for the very poor in developing countries? So much has been said about apathetic populations who could not see where their interests lay, imprisoned as they were in cultures opposed to change. On our part, we have been witnesses to the contrary far too often to believe that human beings anywhere, however poor they are, would be capable of resigning themselves to extreme poverty as their natural lot. True, we have seen families and entire villages hanging on to their ancient farming tradition which exhausted the body without providing enough food to eat. Yet, they did so not because they were opposed to change, but because no one guaranteed them that change would not plunge them even deeper into irrevocable poverty. We have seen mothers in sub-Saharan shantytowns fill the mouths of their newborn babies with pap early in the morning to last them through the day, while they walked barefoot for miles themselves to find some sort of work in town. These mothers refused outright to leave their children in orphanages, because they knew only too well that they would never get them back again.

As one woman told me, *"The poor have to work without skills or trades. And they live only because they don't want to die. But that isn't really living life, for life isn't like that..."* So what does she think life ought to be? *"Life is never having to beg; it is being respected and being addressed with dignity. When my boss insults me, I don't say anything. I just remind myself that the hand that gives is always above the hand that receives. I stay quiet for my children's sake. But my boss isn't God. For God knows who I am."*

The international seminar on *"The Family, Extreme Poverty and Development,"* held at UNESCO in June 1987, asserted that the poorest around the world stayed alive

essentially through their own efforts and through the support of their fellow citizens and small local NGOs who were on their side. It was this, perhaps clumsy, ineffective, empty-handed but infinitely persistent refusal to give up, which was proclaimed before the major inter-governmental agencies. The same seminar proclaimed the absolute necessity of respect for all human rights and the extent to which they are all interdependent in the lives of the poorest everywhere in the world. Even if in theory they have political freedom, the illiterate, the long-term unemployed and families entirely dependent on welfare are politically helpless in industrialized countries. Similarly, freedom of opinion, of expression and association are a dead letter for families who live on the edge of deserts in developing countries, overwhelmed by sickness and poverty and getting a meal only once every two or three days.

The existence of the poorest on all continents proves that to grant civil and political liberties without providing the practical means to exercise them may well be worse than to deny them altogether. To grant them simply means to deepen the isolation of the poorest and to humiliate them for not behaving like free citizens, when that is what they are entitled to be. It is a way of binding them hand and foot to the whims of those who have the wherewithal to exercise their freedom. Similarly, to see oneself arbitrarily allotted from above a meager income, any kind of unpleasant work, any miserable housing, without being in a position to voice one's opinion, to make one's own choices, to negotiate or to refuse an offer, means being reduced to the status of a second-class citizen. In one capital city in Western Europe all families who are without employment, without resources or who are receiving the minimum guaranteed income from the State are relegated to the derelict quarters of the city. Elsewhere, authorities automatically split up homeless families or force them to move into apartments without proper sanitation which are unfit for family life. What is the meaning of the freedom to choose one's residence or the freedom of movement for people in extreme poverty, whether they live in the North or the South?

Judging from what these groups teach us, the very poor pay for the rights which are accorded to them piecemeal with an increased load of humiliation, dependence and contempt. *"Could they not maintain the wells and tractors that we provided?"*; we ask, forgetting that in regions ravaged by famine we also need to provide the people with the adequate means of making new ways of agricultural development their own and to offer them the chance to make their own choices. We readily think that *"those people have no political sense"*, when inhabitants of the poorest parts of European cities abstain from voting. This is an accusation that the people themselves cannot answer, for in their areas the schools have been under-equipped and overcrowded for generations. Many adults cannot read the political platforms; in any case, their opinion is not asked for when these platforms are being drawn up.

For the poorest, it appears that only a campaign to have all human rights respected can safeguard their human dignity. Is it not precisely our preoccupation with the achievement of now one category of human rights, now another, that has made us lose

sight of what ought to be the very purpose and *raison d'être* of all these rights, namely, the recognition of the inalienable dignity of every human being? What other reason or excuse can there be for our societies allowing some of their members to be exposed to a destructive misery beyond poverty and life's uncertainties and failing to mobilize all their resources to put an end to that disgrace?

III. A VISION OF HUMANITY AS THE SOURCE OF RESPONSIBILITIES AND RIGHTS.

Presenting extreme poverty as an issue to be taken up by the defenders of human rights was, as we have said, an innovation. It did not fail to surprise the public in our democratic, Western countries. The experience of the French Economic and Social Council made that clear to us. In line with its terms of reference, the Council chose to consider and give the government its opinion on an economic and social reality which the nation was finding increasingly disturbing. Logically, its analysis led it to ask whether the inalienable rights guaranteed by the Constitution were actually being applied; of necessity, the existence of extreme poverty called into question the proper functioning and even the very authenticity of our democracy. The Economic and Social Council therefore called for further consideration of the matter and an improvement of the guarantees offered. Today, we can see just how profoundly that demand upsets certain well-established ways of defining and defending human rights.

In France, no doubt, as in the rest of the European Community, we were entitled to feel reasonably satisfied with our achievements in implementing the 1948 Universal Declaration. In the field of civil and political liberties, in particular, we felt we had successes to our credit which were above all reproach. And then out of the very heart of our democracies these questions suddenly arose: For whom had these liberties been recognized? Why not for everybody? How can we explain the outlaw situation of the very poor? And if they continue to be excluded, have we really moved on from a society of privileges to a society of human rights? The Economic and Social Council affirmed, proof in hand, that the poor were still with us; but it also demonstrated that the most deprived of our fellow citizens, because of what we were putting them through, were witnesses to all our deviations from our convictions, our ideals, and our declarations.

Here was a disconcerting conclusion which raised another disconcerting question: Had we been right in asserting that there existed a certain hierarchy among rights which had all been declared equally inalienable? Was it reasonable to distinguish civil and political liberties as having priority and being in some way nobler than other rights? Were they really easier to implement than economic, social and cultural rights, the state supposedly merely having to abstain from interfering in order to allow every citizen to enjoy them? Had we taken the right line in creating a division within a set of rights which our governments in the United Nations' General Assembly had declared indivisible and interdependent?

In the face of these questions, which were disturbing even for the most sincere defenders of human rights, we could not expect rapid changes. How could we change the course of history which had led countries to cross swords in the United Nations' Commission on Human Rights on the priority some wanted accorded to civil and political liberties and others to economic, social and cultural rights? In that forum, as in our national and European bodies, a consensus on dealing seriously with the topic of "extreme poverty and the indivisibility of human rights" remains difficult to achieve. At the rally of defenders of human rights held on the Plaza of Human Rights and Liberties in Paris on October 17, 1987, nearly one hundred thousand men and women, poor and better-off, from all backgrounds, did indeed declare that extreme poverty was a violation of human rights. Some fifty non-governmental organizations, of a variety of allegiances, came together that day to back the very poor, for whom October 17 is now a date which gives real significance to their sufferings and to their struggle. It was certainly a step forward, perhaps a new departure; yet, after this event, everything still remained to be done to strengthen awareness and translate the alliance with the unemployed, the illiterate, the indigent, and the homeless into concrete action.

This slow progress, inevitable as it may seem, is perhaps due in the first instance to our lack of experience of what life is really like for those whom excessive poverty reduces to inescapable dependence on the goodwill of others. Our society as a whole has lost contact with that experience and perhaps we no longer know what it means to have no concrete means of making oneself heard, of proclaiming one's existence, of demonstrating one's humanity and defending one's cause.

But if we were able for so long to ignore the experience and thought of an entire segment of humanity, including citizens of our own country, are we really serious about knowing the true basis for human rights? In the name of what definition of the human being does a person have absolute rights? On what basis can those rights be withdrawn? Are these not the basic questions addressed to our declarations and conventions by those who have nothing but their humanity and not a single visible supplementary achievement to offer in return for the rights granted? Why are we declared to be born equal and free? Since the rights recognized on that assumption are systematically denied to some, is it our opinion that there are sub-humans among us, human beings born or progressively led to be less equal, less free, less human than others? Does humanity produce its own refuse, as we have heard it said in some countries?

During the International Year of the Child, we raised a similar question regarding children's rights. No doubt, it was necessary to reaffirm that children have inalienable rights. But was it not even more necessary to remind ourselves of the reasons for that? Is the notion of the child we wish to defend unequivocal and carefully argued? Do we know the child, do we respect the child as such, for what children mean to humanity, today and tomorrow? Doesn't the everyday reality of children's lives in the Fourth World oblige us to ask that question, since our attitude and our behavior sometimes give the impression

that for us such children, to take the extreme view, should perhaps not come into the world at all?

"Seeing how our children are treated, what respect do you have for them, what respect do you have for us as parents endowed with rights?" That was the question later put by Fourth World families at the seminar on *"The Right of Families to Live in Dignity,"* organized at the Council of Europe in 1984. To go to the heart of the matter, what is our concept of the human being? That is the first question which people overcome by misery put to us. Furthermore, through their life experience, they challenge the concept which apparently enables us to ignore the indivisibility of their fundamental rights. We have seen how they demonstrate the interdependence of those rights. Yet, their anguish does not come so much from the mechanisms of that inter-dependence which imprison them in an existence virtually interwoven with unbearable deprivations. Their suffering, as we have said, stems far more from the indifference of the world around them which does not care to know or understand, although the fate of flesh and blood human beings is at stake. *"Aren't we human beings too?"*

That is an unsettling question for those who are prepared to listen, for it is dictated by a concept of the human person which the poor themselves refuse to relinquish. If we would only listen to them, they would remind us of what we appear to have forgotten : that « every man is a person », as our African friends put it. «Zo kwe zo,» and therefore human rights are to be defended not in the name of some principle of law but in the name of the human being.

We have seen how, against all probability, the refusal to be treated as something less than human springs up again and again in areas of extreme poverty. *"It isn't fair"...* How many times have we heard those words repeated like an age-old lamentation! *"Father, is it fair that they refuse me housing?"...* *"Father, it's true that I can't read but is it fair that at school they don't want to hear my views about my children?"...* *"Father, is it fair that they put me in the orphanage, because our shack in the shanty town burned down and because my mother has no place to live?"...* And far too often that question is followed by the heartrending observation: *"We are not dogs, after all".*

Is it not because we have forgotten that « every person is human beings » that we have left part of humanity without the means to demonstrate its dignity, its capacity for thought and its usefulness for others? In any case, it is in those terms that, as a priest, I am forced to put the question to myself and to my Church. My role is not first of all to find out whether or not the world is true to its declarations on human rights. My first duty is to do my share to ensure that our declarations and the way we apply them are in line with God's view of humanity. I need to ask myself if, for me, someone rendered unrecognizable by misery remains a full, intact human being, a child of God by birth. I must know if the way I try to uphold the rights of the poorest in my own life, in my priesthood, in my Church and in the world at large contributes to enlarging their liberty, their freedom to think, to believe, to act for themselves but also to act for the good of all.

Are my life, my actions, my words conveying to them the message that they are free and that they are capable of choosing to be privileged agents of divine as well as of human justice?

A Christian cannot conceive the human being other than as free, unique, and indispensable to the common purpose. For a Christian, there can be no such thing as losing your rights because you lack the resources to show yourself equal to others. A Christian's and the Church's first duty is not so much to defend human rights, much less to defend them in the name of the law. Our duty is to defend the human being by restoring their rights to those whose very humanity has been called into question.

The Gospel tells us that God has the right to know that all His children are loved by their brothers and sisters. And this is where the essential question comes: Whom should I love before all others? To whom should I first offer that overflowing love which will restore his condition as an equal child of God? In the view of the Gospel, there is no doubt whatsoever that it is to that man, that woman, that child, that family in the deepest deprivation, lacking our education, our culture and therefore our way of worshipping God. Those are the people whom we must treat as another self. For it is in them that the rights of God are violated because we no longer recognize them as our brothers and sisters. Dare I add that all the declarations of human rights made in modern times seem to me to be an interpretation, a reflection of what Jesus Christ lived and continues to live to fully? The Gospel, perhaps better than any of our treaties and declarations, teaches us the indivisibility of rights in the name of that indivisibility of humanity itself, which at certain points in our history we called fraternity.

Moreover, couldn't all churches, all religions, all people of goodwill be unified around this mission of recognizing every person as a brother or sister, defending each person for the sake of his or her human condition, and restoring the rights to the poorest simply because they are human? Who would not adhere to the exhortation: *do unto others as you would have them do unto you*? Is fraternity not what all people seek and what all people equally need?

All people of goodwill are brought face to face with their God, with their convictions and beliefs, when they come into contact with extreme poverty. Who can accept that the father of a family should be unable to read and write or that a poor man, especially a young one, should be condemned to unemployment for lack of education? No one can admit that the mother of a large family should be without the resources to take real care of her health, that she should not have the money to feed her children herself. No one with a heart can allow children to be humiliated in school because of the poverty of their home; nor can one accept that whole families should be obliged to live as if happiness was withheld from them forever.

Here we touch moreover on another aspect of our concept of each person as the holder of responsibilities to which he aspires and which confirm his quality as a human

being. Isn't it precisely in order to carry out these responsibilities with dignity that a person claims rights? The indivisibility of rights and responsibilities is also something that the poor of the world remind us of in practical, irrefutable terms. Surely it is by taking the poorest as partners and allies that we would have the best chance of advancing in our understanding of this indivisibility, not just in the life of each individual person but also in the overall existence of the whole of humanity. They truly demonstrate that it is not just the individual person but humanity as a whole which is indivisible, linked by one and the same destiny.

A new and unprecedented application of human rights would be achieved by taking the very poor as our partners. Beyond that, it would surely be a way of returning to the deepest sources of all our declarations which always remain only a provisional expression of humanity's never-ending effort to understand itself better, a conceptual approach which is destined to go on developing. No people, whatever its culture or history, can be excluded from that endeavor.

IV. RESTORING HUMAN RIGHTS TO THE VERY POOR: A UNIVERSAL MISSION

Experience in the field on every continent has taught us that trying to rediscover the sources of human dignity comes naturally to men and women of all cultures and beliefs. Wherever people are defenseless against the anguish and suffering of extreme poverty, wherever they are living in despair, unable to make themselves heard, there are other men and women prepared to put themselves at their service, ready to listen to their outcry, ready to respond to it and to make others listen too. Wherever there are entire populations gnawed by hunger, ashamed of their own ignorance, humiliated by unemployment, worn down by illness and weakened in body and soul by poverty, I have seen others join them in their struggle to obtain redress.

I am not talking here about government support, for it is precisely where that support is lacking, where official ties have been broken and people are excluded from both the national and international community, that fellow citizens rise to their feet, and local associations are created. These signs invariably appear when people have been excluded from our policies or budgets, when they only have one another to depend on. To disown human beings, families, a whole neighborhood or village in this way is intolerable, and when the public services have given up, ordinary people take the lead. This is a fact to which I have been witness since my childhood, in every country, rich or poor, and in every culture. When I ask people, be they Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Animist, Hindu or Buddhist, what makes them refuse to accept extreme poverty, their answers are not necessarily those dictated by their religion or precepts inculcated by tradition. Tradition throughout the world, generally regards alms or assistance as the proper response to those whose appearance has been altered beyond recognition by poverty.

The answers that I hear throughout the world are of a different nature: "*Human beings weren't created to live in such abjection*"... "*That isn't what God would have wanted*"... "*I cannot accept that they should have to live in shame*"... "*As a woman, I cannot allow other women to live in such poverty.*" The mother of a Muslim family somewhere in Africa told me: "*Have no fear, wherever people seem to have been completely abandoned, you will always find someone who comes to their aid.*" She added: "*When there is no one else left, there will always be a nun.*"

Why this persistence on the part of individuals, when the community has abandoned people who seem to have lost all signs of humanity? "Because they are human beings"... This is what I was told by the state social services in Poland: "*They have no jobs, they don't educate their children properly, and they take to drinking, but everybody can be saved.*" One may certainly question the severity of the measures taken by these services in order to "save" families living across the river in a run-down area of Warsaw, but at least we didn't hear the words "*beyond redemption,*" so often used in other places. The idea that people could be "beyond redemption" has been expressed in richer countries, perhaps in desperation. For is it not in these countries that aid has been attempted in all of its most constructive forms, both public and private, without ever managing to eliminate extreme poverty? However, it is in these countries too, that when all other bridges have broken down we find fellow citizens, often families hardly less poor than those they try to help, who will not accept that society should condemn any household to such an inhuman existence.

Indeed, in our experience, it is mainly the poorest themselves who are that last rampart, refusing to see one another sink into despair. But there are always people in the neighborhood who will support this refusal. These efforts, it's true, usually meet with little success, for how can abject poverty be combated simply by personal goodwill? What does count, however, is the idea that poverty "*isn't fair*", that people weren't created to be dehumanized in such a way. The universal feature of poverty is that people are deprived of the responsibilities and the fundamental rights usually acknowledged in their particular culture. And in every culture, on every continent, there are men and women who find it both abnormal and inhuman that entire segments of society remain defenseless against such extreme poverty, or even worse, that they should be excluded because they live in such deprivation. There are people everywhere who echo the feeling that the poorest have about themselves: "*It's not fair, for I'm a human being too.*"

This feeling explains the birth in the 1960's of what has become the "*Permanent Forum on Extreme Poverty,*" founded by the ATD Fourth World Movement. It brings together people from all over the world, allowing them to learn from each other's experiences. Nobody gives lectures or expounds theories. Each member tries, within the framework of his culture, his individual situation and his religious convictions, to support children, young people or families living in extreme poverty in his own country. People acting individually, soon are no longer alone. In the Forum they discover ways of establishing small non-governmental organizations within the community they are trying

to serve. That, too, is significant. We are not dealing with exceptional people here, but with ordinary citizens, capable of bringing together others who share their views as to what constitutes a human being.

One may certainly ask in what way this approach relates to human rights as we know them in our democracies. It is an approach which is making its way, quietly no doubt, and without so far provoking any spectacular changes in the national or international communities. Yet, UNESCO, UNICEF, the World Bank and the European Commission are represented at all the meetings where these defenders of humanity have a real voice. That does not mean that these major bodies are all at once automatically in a position to reach the poorest and change their situation. Yet they are all involved in a process which I believe is essential for real progress in the field of human rights. For it signifies a return to the source of all rights, a rediscovery of mankind, in particular of people deprived of the means to show that they too are human and capable of partnership in the context of the culture of their time and place.

It is true that in the Western countries we tend to regret the often limited importance attached to declarations and treaties in other parts of the world; but have we not been rather hasty in our desire to see all nations adhere to them, no matter what their history or their culture? Have we forgotten the time and experience that have been required in our own countries to build up nations sufficiently united to create democracies and thus embark on establishing equality and liberty for all? Was it wise to believe that only economic reasons could justify certain denials of human rights elsewhere, just as we take the view that only economic reasons could explain obvious failures to achieve full human rights in our countries? Could not the discovery that extreme poverty denies all rights, because it denies the human person, be used as an opportunity to take up the ideal of inalienable rights at its very source again, through co-operation between rich and poor nations and between all cultures?

Is this not the chance the very poor offer us to help re-focus all our struggles and to ask ourselves the real questions once again? They bring it home to us that the question is not what economic resources are available for the implementation of our declarations, but whether we believe that every person is worthy of assuming responsibilities for the good of others. That brings us to the issue of a person's right to share the responsibilities and the rights which the society he or she lives in confers on most of its members. Then the question of inalienable rights for all clearly arises. However, it is only at the end of an examination of the lives of the poorest that human rights can be fully recognized. Is that not an approach worth adopting, since history tells us that imposing human rights as a prerequisite poses a real problem in many cultures throughout the world?

This was the line of reflection followed at a seminar of the Forum meeting at UNESCO in 1987. The delegates underlined, in the very first place, the right of all people, in particular the very poor, to be recognized and to have proof that they are recognized as human beings, the right to have others join them to show fraternity by

sharing their life and their struggle. This is what we call "*human beings investing in humanity*": "*If you have lost faith because you have experienced so much neglect, I will come to your side and show you that you are my brother, my sister, worthy of confidence and responsibility.*"

It would seem that no culture can truly deny this investment by committed men and women in others whose confidence in their own abilities, in their identity and in the support of people around them has been shattered by extreme poverty. The extreme poverty which I myself have witnessed throughout my entire life is a slow and painful progression, where confidence in oneself and in people in general is ever more undermined, day by day. Every-where, North and South, the very poor are people with a long history of erosion of their self-confidence and their expectations of others, a history in which hopes are dashed, ever more suppressed with each passing year. Over the years, I have seen this experience gradually better understood all over the world.

Everyone can understand that if the humanity of the poorest is to be redeemed, the ultimate price must be in terms of our own human investment. Whoever believes in humanity can agree that the poorest have an absolute right to call on others to come personally to their aid. "*Humanity is a human being's own best cure*", as our friends in Africa would say. In the light of this perspective, all people, whatever their philosophies and beliefs, have a vocation and a mission to help the very poor. Could not such an awareness give new vigor and direction to our reflection and experimentation with regard to human rights? On this basis, rich and poor from the same country, and rich and poor people among all nations, would have the chance to meet on a more equal footing, and to discover the common heritage which justifies the great international declarations and conventions, and which alone can ensure genuine, common implementation of them. It is not so much education about human rights that the world needs but rather a joint inquiry into what makes for the indivisibility of human beings not only as individuals, but also as a body, necessarily united and jointly responsible for the human rights they grant one another.

For my part, I can say, in conclusion, that the poor have taught me an invaluable lesson about this comprehensive indivisibility. First of all, they taught me that we will not get anywhere in improving our understanding of extreme poverty by dividing it up along geographical lines. When we allow them to speak for themselves, they are much more concerned to tell us what unites them, namely the impossibility of being proud of their identity, of their history, the ban on belonging to any group which is not negative or even shameful. On every continent, they tell us that it is impossible for them to live as equals with other people, as long as these people continue to be unaware of who they are. The inexorable concentration of deprivations which makes life as a person and as a family impossible is, to my mind, the clearest indication of the indivisibility of the fundamental rights that must be attributed to them if we want them to be truly free.

More important still: people living in extreme poverty in all countries express their

conviction that living as a person, as a brother or sister, as a citizen implies being able to take on one's responsibilities. For them, fundamental rights have their true meaning and are truly achieved only when they enable people to be responsible beings, that is to say, workers re-recognized as such, parents capable of rearing their children, useful members of a community, men and women playing their part in the destiny of their country. The poorest teach us not only about the indivisibility of rights and responsibilities but also of the co-responsibility between individuals and between peoples which this indivisibility signifies. For the poorest in all countries, everyone has a personal share in the single mission of building a national and international community *"where our children can live," "where people would go hand-in-hand"...*, a mission which is conceivable in the light of every one of the faiths and beliefs represented in the United Nations.

Could it not be that, in the end, the future of human rights will depend on the poorest and the mission they wish to take on with us? To achieve these rights, a new alliance and new partners are offered to us. What a gift it would be to the world, if we were willing to accept them!

CHAPTER 3 EXTREME POVERTY AND HUMAN RIGHTS: INDIVISIBILITY FOUR TIMES

Charles Courtney

Charles Courtney is Professor of Philosophy at Drew University, New Jersey. He has been a supporter of the International Movement ATD Fourth World for 20 years and is the President of its U.S. branch.

INTRODUCTION

The main subject for this paper, like for the others in the volume, is Joseph Wresinski, the founder of the Fourth World Movement. But my paper deals with the subject in a different way. The other papers begin with his ideas, then show how they were applied to programs of action and go on to suggest how those ideas and programs could have wider application. My approach is to highlight some of Wresinski's ideas about poverty and the extremely poor and relate those ideas to some recent work on the philosophy of human rights. This might seem to be an unpromising approach since, although the philosophical literature on human rights is large and lively, one could read for a long time and not find a serious discussion of the relation between human rights and poverty. But I do not worry over a possible gap on the philosophical bookshelf. My strategy, rather, is first to listen to the philosophers to find out what problems they *do* wrestle with. Then I suggest that Wresinski may have something important to offer to the discussion.

The paper consists of two main sections. The brief survey in the first section of the paper reveals that on two basic issues, (1) the very conception of human rights and (2) whether human rights can or should be grounded in a concept of human nature, philosophers take widely divergent positions. The second section attempts to show that Wresinski has some insights that bear on those issues. In particular, I explore what he has to say about the indivisibility of humanity, community, the person, and human rights. Although indivisibility by itself does not provide a complete answer to the question of the nature of human rights or the relation between human rights and human nature, it can function (1) as a rule for exposing flaws in philosophies and the social policies that are derived from them and (2) as a goal for both thought and action. Because both the philosophers and Wresinski make constant reference to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, it is the *basso continuo* for the entire discussion.

I. A BRIEF REVIEW OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL LITERATURE ON HUMAN RIGHTS

After a long period of specialization in which academic philosophy lost touch with the public, it has in the last generation begun to take public issues seriously and to attempt to influence public opinion and policy. One example of the disconnection between philosophy and the general public is the January 1966 *Time* magazine essay entitled, “What (If Anything) to Expect From Today’s Philosophers.” The unnamed author says, “In a world of war and change, of principles armed with bombs and technology searching for principles, the alarming thing is not what philosophers say but what they fail to say.” Philosophers have become “relatively obscure academic technicians” and “contemporary philosophy looks inward at its own problems rather than outward at men [sic], and philosophizes about philosophy, not about life.”¹⁰ A sign of the tide turning was the founding in 1971 of the journal, “Philosophy and Public Affairs.” This journal, which deals with a broad spectrum of issues, has now taken its place among the most widely respected philosophy publications.

It is not surprising, then, that the philosophical literature about human rights is vast and growing rapidly. The wide interest in the subject, however, has not been matched by the emergence of a consensus concerning the justification or implication of human rights. One can agree, however, with Richard Rorty who, borrowing the term from Eduardo Rabossi, says that, “One of the shapes we have recently assumed is that of a human rights culture.”¹¹ Philosophers from many different schools and traditions are attempting to make sense of this theme that has come to define our time. This situation makes it possible to appreciate Hegel’s famous image for philosophy: “the owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk.” That is, philosophers, rather than creating institutions and meanings, reflect on and offer a conceptual understanding of what is already there to be thought about. In the next few pages I offer a brief sketch of some among the many ways that philosophers have thought about human rights in recent years.

Since everyone would agree that the adoption by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1948, of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (hereafter, Universal Declaration) is the single most important event in recent human rights history, I will organize my sketch of philosophical approaches to human rights around responses to that document. In a recent article, Michael Ignatieff, drawing on the book of my colleague Johannes Morsink,¹² notes that early in the drafting process delegates argued so fiercely about “the philosophical and metaphysical bases of rights” that the whole project was salvaged only when Eleanor Roosevelt, the chair, determined that they would be silent about those matters. The result is that “The Universal

¹⁰*Time* magazine, January 7, 1966, p. 24.

¹¹ Rorty, R., 1993, Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality, in Stephen Shute and Susan Hurley, editors, *On Human Rights: The Oxford Amnesty Lectures 1993*, New York, Basic Books, p. 115.

¹² Morsink, J., 1999, *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: Origins, Drafting, and Intent*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press.

Declaration enunciates rights; it doesn't explain why people have them."¹³ Some subsequent philosophers have attempted to provide philosophical and metaphysical justifications for human rights; others have taken the Universal Declaration as a starting point for reflections about the relations among the rights and about their practical applications. I will give examples of each approach.

Michael Perry, in his book of that title, argues that "the idea of human rights" is ineliminably religious. Perry holds that the Universal Declaration's recognition of "the inherent dignity . . . of all members of the human family" (Preamble) and its declaration that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights" (Article 1), embodies "the idea that *there is something about each and every human being, simply as a human being, such that certain choices should be made and certain other choices rejected; in particular, certain things ought not to be done to any human being and certain other things ought to be done for every human being.*"¹⁴ For Perry this "something about each and every human being, simply as a human being" is that each human being is sacred. He goes on to contend that, if it is not to be left hanging, the idea of human dignity must be linked with a religious tradition which includes answers to such questions as "Who are we? Where did we come from; what is our origin, our beginning? Where are we going; what is our destiny, our end?" His review of many such traditions leads him to the conclusion that "real moralities—the moralities that various human communities have actually lived—have always been cosmologically embedded."¹⁵ He finds wanting the attempts to find secular alternatives to the concept of "sacred," for example, Ronald Dworkin's "inviolable." Such concepts provide no compelling reason protect dignity with a set of human rights.

All this being said, Perry acknowledges that he has made only half a case, a negative one, namely, that secularism cannot provide a justification of human rights. The positive case for a religious grounding of human rights still needs to be worked out. Perry's claim is that the full meaning of "human dignity" is encompassed only in a religious view.¹⁶

Jack Donnelly, one of the most prolific and respected writers on our subject, takes a different approach in his book, *Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice*.¹⁷ He does not see the need "to provide a direct philosophical justification of any particular list of human rights" because "there is a remarkable international normative consensus on the

¹³Michael Ignatieff, 1999, Human Rights: The Midlife Crisis, in *The New York Review of Books*, Vol. XLVI, No. 9, May 20, p. 58.

¹⁴Michael Perry, 1998, *The Idea of Human Rights: Four Inquiries*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 13.

¹⁵Perry, op. cit., pp. 15-16.

¹⁶Ignatieff, commenting on Perry, points out that religions have often provided sacred reasons for violating human rights. He prefers making moral reciprocity the heart of a secular defense of human rights.

¹⁷Donnelly, 1989, *Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press. The quotations that follow are from pages 12 to 23.

list of human rights contained in the so-called International Bill of Rights.”¹⁸ Nor does Donnelly construct or defend a theory of human nature. He says that “we can go a long way in dealing with most of the dominant contemporary theoretical and practical controversies connected with human rights before issues of philosophical anthropology intrude decisively.”

Donnelly contends that the International Bill “is based on a plausible and attractive theory of human nature,” the core of which is an affirmation of the inherent dignity of the human person. He thinks it is possible, and sufficient for his purposes, to develop from this affirmation a concept of a human right. He says that “human rights are special class of rights, the rights that one has simply because one is a human being.” No empirical assessment of needs is required as the basis of human rights. Human rights have their source in our “*moral nature*.” For Donnelly this nature is not fixed once and for all. It is “a *social project*” which emerges from “the interaction of natural endowment, individual action, and social institutions Human rights specify a structure of social practices to achieve a particular realization of human potential.” Any given definition of human nature is, according to Donnelly, “a moral posit, a moral account of human possibility.”

Donnelly says that the concept of human rights that he has drawn from the Universal Declaration “is compatible with many but not all theories of human nature.” Which ones would be incompatible? Those that, although they may have an venerable and honored view of human dignity, define the individual in terms of status or role rather than simply as a human being. His examples, discussed separately, are traditional societies, communism, corporatism, development dictatorships, and communitarianism. He concludes this chapter-long discussion by saying that “only liberalism, understood as a regime based on the political right to equal concern and respect, is a political system based on human rights.”¹⁹

John Rawls is an interesting counterpart to Donnelly because as a representative of political liberalism he proposes an interpretation of human rights which he thinks can be shared by hierarchical societies. His seminal book, *A Theory of Justice*,²⁰ defined justice as fairness and portrayed a just society as one that is constructed by a set of formal procedures, not requiring first principles or a theory of human nature. But since the theory of justice as fairness is worked out with reference to “a hypothetically closed and self-sufficient liberal democratic society and covers only political values and not all of

¹⁸ The International Bill of Human Rights” consists of three documents: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966). The International Bill entered into force in 1976 upon ratification of 35 United Nations Member States. The United States of America is not one of them.

¹⁹Donnelly, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

²⁰Rawls, J., 1971, *A theory of Justice*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press.

life”,²¹ the question of human rights lifts the discussion to a more general level which Rawls calls that of the law of peoples, law which applies to “international” relations. The constructivist view holds at this level as well, for, according to Rawls, “human rights as we have described them . . . do not depend on any particular comprehensive moral doctrine or philosophical conception of human nature, such as, for example, that human beings are moral persons and have equal worth, or that they have particular moral and intellectual powers that entitle them to these rights. This would require a quite deep philosophical theory that many if not most hierarchical societies might reject as liberal or democratic, or in some way distinctive of the Western political tradition and prejudicial to other cultures.”

Rawls says “that basic human rights express a minimum standard of well-ordered political institutions for all peoples who belong, as members in good standing, to a just political society of peoples.” This formulation contains two limitations that show how Rawls’s liberalism differs from Donnelly’s. First, Rawls says that human rights pertain to those who are members in good standing in a just political society; for Donnelly, they apply to all humans simply because they are human. Rawls later says that human rights have universal application and are to be distinguished from the rights of democratic citizenship, but his constructivist approach never allows him to speak of human rights other than in the context of the law of peoples. The second limitation in Rawls’s formulation sheds some light on this issue. The “minimum standard” established by human rights assures “the right to life and security, to personal property, and the elements of the rule of law, as well as the right to a certain liberty of conscience and freedom of association, and the right to emigration.” In a clarifying note Rawls goes on to distinguish “human rights proper” (he mentions Articles 3-18 of the Universal Declaration) from others that state “liberal aspirations” (Article 1) or “presuppose specific kinds of institutions” (Articles 22 and 23). Donnelly, in contrast, accepts all of the articles of the Universal Declaration and insists on their indivisibility.

This brief discussion does not do justice to the complexity of Rawls’s argument, but it does exhibit significant differences between two philosophers who claim a liberal heritage. Rawls appears to be a Liberal with an English lineage. Donnelly is best understood as related to the Enlightenment of the European Continent.

Finally, Richard Rorty, in the article quoted above, offers yet another appreciation of human rights. He wants to promote “the human rights culture” because it combats the division between us and them, a distinction which contrasts the genuine humans and those who are “animal,” “children,” or “nonmale.”²² Rorty wants an inclusive world in which people are sympathetic rather than hostile, in which they support rather than harm each other. But he says that we are mistaken if we think that we can contribute to such a

²¹Rawls, J., 1999, *The Law of Peoples*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press. The quotations are from p. 44 and pp. 68-70.

²²Rorty, op. cit., pp. 113-114.

world by seeking to know the distinctive attribute(s) that we all share as humans. He knows his Plato, his Aristotle, his Kant, and his Hegel and does not think that any of them delivered the knowledge promised. In fact, by giving primacy to reason and knowledge, these “foundationalists” have contributed to our moral predicament. Moreover, even if such knowledge were available, Rorty denies that it would make any practical difference. A pragmatist, he wants results, so he says that “the best, and probably the only, argument for putting foundationalism behind us is . . . [that] it would be more efficient to do so.”²³

Rorty’s alternative is a “sentimental education,” which would consist mainly of telling long, sad stories of those unlike us, so that we will be induced “to tolerate, and even to cherish, powerless people—people whose appearance or habits or beliefs at first seemed an insult to our own moral identity, our sense of the limits of permissible human variation.” Stories can do what knowledge can never do—bring about “the continual refreshment and re-creation of the self, through interaction with selves as unlike itself as possible.”

So Rorty also is a son of the Enlightenment, although a strange one. He affirms Enlightenment humanistic ideals, and those of earlier “prophets,” but he wants to dethrone reason. Neither an anti-rationalist nor a romantic, he calls us to use our minds and hearts to deal with the contingent, historical situation staring us in the face. He does not quarrel with the list of rights in the Universal Declaration, nor quibble about its language. He is no doubt glad that the Universal Declaration has contributed to creating “the human rights culture,” but he probably worries that its friends will make it an object of reverence and fail to bring about actual change. For him, one Universal Declaration is enough; it is more important now to have 10,000 edifying stories. In the meantime, Rorty’s vocation apparently is to jibe at philosophers so that they will take a different tack.

This brief survey has dealt with four thinkers; any of two dozen others could have been chosen. My reading in this field has convinced me that: (1) human rights, and the Universal Declaration in particular, raises the question of human unity and diversity in new ways; (2) there is as yet no consensus about the philosophical status of human rights concepts; and (3) philosophers can contribute in two ways: (a) by clarifying central human rights concepts and (b) by tracking the dynamic relation between concept and application. In the next section of this paper, I will work at the first task by considering several ways in which “indivisibility” pertains to human rights.

II. EXTREME POVERTY AND THE INDIVISIBILITY OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Now the reader will understand my title, for in this section I will deal with “indivisibility” four times: the indivisibility of humanity, the indivisibility of community,

²³Rorty, *op. cit.*, pp. 122 and 133-134.

the indivisibility of the person, and the indivisibility of human rights. The Universal Declaration will figure more or less prominently each time. My hope is that the four reflections will build on each other so as to provide an increasingly complete picture, a coherent set of concepts that can be connected to making concrete social policy.

II.1. The Indivisibility of Humanity

It was the enormity of World War II (1939-45) that prompted the founding of the United Nations (1945) and the writing of the Universal Declaration (1948). The second plank of the Preamble of UDHR begins, “Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind . . .” The prime example of disregard and contempt was the Nazi program of destroying Jews, gypsies, and the physically and mentally disabled so as to assure the purity and dominance of the allegedly superior Aryan race. The UN and the UDHR exist in order to prevent the recurrence of such an atrocity.

Because the drafters of the Universal Declaration thought that the unity of humanity had been threatened by the ideologies of World War II, they insisted on writing a “universal” declaration, one that would apply to all human beings. Of course, they were not the first to see humankind as a unity. But it is also true that the indivisibility of humanity is precarious both in concept and in reality.

The Greeks have given us some of the most exalted human ideals. But they also created the word “barbarian,” meaning those who did not speak Greek and whose speech was, therefore, a senseless string of “bar, bar, bar.” Aristotle, who wrote brilliant and enduring treatises on ethics and politics, accepted slavery. There is no indication that he sensed contradiction or even tension when, in his discussion of friendship, he penned this portentous passage: “Master and slave have nothing in common, since a slave is a tool with a soul, while a tool is a slave without a soul. In so far as he is a slave, then there is no friendship with him. But there is friendship with him in so far as he is a human being.”²⁴

Latin culture as well is ambiguous about the indivisibility of humanity. Of course, Terence said “homo sum: humani nihil a me alienum puto” (I am a man: nothing that relates to man do I deem alien to me.). But there is also the saying, “lupus est homo homini” (man is a wolf to his fellow-man). And the Renaissance humanist, Erasmus, said “homo homini aut deus aut lupus” (man is to man either a god or a wolf). Taken together, these saying suggest that, although at some level we know that we are all human, we are prone, if it suits our interest, to treat others as different (and in the process run the risk of losing our own humanity).

²⁴Aristotle, 1985, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin, Indianapolis, Hackett, p. 229.

Isaiah Berlin, the recently deceased and much celebrated historian of ideas, asserts that the revolt of Romanticism, which became “articulate in the second third of the eighteenth century, principally in Germany, has shaken the foundations of the old, traditional establishment, and has affected European thought and practice profoundly and unpredictably . . . is perhaps the largest shift in European consciousness since the Reformation.”²⁵ According to his biographer, Michael Ignatieff, Berlin held that Romanticism’s glorification of individual creativity, whether in art or politics, “helped to fracture the idea of a single human species whose members were equally entitled to the same forms of moral consideration.” He quotes Berlin as follows: “The division of mankind into two groups—men proper, and some other, lower, order of beings, inferior races, inferior cultures, subhuman creatures, nations or classes condemned by history—is something new in human history. It is a denial of common humanity—a premise upon which all previous humanism, religious and secular, had stood.” Ignatieff continues his exposition and interpretation this way: “The curse of the twentieth century, Berlin argued, has been that both of its major utopias—Hitler’s and Stalin’s rejected the very idea of the indivisibility of the human species. A communist true believer did not even attempt to persuade a bourgeois or aristocrat of the truth of communist principles: they were class enemies, to be re-educated or disposed of. Likewise, fascists did not begin to reason with Jews, gypsies or other racial enemies. They were to be extirpated as vermin. Romanticism’s denial that all human beings were everywhere the same could lead ultimately to the denial that they deserved to exist.”²⁶

Still experiencing the aftershock of World War II, those who created the United Nations wanted to mend the fracture of humanity. The UN Charter begins with the words, “We the peoples of the United Nations . . . have resolved to combine our efforts.”²⁷ The first plank of the “Preamble” of the Universal Declaration speaks of the dignity and rights of “all members of the human family” and the following section proclaims that the Universal Declaration is “a common standard for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society . . . shall strive . . . to promote respect for these rights.”²⁸ The words “all” and “every” are there to be a direct counter to those who would divide humanity. The “we” is without qualification. These documents are written by representatives of all of humanity in behalf of an undivided humanity.

“Each” and “all” are complementary. “Each” accents the dignity of each individual. Accordingly, many of the specific human rights affirm the freedom of the

²⁵Berlin, I., 1998, *The Apotheosis of the Romantic Will*, in *The Proper Study of Mankind*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, p. 554.

²⁶Ignatieff, M., 1998, *Isaiah Berlin: A Life*, New York, Henry Holt, p. 248. The Berlin quotation is from his 1990 *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, London, John Murray, 1990, pp. 179-80.

²⁷United Nations Department of Public Information, 1993, *Charter of the United Nations*, New York, pp. 1-2.

²⁸United Nations Department of Public Information, 1993, *Human Rights: The International Bill of Human Rights*, New York, p. 4.

individual from coercion and oppression. “All” connects with the idea of “the human family” and accents the common human condition. The “accident” of being born now rather than then or here rather than there should not obscure the fact that we are all born into families and that if humanity is indivisible it makes sense to speak of “the human family.” There are many differences among us, but they all take their place with a common humanity. Hannah Arendt put “each” (individual) and “all” (common) together well when she said, “We are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live.”²⁹ We are the same in that we are unique, and each of us deserves to be treated as one of the family.

Joseph Wresinski’s contribution to the French commemoration of the Bicentennial of the French Revolution was to write an essay called, “The Very Poor, Living Proof of the Indivisibility of Human Rights” (reproduced as Chapter 2 in this volume). He gives examples from his own life and from his lifetime of standing with the poorest of how society calls into question the humanity of the poorest. They are called names, they are excluded, and worst of all, they are simply ignored. Laws are made and agencies are set up as if the poorest did not exist. Faced with this exclusion, the poorest cry out: “It isn’t fair.” “We are not dogs, after all.” “Aren’t we human beings too?” Wresinski’s argument is that exclusion of the poorest raises the question of the indivisibility of humanity just as much as the more notorious ideologies of our century.

His experience with the poorest leads him to offer a concept of the human person, namely, that “*every person is [a] human being.*” But we may ask whether he has said anything meaningful. Don’t we expect a concept to tell us *what* something is? The philosophers discussed in the Introduction decided not to spell out the content of the human because such work would be (1) too difficult, (2) lacking in universality, or (3) not necessary for considering the application of human rights. Perhaps Wresinski, not a professional philosopher, doesn’t understand the nature of a concept. For we might agree that every person is a human being, but still be in the dark as to *what* human being is.

But perhaps Wresinski has done more than it appears at first. He would agree, of course, that it is important to try to fill out the concept of the human with some content. But he would say that his “concept” should function as a principle logically prior to all specific definitions of the human. That is, whatever content is given to the idea of the human must be applicable to all persons. If it is not, that view of the human is untrue no matter how admirable the content is. One thinks here of Leibniz’ adage that truth is more likely to lie in philosophers’ affirmations than their denials; perhaps his point has its most weighty moral application right here. The point of the distinction between principle and content can be made in another way. We can assume that the content of any definition of the human will include all of the best qualities. The function of the principle is to require that whatever is claimed by the definer and the definer’s community will be claimed for all humans. The principle that “every person is a human being” allows us to

²⁹Hannah Arendt, 1958, *The Human Condition*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, p. 8.

know, before even looking at the particular content, that any definition which fails to be unqualifiedly universal is false.

Wresinski's point is echoed by Isaiah Berlin in his 1959 lecture, "European Unity and its Vicissitudes." Ignatieff points out that although Berlin affirmed that there is such a thing as a human nature, his list of features "was bare and to the point." He claimed only that we share the same body and capacity to feel pain, and that we are moral beings. Without knowing the whole content of the human, we can recognize the inhuman when we encounter it. Ignatieff presents Berlin's version of the "principle" is: "to regard human beings as vermin was to reason from demonstrably false premises." Ignatieff continues his exposition by reporting that Berlin thought it was clear "where ideas of racial superiority and theories of the dictatorship of the proletariat, these twin denials of human universality, were bound to lead. The human race had at last performed all the necessary experiments: it was no longer possible to deny that mankind must either respect the universality of the species or perish altogether."³⁰ Berlin and Wresinski share the same principle and the same logic. Wresinski's contribution is to insist that the "quieter" denial of human universality, namely, the exclusion of the poorest, also raises the questions of the legitimacy of concepts of the human and of even the survival of the species.

II.2. The Indivisibility of Community

In the preceding section the idea of "the human family" from the Universal Declaration was used to argue that all conceptions of *what* is human must apply to all persons. This section will use the idea of family as the basis for some reflections on *how* we are together.

Our very being requires human togetherness. Every human being has a mother and a father. In order for there to be a new human being, two people must come together. Does the possibility of cloning provide a counterexample? Not really, because whereas normal conception requires only two people, the highly sophisticated and delicate process of cloning requires the involvement of many more people. Moreover, each of us comes helpless into this world. If we are to live beyond birth, others, biological family or not, must give us care. And the period of time for this intensive care is much longer for humans than for other animals. Even the strongest advocate of the independence of the individual must admit that at the beginning and for a long time afterward each of us is deeply dependent on others. "Human family" is more than just a nice phrase.

The special needs of children were recognized by the United Nations in the 1959 "Declaration of the Rights of the Child" and in the 1989 "Convention on the Rights of the Child." The Declaration states that "the child, by reason of . . . physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care." The goal is "to ensure to the maximum

³⁰Ignatieff, *op. cit.*, pp. 249-250.

extent possible the survival and development of the child” (Convention, Article 6). States are called on to see that the goal is reached, but there is ample recognition of the primary role of parents, relatives, and those closest to the child. Principle 2 of the Declaration indicates that the development envisaged is indeed comprehensive: “The child . . . shall be given opportunities and facilities . . . to develop physically, mentally, morally, spiritually and socially in a healthy and normal manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity.”

The Declaration and Convention make it clear that if the child develops into a full member of society it is because of the efforts of many others working together. The Universal Declaration, in contrast, presumes that development has taken place and speaks for the most part of the rights of adults. We saw earlier that many have divided those rights into two kinds, civil and political on one hand and social, economic, and cultural on the other. John Rawls goes so far as to hold that only the first kind are human rights in the strict sense. But since childhood is focused on the *development* of personhood, the documents about the child do not distinguish between kinds of rights. It is assumed that the whole person needs to be developed. And we can become adult persons only through the support of the wider community, that is, the human family.

The child serves well as a model for how the human community is indivisible. We are born helpless and flourish only through the help of others. Development consists in increasingly being able to help oneself (and to help others) without ever outgrowing the need for the support of others. Is there a principle here that can be applied beyond the age of childhood (now, almost universally the age of eighteen years)? I suggest the following: without regard to age, all unmet need concerning health and well-being should be regarded as an occasion for the human community to offer help. Lifting the age restriction allows for recognizing those cases where the optimal development process did not take place, for whatever reason (lack of human or material resources, natural catastrophe, negligence, etc.). If physical, mental, social, or moral development did not take place at 5 or 9 or 15, it should not be denied at 25 or 37 or 46 or any age. Why? Because every human being is always a human being and a human being is a terrible thing to waste.

It is also possible to tease out of the model of the child a criterion for how help is to be offered. Since needs are met in order to achieve human development, help must be offered in such a way as to enhance development, that is, the capacity to act independently and take responsibility. It is on this point that the thought of Joseph Wresinski and the experience of the Fourth World Movement can be helpful.

First of all, the Movement has learned that there is great solidarity within the world of the excluded poorest. Those who have very little show over and over again that they stand together and share whatever they have. So the poorest show the indivisibility of the human community by their way of life. And the poorest provide a test of others’ understanding of the meaning of indivisibility. Indivisibility is incompatible with

exclusion, and the Movement has discovered that in all countries there are those who have crossed the barrier to stand with the poorest. The Movement, made up of the poorest, full-time trained volunteers, and supporters, is a living world-wide witness that humanity is indivisible. Those in the Movement would say that standing together is itself the decisive first step toward eradicating extreme poverty. To be sure, crossing the line of exclusion does not by itself change intolerable living conditions nor does it meet all needs. But the simple act of crossing over and standing with affirms the humanity of the poorest.

Second, the poorest claim their human rights so that they can fulfill their responsibilities, that is, so that they can participate fully in human society. The poorest know what their needs are because they have lived in lack. They are eager to state their needs and participate in designing the ways of meeting them. Rather than being passive recipients, they want to be active participants. Wresinski closes his essay with these words: “Could it not be that, in the end, the future of human rights will depend on the poorest and the mission they wish to take on with us? To achieve these rights, a new alliance and new partners are offered to us. What a gift it would be to the world, if we were willing to accept them!” There is indivisibility, coupled with one of its finest fruits, mutuality.

II.3. The Indivisibility of the Person

The third indivisibility, that of the person, can be presented more briefly, partly because it is the continual and direct experience of each of us. Shakespeare marveled, “What a piece of work is man!” There are two things in that line. We are complex and elusive, but we are also *a* piece. We can and should distinguish different functions and aspects of our lives, but we are mistaken when we think of them as actually separate. Examples are ready to hand. Physical exhaustion or illness is an obstacle to good mental activity; rest and fitness contribute positively to thinking. Preoccupation or inattention often leads to falls or accidents. We should not try to resolve an interpersonal conflict when we are emotionally upset. Efficiency may be an appropriate standard for the office but not for the nursery. Questions acceptable between friends are not so in a financial transaction. Yet each person is body and mind, officer and parent, friend and clerk, etc.

We each have one name, unless we are trying to deceive with an alias. Thus we are responsible for (that is, answerable for) everything that is done under that name. It won't work to say “The Devil made me do it,” because we are indivisible. We do not get to choose what to own up to. But indivisibility also means that we can claim credit for our accomplishments. If someone else claims credit for our work, it has been alienated from us, literally, othered. The dynamic relation between personal unity and diversity is expressed in the statements, “I fell apart” and “She has finally got it all together.”

Even though the Universal Declaration does not explicitly state that the human person is indivisible, it implicitly affirms it in two important ways. First, one can read

the entire document and replace each pronoun or general noun with one's own name. This substitution would work for such terms as "human being," "everyone," "person," "no one," and "all." Thus, one and the same person can be seen to be the subject of each of the articles. Second, the content of all of the articles applies to every person. The person is the object of each of the articles; they are all directed to the individual person. Something would be amiss if someone read the various articles and said, "This human right applies to me, but that one does not." The person is a complex unity and the Universal Declaration attempts to articulate many of the basic aspects that each one of us is.

Joseph Wresinski and his colleagues in the Fourth World Movement testify to the indivisibility of the person in another way. They have seen in thousands of cases how poverty is not just a lack of money, but rather a total condition that touches every aspect of a person. A few examples will make the point. Without employment parents are unable to provide nutritious food for their children. The children are frequently sick and miss many days of school. They fall behind, are treated negatively by teachers who do not understand the whole situation, and end up misbehaving and being dismissed from school or simply dropping out. Such a child finds it hard to get a good job, and the cycle repeats itself. Or, parents, out of self-respect or in order to protect their children from taunts, don't send their children to school unless they have shoes and clean clothes in good repair. The children fall behind, etc. Or, a family that does not have a permanent address does not get the proper kind of identification and, therefore, does not qualify for the housing, medical, and food support offered by its society.

Finally, the accumulation of deprivations and the negative regard or disregard by others can affect the very personhood of the one in extreme poverty. Once again, the indivisibility of the person is manifest. Others radically reduce the poorest to what they choose to see about them. The poorest are seen not in their full humanity, but only according to that one term, "poor." The poorest are often referred to as "they," a term that stops at anonymity and does not include a face, let alone a name on a face. Here we have indivisibility, but of a foreshortened kind that offers a caricature as a substitute for a real person.

A parallel reduction can happen for the one in extreme poverty. If at every turn I am lacking or incapable or not recognized, I will begin to ask, "Who am I?," "Am I worthy at all?," "If I am not acceptable at the workplace, can I be a good spouse or parent?," "If no one cares whether I live or die, why should I take care of myself?" The indivisibility of the person is shown most cruelly when the circumstances of poverty leads one to give up on oneself.

II.4. The Indivisibility of Human Rights

Anyone familiar with the philosophical literature on human rights would expect that this section on the indivisibility of human rights would consist of arguing against

those who distinguish between civil/political rights and social/economic/cultural rights and claim further that one has priority over the other. But that is not what I will do. Rather, the preceding sections suggest that the issue must be posed differently. For if I have made a persuasive case for the indivisibility of humanity, community, and the person, I am in a position to say that unless human rights are indivisible they run the risk of lacking human significance.

Perhaps the best way to show the link between human significance and human rights is to look at the case Joseph Wresinski makes for the proposition that extreme poverty is a violation of human rights. The “Wresinski Report,” adopted by the French Economic and Social Council on February 11, 1987, contains the following definition: “Situations of extreme poverty result from a series of insecurities which persistently affect several areas of existence, jeopardizing a person’s chances of reassuming their responsibilities and regaining their rights independently in the foreseeable future.” Each of the chapters of the Report can be correlated with specific Articles of the Universal Declaration: Income (22-23), Housing (25), Health Care (25), Social Services (22), Education (26), Training and Employment (23-24 and 26), Civil and Political Liberties (3-21 and 28). Except for Articles 1 and 2 and 29 and 30 which are more general in nature, the Report deals directly with every article. By using statistics as well as case studies based on decades of direct experience, the Report is able to show that extreme poverty involves deprivations in many if not all of the above categories. The conclusion is easy to draw. If the articles of the Universal Declaration are a standard by which to judge respect of human rights, extreme poverty is a glaring example of their denial.

In addition to identifying extreme poverty as a violation of human rights, the Report goes on to make policy proposals for its elimination. The basis for the point by point reclamation of human rights and responsibilities is the affirmation noted earlier (and correlated with Articles 1 and 2) that every person is a human being. Since “every person” includes the poorest, the poorest themselves must be included from the beginning in every effort designed to eliminate extreme poverty. Indivisibility comes into play in two ways. (1) The partnership between the poorest and others shows the indivisibility of the human community. (2) If the partnership is to succeed there must be coordination among the various institutions and agencies. That is, the housing department must know what the health department is doing and they must be in concert with the labor department and the justice department. More than a decade after the adoption of the Wresinski Report and on the basis of sustained collaboration with representatives of the Fourth World Movement, the French Assembly in mid-1998 approved just such a comprehensive and coordinated program to address the problem of extreme poverty. This program respects the indivisibility of the person and shows that human rights are protected best when they are regarded as an indivisible unity.

I want to conclude this section and the paper itself with a brief discussion of a recent and increasingly influential philosophical approach to rights theory. It is the “capabilities” approach most prominently associated with 1998 Nobel Prize laureate in

Economics Amartya Sen of Trinity College, Cambridge, and Martha Nussbaum of the University of Chicago. What follows is by no means an adequate exposition of their views. I do, however, hope to show that the capabilities approach correlates well with Wresinski's call for a partnership for development and with my emphasis on the various forms of indivisibility.

On the latter point, Nussbaum, in a recent article, presents a list of the most central capabilities, each of which is separate (I have been saying distinct) and indispensable (I would say indivisible). 1. LIFE. Being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length.; 2. BODILY HEALTH. Being able to have good health (reproduction, nutrition, shelter); 3. BODILY INTEGRITY. Being able to move freely from place to place; secure against all forms of assault; 4. SENSES, IMAGINATION, AND THOUGHT. Being able to use the senses, to imagine, and think. Freedom to express and create; 5. EMOTIONS. Being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves; 6. PRACTICAL REASON. Being able to form a conception of the good ; freedom of conscience and religion; 7. AFFILIATION. Friendship: being able to live for and to others. Respect: being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others; 8. OTHER SPECIES. Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature; 9. PLAY. Being able to laugh, to play, and to enjoy recreational activities; 10. CONTROL OVER ONE'S ENVIRONMENT. Political: being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life. Material: being able to hold property and employment.³¹

I have shortened Nussbaum's descriptions, but it is readily seen that her central capabilities include all of the things covered in the Universal Declaration while giving more explicit attention to what we might call the inner life of persons. Sen and Nussbaum have chosen "capability" as their basic concept for two reasons, one empirical and one philosophical. Sen's first important empirical research dealt with the economics and ethics of famines in India and China; Nussbaum spent several years doing interdisciplinary research at WIDER: World Institute for Development Economics Research at the United Nations University, Helsinki, Finland. While the traditional categories of analysis (incomes, utilities, resources, primary goods) accounted for much of the data gathered from widely different societies, they came to the conclusion that looking at things through the lens of capability does an even better job. It allows the focus to be on the person as an agent in relation to a natural, human, and cultural environment. The philosophical reason is that "capability" allows them to address rights issues without having to take a stand on the question of the goals and goods of life (here, they, to some extent, follow Rawls's formalism) or on the question whether people have the right to be provided with resources for living (here, they find a middle way between liberals and conservatives). A society that assures capabilities does not promise achievement. A person with capability is free either to function well or not. But a

³¹Nussbaum, M., 1977, Capabilities and Human Rights, in *Fordham Law Review*, Vol. 66, pp. 273-300. The list is taken from pp. 287-288.

person without capability is denied the possibility of achievement. Nussbaum's list of central capabilities states what the approach says every person has a right *to be able* to do.

I connect capability theory with Fourth World thinking in the following way. Wresinski consistently pairs rights with responsibilities because he sees persons as agents, not objects; this squares with the Sen/Nussbaum accent on being able to act. Wresinski's account of the cluster of deprivations that define extreme poverty can be read as a list of capabilities that must be developed if people are to have a chance at a full human life. The development of capabilities must be a joint effort, suited to particular circumstances, and this is echoed in Wresinski's call for a new partnership between the poorest and others.

A final observation is that the poorest are more capable than others think. For example, the hard school of poverty has made the poorest able to endure hardship, able to cope with the unexpected, and able to discern the most important from the less important. The poorest bring these things to the partnership. They also bring what no one else can, namely, a direct knowledge of life in extreme poverty. Wresinski's challenge is that if we are serious about indivisibility, human rights, and the eradication of poverty, we, especially those of us responsible for creating and carrying out social policy, will not deny ourselves that knowledge.

CHAPTER 4 EXTREME POVERTY AND HUMAN RIGHTS AT THE UNITED NATIONS

Leandro Despouy

*Leandro Despouy is a former Ambassador to the United Nations' Human Rights Commission in Geneva. In 1992, as an Expert in the Minority Discrimination Prevention and Protection Subcommittee, he was appointed as Special Rapporteur in charge of writing a study on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights which was approved by the Human Rights Commission in 1996.*³²

INTRODUCTION

A superficial reading of the today's world taking into account only the dramatic increase of commercial trade and communications around the world, the frenzied growth in consumption, and the tremendous technological progress registered in some areas, could lead us to optimistic conclusions about the state of our world. But these conclusions would be erroneous because they would hide the dramatic reality of poverty and exclusion, social fragmentation, and deprivation for masses of people living in dire conditions.

Poverty is one of the major problems afflicting humanity at the end of this century. Poverty, and more specifically extreme poverty, is not a one-dimensional phenomenon of an exclusively economic nature. It is a complex mechanism of social corrosion involving all aspects of human life and entailing social consequences whose magnitude forces us to ponder the phenomenon at the global scale. This paper reviews the evolution of the thinking about extreme poverty in the social bodies of the United Nations System (particularly those agencies charged with safeguarding human rights), the contribution made by Father Joseph Wresinski in bringing the topic to the fore within the United Nations, and the role of his movement, ATD, in the development of a study on extreme poverty and human rights that was carried out by the United Nations Human Rights Commission.

From a methodological viewpoint, the study on human rights and poverty on which this paper is based is the outcome of a long consultation with families and organizations that live or have spent a long time in places riddled with poverty. This is what sets it apart and is, perhaps, its most significant contribution. In the present paper, we provide an analysis of the increasing focus on poverty and social exclusion that has taken place in

³² This text has been edited from its original version in Spanish. The study at the Human Rights Commission on which the paper is in part based is: United Nations, 1996, *Final report on human rights and extreme poverty*, submitted by the special rapporteur, Mr. Leandro Despouy, E/CN.4/Sub.2/1996/13, 18 June 1996.

many United Nations agencies.. The paper discusses the progress achieved through the statement and the action program adopted during the World Conference on Social Development that took place in Copenhagen in May 1995. Thereafter, the most salient aspects of the report on human rights and poverty adopted by the United Nations Human Rights Commission are highlighted. The indivisibility of human rights is exemplified through situations that are similar to poverty such as slavery and Apartheid.

I. EXTREME POVERTY IN UNITED NATIONS DEBATES

Poverty and its impact on peace and international security were among the concerns of those who created the UN Organization, as well as its predecessor, the Society of Nations. Part XIII of the Versailles Treaty (1919), containing the Constitution of the International Labor Organization (ILO), stated that “Universal and lasting peace can only be based on social justice,” and that the discontent caused by injustice, poverty and deprivation to a large number of human beings constitutes a threat to universal peace and harmony. Later, on May 10, 1944, when the basis of the new world institutional reorganization was laid out in the Philadelphia Declaration, this OIT concept was confirmed: “Poverty, in any place, constitutes a threat to the well-being of all.”

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted on December 10, 1948, established the idea that among the highest aims of humankind was, precisely, the achievement of a world where human beings could be free of fear and poverty and thus enjoy freedom. The statement of this ideal was repeated later in the preamble of many other international instruments, as was the case of two Agreements adopted in 1966: The International Agreement on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Pact on Civil and Political Rights, which also establish that such ideal, “Cannot be achieved...unless the conditions are created for each person to enjoy their civil and political rights as well as their economic, social and cultural rights.”

However, beyond the statements in both instruments, the truth is that during the development of these documents—which took almost 20 years (1947-1966)—the link between poverty and human rights was practically absent. However, when these were adopted (1966) and especially when they were implemented almost 10 years later, the world was already bogged down in an extensive and deteriorating debate over the prevalence of one or the other category of rights. In some Western countries, only those rights of a civil and political nature were considered human rights. Economic, social and cultural rights were denied such categorization.

This debate extended over two decades within the realm of United Nations, and it was related to the ideological continuation of the last period of the “Cold War.” The West argued that liberty and democracy were the priority while those of the Eastern Block stressed equality, as if these were incompatible and not needed both for the achievement of human rights as a whole. This sterile and Byzantine debate, far from contributing to the development of human rights, was an obstacle and created distortions within the framework of an international environment that became more polluted and hostile every day.

Even though it is obvious that the international dimension attained by human rights today is one of the greatest achievements of our times, a quick glance on the overall international human rights protection mechanisms is enough to confirm that most of them are designed to protect civil and political rights. In fact, besides the International Pact

establishing them and the Human Rights Committee overseeing their application, there are several agreements and treaties that specifically strengthen the protection of each of these rights. For instance, the different conventions against torture reaffirm the protection of every individual's personal and psychological safety. The International Convention to Abolish Racial Discrimination adds to the protection mechanisms included in the Civil and Political Rights Pact. It is important to highlight that each of these agreements (more than 30 of a universal nature) provide for their corresponding control bodies. An identical situation is also observed at the regional level, where most of the conventions give priority to this same category of rights. Thus it is fair to say that the "conventional mechanisms," that is to say, those originating from specific international monitoring treaties, almost exclusively comprise of civil and political rights.

The same phenomenon is observed at the level of the regular bodies of the United Nations (General Assembly, Human Rights Commission, Human Rights Subcommittee, etc.) where supplementary surveillance mechanisms have also been established. Actually, several working groups (Forced and Involuntary Disappearance of Persons, Arbitrary Arrests, etc.), thematic rapporteurs (on Torture, Summary Executions, Freedom of Speech, Independence of the Judiciary, etc.), and country-specific groups have been created (e.g. Iran, Cuba, Sudan, etc.) in the field of civil and political rights. These "unconventional mechanisms," besides increasing during the last years, have been adapting and improving to achieve greater levels of operation and effectiveness in their corresponding activities.

The treatment given to economic, social and cultural rights has been very different and the outcome has also been different. Beyond the untiring work performed by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights—from the activities undertaken by the ILO in its specific area, from the general discussions held in the General Assembly, the ECOSOC, the Committee and the Subcommittee on Human Rights—the United Nations has never adopted mechanisms similar to those provided to protect civil and political rights, nor has it set up other mechanisms, different and more appropriate, to promote the implementation of this category of rights.

Thus, the recognition that both categories of rights are indivisible and interdependent routinely reaffirmed through different resolutions at that time, was more a formal statement of intention than a legal reality. In fact, the only thing that increased during these years was a large arsenal of protection standards and mechanisms, both universal and regional, of a single category of human rights: civil and political rights.

When the international community took the risky road of drafting a text on the Right to Development, a new opportunity to overcome this dichotomy was once again lost. The countless discussions and debates that took place both in the General Assembly and in the Human Rights Commission during the preparatory works are a reflection of a world dominated by ideological confrontation and too far from the material and spiritual concerns caused by poverty. The main result of such effort was the Statement on the

Right to Development adopted by the General Assembly in 1986. Indeed, this was not the outcome of a real consensus but rather the result of a formal compromise between both rival blocks. Proof of this is the fact that the working groups subsequently created for its implementation prolonged the same discussions beyond the fall of the Berlin Wall. Third World countries continued to use the same forum to wage the political and ideological battle that opposed and still opposes the interests of the North to the needs of the South. This debate delayed the realization of this right and the creation of an environment amenable to international understanding and cooperation that are indispensable to secure this right.

In summary, up to the end of the 1980s the issue of poverty had vanished from the legal and political literature of UN social organizations and, if any reference was ever made on the subject, it was only in the small and neglected setting of economic, social and cultural rights. In this regard, it is important to note that when Father Joseph Wresinski gave his famous speech before the Human Rights Commission in 1987, only an item in the agenda referred to this category of rights, under the topic “The Issue of Effective Enjoyment of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,” in which Father Wresinski made his presentation.

This indicates that at that time, poverty was a phenomenon disassociated from human rights, and if there was any relation between them it was only with economic, social and cultural rights, especially with economic rights. The novelty in Father Joseph Wresinski’s speech was that he identified poverty as one of the most serious ills of our time directly affecting the enjoyment and exercise of all human rights. In his speech he stated that if there is anything that shows with dramatic realism the indivisible and interdependent nature of all human rights it is precisely poverty. “If you, who are responsible for safeguarding the effectiveness of human rights in the world do not see in poverty the inhuman face of the worst violations, it would be difficult for humanity to move forward in the path of progress and fraternity...”

Beyond the moral impact of the speech, the reaction in the political and diplomatic front was cautious, especially at the beginning. Governmental delegations wondered who would benefit from a debate on poverty. The developed Western countries thought that this type of issue could become a political weapon used to serve the interests of the Socialist block. The latter, in turn, had the fear that Western countries could rescue for their own benefit an issue that Socialist countries had raised for ages. The developing countries assessed with concern the risk of being ostracized as great violators of human rights given the high indices of poverty recorded in most of them. It is in this context of mutual mistrust, increasing skepticism and widespread doubts that the Human Rights Commission, pushed by a strong demand from the non-governmental sector (and in particular by ATD and other NGOs working in the field), adopted the first resolutions on the issue.

In 1988, a first resolution referred to the issue under the title: “Human Rights and Extreme Poverty.” One of its paragraphs mentioned poverty as the denial of human rights but as always, within the frame of economic, social and cultural rights. This was reaffirmed the following year in similar terms and it was only in 1990 that the first resolution of the General Assembly was achieved. This narrative is intended to describe the historical context in which the debate on the issue was initiated within the United Nations and the multiple obstacles that had to be overcome until a correct treatment of the issue was achieved. It was not until 1990 that the Human Rights Commission asked the Human Rights Subcommittee to carry out an in-depth study on the existing link between extreme poverty and human rights and, in 1992, the Commission requested a worldwide study on the impact of poverty on human rights.

This victory was not easy. It was the outcome of a long effort of dialogue and persuasion in the diplomatic environment in which those individuals who were familiar with Father Wresinski’s work played a very important role. In fact, it was his great power of conviction, his longstanding presence in places where poverty existed and the credibility of his movement that allowed the successful start of the difficult UN path. Wresinski knew the Secretary General of the UN, Javier Pérez de Cuéllar from Peru, who later joined his movement; and the then Director General of ILO, Mr. Blanchard, who among other celebrities naturally and fiercely supported his proposal.

Wresinski never lobbied personally; he went to the UN only once and left the lobbying to the dignitaries working in the UN system. All the diplomatic colleagues that met Father Wresinski at that time, both from the East, the West and the Third World acknowledged having been greatly touched by his personality, his strong convictions, and his belief that the issue of poverty and its linkage with human rights would soon be at the fore among the issues of greatest concern and interest in the international agenda. He died two years later.

However, there were many obstacles that had to be overcome, from the approval of the resolution by the Human Rights Commission requesting the study, to the appointment of a Special Rapporteur (a task that was entrusted to the author), in order to complete the work. The political significance of a report of this type was obvious because it was, and still is, an extremely sensitive issue to governments, no matter their ideological direction. It is easy to imagine that the mandate I was entrusted could have been used as a lethal weapon to attack the West in the hands of an orthodox communist; at the same time, a staunch anticommunist could have used the report to focus his/her criticism to show that socialism had not even achieved the elimination of poverty.

This explains why at the start, when the issue was beginning to be discussed, only the term “extreme poverty” could be included in the resolutions as a denial of human rights. It took a while to accept the idea of a study. To reach that decision, prior approval of a methodology offering guarantees of a non-political and specific approach to poverty, from the human rights viewpoint, was necessary. It may seem paradoxical that a report of

this nature, which had to dodge so many risks and overcome such obstacles, was finally unanimously approved with the co-sponsorship of more than 80 countries. This was the largest number of co-sponsors registered so far for any study.

Several external factors helped the development of the study. First, there was a period of goodwill in East-West relations following the fall of the Berlin Wall. Second, the UNDP reports on Sustainable Human Development opened the door to a more comprehensive rethinking of development. Third, the World Conference on Social Development took place in Copenhagen (May 1995). Meanwhile, the preliminary reports from the Special Rapporteur were the basis for a specific mention of the relation between extreme poverty and human rights in the final statement adopted at the World Conference on Human Rights which took place in Vienna in April 1993.

II. THE LINK BETWEEN EXTREME POVERTY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Traditionally, poverty and particularly extreme poverty have been perceived and described mainly as economic phenomena. Here however, we will aim at showing the broader impact of poverty on human rights. Specifically, the report prepared for the UN Human Rights Commission shows that extreme poverty is not just a single dimensional phenomenon but actually affects all aspects in the life of individuals. It also shows that it is not a matter of the denial of a specific right, or of a certain category of rights, but rather of human rights as a whole. The report shows to what extent extreme poverty is not only a threat for economic and social rights as is generally assumed from an economic viewpoint, but also a threat for civil, political and cultural rights. Under this vision, extreme poverty is a fact that is particularly revealing of the undivided and interdependent nature of human rights. Actually, life in extreme poverty suggests that there is a cumulative process of precarious aspects that are mutually intertwined and strengthened: poor living conditions, an unhealthy environment, unemployment, poor health, lack of education, deprivation. All these elements constitute a “horizontal vicious circle” of poverty.

This last statement poses several questions. First, from a legal perspective what is at stake is not the acknowledgment but rather the real exercise of overall human rights and basic freedoms by extremely poor individuals. Second, this vision allows to verify that as a consequence of the indivisibility and interdependence of human rights, in a linkage such as the one described above, being deprived of one right may have—in fact, it often has—a negative impact on the exercise of all other rights. Likewise, the specific nature of poverty alerts and allows us to anticipate that under similar conditions, the fact of reestablishing in an isolated manner a single right is not enough for an individual living in extreme poverty to have access to the full exercise of all of his/her rights.

Another equally detrimental aspect is the marked tendency to perpetuate poverty, as it seems to be passed from one generation to another. This has been the subject of various

research works in different periods in world history, and it is also clearly reflected in several case studies developed by the ATD Movement that discuss the life of families spanning along several generations. When poverty perpetuates itself, a “vertical vicious circle” takes shape. In this manner, both spirals become some sort of a “hellish mechanism” that make it enormously difficult to get out of it, depriving individuals from any real and effective prospect of exercising their human rights and assuming responsibilities. Social exclusion is another of the most acute social consequences of poverty, frequently accompanied by the stigmatization of those suffering it. If exclusion may sometimes lead people into poverty, poverty almost always leads to exclusion.

One of the advantages of the methodology used here lies in its thematic scope since the true impact of poverty may only be known if all and each one of the areas on which it has an impact are examined: economic, civil, social, cultural and political. Besides, it is imperative that the information obtained on people living under such conditions originates from the people themselves. However, this population is generally not consulted, even in cases of studies and programs focused on them. The views of those affected by poverty is an indispensable condition, not only because it is a requirement inherent to any approach on human rights, but also because if this is not done, it becomes impossible to know the internal dynamics of poverty. In other words, it is impossible to verify the impact that each of the deprivations has on the potential aggravation of other needs, and so sequentially up to reaching extreme poverty.

Besides the negative impacts that the different deprivations have on each other (poor environmental conditions, unhealthy work, impacts on education and these, in turn, on participation and cultural life, etc.), as these deprivations increase and intensify, exclusion becomes worst, insecurity heightens, there is a decrease in possibilities to truly exercise human rights, and difficulties increase for these populations to assume their own responsibilities. When these insecurities become more acute and perpetuate over time in such a way that the whole existence of the individual is controlled by this multiplicity of shortages and dearth, we see the merciless face of poverty. To conclude: the sum of shortages and deficiencies in health, education, the environment, participation, etc., whose persistence destroys the lives of all those suffering poverty, is a denial of the basic human rights in the current legal language.

III. CHANGING THE PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE POOR AND POVERTY

It is often more difficult to prove what is apparent than what is unique or exotic. The poverty phenomenon is a case in point. One of the main challenges I had to face as Special Rapporteur on this issue was, precisely, avoiding that my commitment and faithfulness to the portrayal of poverty (which is as useful as irreplaceable given the methodological requirements of the study), would betray the message and reality of those living under extreme poverty conditions. How can one describe truthfully the miserable living conditions, the suffering and, above all, the degradation poverty causes on

individuals without resorting to fatalist messages in the sense that people who have become impoverished would never be able to escape from it, or even worst, that degradation has been such that these individuals have already lost their status as human beings, without unwillingly contributing to racist or xenophobic biases? How can one show the terrible aspects of poverty without playing the card of those that have a discriminatory perception of the poor?

As this was a global study, I decided to make reference to other situations that equally highlight the lethal mechanism of discrimination to solve this problem. For example, I took Apartheid. What did the government of South Africa do to justify itself and carry forward its policy of social exclusion and unchecked exploitation of blacks? The mechanism it used was no other than to deliberately deny the economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights, etc., of the black population. Something similar occurred with slavery. Beyond the socioeconomic and pragmatic motives of both systems, the ideological basis was similar: slaves were not deemed to be human beings and, therefore, they had no rights.

There is a risk if we describe the terrible consequences of slavery and the level of degradation to which it may lead, that this could lead to somebody interpreting—much as slavery advocates did—that such a slavery-degraded human being was actually an object and, consequently, he/she did not deserve to be treated as a human being. However, it was under the impulse of the struggles of the slaves themselves and of the ideals of humanistic thinking that it was acknowledged that all human beings are equal in dignity and that behind the condition of a slave there is a human being. Thus it was possible to see that that creature, who slavery advocates saw as an object, became a human being—to the extent that he was allowed to exercise his rights on an equal footing. We have also seen how blacks in South Africa—once they had access to the enjoyment of their human rights and fundamental freedoms—initiated, along with the regime that excluded them, one of the most original and exemplary political processes of this century, leaving behind very rapidly the last remnants of such contemporaneous form of slavery which was Apartheid. As to the differences existing among the three situations under analysis, the most relevant one may be that slavery was seriously questioned even at the time when it was institutionalized. Apartheid was repudiated and fought with almost all the mechanisms the world community had developed up to then. But poverty can roam comfortably given the general indifference.

One of the most important contributions of the study on extreme poverty and human rights was to show how little and how poor the knowledge on poverty at the global level was. Even worst, we ignore how little we know about extreme poverty. Aside from being deficient, our knowledge is often wrong, since the perception of poverty in our societies is mostly derogatory and full of biases. “The rich”, wrote Charles Booth, founder of the Salvation Army in the last century, “hid the poor behind a curtain, and over that curtain, they painted monsters.” This explains why a large part of the population feels frightened and scorns the poor. The poor are regularly made

responsible for their situation and are deemed to be less competent and incapable of becoming more skilled. It is believed that poor people are condemned (and this belief is actually what condemns them) to live in poverty, as if it were a deliberate choice to fall into poverty or to remain poor.

When the unawareness and prejudice barriers of our biased knowledge are overcome and we enter into such complex social reality, we discover a world that we hardly know. This is the conclusion drawn from various statements from those that have lived close to families in extreme poverty for a long period of time. It must also be emphasized that those in extreme poverty are a fragile population. We cannot intervene without paying close attention or else we may destroy the precarious balance in which the very poor survive. This is a population that is more vulnerable to mistakes and failures than others. We are always at risk of giving only partial responses to a population, while ignoring their efforts, thereby perpetuating the lack of cohesion in their existence. The irrationality of life under extreme poverty forces this population to commit senseless and even antagonistic actions. If our response to that population is fragmentary on a case by case basis, we are at risk of deepening the divisions and the gaps.

The answers to the problems of the very poor lie in coherent interventions and projects that must be developed, implemented and evaluated with their participation. To be able to act efficiently, we need to understand the complexity of this painful world, and to value and encourage its struggles and its successes. Even within this world of death, marked by adversity and misfortune, there are moving gestures of solidarity, both intended to preserve family ties and to provide assistance to somebody suffering from similar situations. These are gestures that define a willingness to fight, even when the fight materializes in small achievements, scarce successes and many defeats. But these successes—which may seem insignificant in light of those countless battles that are lost daily—state in their own way (and in the wordless language of those who most of the time have not even learned to use these words), the reality of a fight, of a silent and unseen struggle whose intensity and resilience allows the very poor to face their condition each day and at each moment of their lives. Without an acknowledgment of the efforts of the poor and those who support them, it would be difficult to contribute to the liberation from poverty.

IV. POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE SIGNS OF THE LAST FEW YEARS

Today, there is an awareness, albeit insufficient, of the extent and seriousness of poverty and exclusion. This is reflected above all in the fact that the extreme poverty issue has been included in the agenda of almost all UN Common System agencies dealing with economic or social issues. For example, in its resolution 47/196 of 1992, the General Assembly declared October 17 as the World Day for Poverty Eradication. A few months later, during the World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna in 1993, a consensus was reached to consider extreme poverty and social exclusion as affecting

human dignity and being at the opposite of a full and effective enjoyment of human rights. There was also a consensus to promote urgent actions to reduce poverty.

Likewise, the UN General Assembly through its resolution 48/183 proclaimed the year 1995 as the International Year for Poverty Eradication. In its Resolution 50/170, it proclaimed the first United Nations Decade for Poverty Eradication (1997-2006). Also, at the International Conference on Population and Development that took place in Cairo in September 1994, at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in September 1995, and at the World Food Summit, that took place in Rome on November 13-17, 1998, poverty appears to be clearly identified among the main obstacles to achieve the objectives proclaimed in the corresponding final statements.

A positive fact has been the approval and implementation of the recommendations of the study on “Extreme Poverty and Human Rights” and, in particular, the appointment of a Special Rapporteur in the UN Human Rights Commission. The Special Rapporteur is responsible for presenting an Annual Report before the Commission and before the General Assembly on the impact of poverty on human rights as well as the actions adopted to fight poverty. The Special Rapporteur must also present an evaluation on compliance with the objectives and goals set in the Copenhagen Declaration and Action Plan at the next United Nations General Assembly convened for that purpose and which will take place in the year 2000.

Another important fact is the progress recorded in the field of cooperation and, particularly, the enhanced role to be played by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in that field and the agreements executed with the World Bank to undertake joint or solely Bank-financed projects. With respect to the work undertaken by other organizations and institutions, it should be remembered that already in the UNDP 1992-1996 Program, poverty eradication was among the six main objectives. A noteworthy aspect of its strategies consisted in supporting community-based organizations, NGOs and governmental institutions assisting the poorest. But the most important contribution of UNDP on this issue was its decisive participation in the development of the Sustainable Human Development concept in its subsequent Annual Reports. The reports indicate that economic growth is not the only reliable indicator to measure development: it must be complemented by other basic indicators such as life expectancy, adult illiteracy, infant mortality, gender equality, etc. Actually, it incorporates new development evaluation parameters that are as reliable as the previous standards but are much more revealing of the economic, social and cultural progress achieved by the countries.

In summary, it could be said that the concept of human development is based on a much more accurate and comprehensive understanding of reality. If what is sought is to assess the development level of a country—besides being cognizant of its economic growth indices—the extent of access of all its inhabitants to effective exercise of their

economic, social and cultural rights, their participation in political life, and their full exercise of freedom, must also be examined.

“Without a correspondent social development there will not be satisfactory economic development”, said James Wolfensohn upon assuming his duties as the new President of the World Bank. In subsequent speeches, he acknowledged that social development was one of the main deficits of our age, and thus a substantive part of World Bank activities would be focused to that sector. Previously, in its publication entitled “The lessons of the Past, the Actions of the Future,” the World Bank acknowledged that throughout the years it modified its objectives: “while it was initially thought that growth would end up benefiting the poor through osmosis, it has now been understood that in order to reduce poverty it is also necessary to take measures in favor of the most deprived and most vulnerable groups.”

The same trend has been recorded in the regional development banks. For instance, the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) was able to expand its annual lending capability to US\$7 billion with the commitment that 40% of its lending portfolio or half of its operations must be earmarked to the social sector, justice and poverty alleviation. These are the positive signs. However, there are still reasonable doubts within most of the agencies concerned with social issues about the seriousness and the size of the announced changes. This explains why working groups have been created within the Human Rights Commission to discuss the impact of structural adjustments and the policies of international finance organizations on the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights and of overall human rights.

Nevertheless, despite these positive signs, there has been a lack of adequate planning in development plans and programs or macroeconomic measures, and a lack of analysis on the impact that these have on poverty. Moreover, the social policies implemented by governments during the last decade have been essentially of a service delivery nature. These policies have lacked efficiency in fighting poverty. There is not even certainty that the current efforts and the renewed emphasis placed by some of the international finance organizations in the social sphere are going to translate into poverty reduction. Some critics see these actions as merely palliative measures intended to diminish the impact of structural adjustments and delay the social breakdown that globalization may cause. In any case, poverty has expanded throughout parts of the world with sequels of impoverishment and exclusion that affect numerous populations and even entire countries and regions such as Sub Saharan Africa. If 10 years ago the fate of some peripheral countries that had large impoverished areas was uncertain or difficult, today this is even more so. Another element of concern is the gap in wealth distribution, which has increased and each day appears as a greater obstacle to achieving forms of development that are more inclusive than the current ones. Still another disturbing sign is the impact of poverty on conflicts as the State appears to be less able to prevent social conflicts. This is an issue that deserves to be analyzed in depth given its direct link with human rights and the proliferation of conflicts in societies already weakened by poverty.

CONCLUSION

What is the relevance of the above for the policies and work of international human rights organizations and other international organizations? What could be the changes that would be implemented in the work of United Nations agencies and in development assistance organizations if the close relationship between extreme poverty and human rights were taken into account? While these are difficult questions, it is imperative to weed out the views that ignore the multidimensional nature of poverty and its harmful incidence on all aspects of the life of individuals and over all human activities. There is a need not only to improve the policies implemented to fight poverty, but also the perception of the very poor in the public at large.

The first thing that poverty reduction programs should be careful about is the poverty that the programs themselves can generate. Transparent social policies that can be assessed by all sectors concerned, especially by those that are generally not reached by the programs, are necessary. For the programs to be effective and capable of reaching the poorest, they must be developed from first-hand knowledge of the life of their beneficiaries. Thus, it is essential to involve the poor in the development, implementation, follow-up and evaluation of the programs designed for them. Not much can be done for the very poor if it is not done with them. Even before the programs are developed, it is essential to become familiar with the target population so that from the very beginning there is some knowledge of the needs of the community. Another important element is to have direct contact with poor families, without which it is impossible to establish a trusting relationship based on mutual trust. For this, it is indispensable to take advantage of the expertise of the NGOs that have been carrying out activities for a long time in poverty stricken areas.

The fight to eradicate poverty requires not only full knowledge of the causes and the conditions that generate, aggravate and perpetuate it, but also of the effect they have on all human rights and fundamental freedoms. It is absolutely necessary to implement participation mechanisms involving the impoverished in all the stages of policies designed to their benefit. More generally, only to the extent that the effective exercise of their rights and freedoms is reestablished, will we see the human being in all its prime and splendor rise from behind that face disfigured by poverty.

CHAPTER 5 REACHING THE POOREST: WHAT DOES IT TAKE?

Huguette Redegeld

Huguette Redegeld is Vice President of the International Movement ATD Fourth World, the organization founded by Joseph Wresinski in 1957. She joined the organization at the very beginning of its existence, thirty years ago. She is currently based in Thailand. In this paper, she presents the main results of a recent study prepared for UNESCO on reaching the poorest.

INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, international conferences and summits held under the auspices of the United Nations have included the issue of poverty in their agenda. The Declaration and Plan of Action adopted at the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995 introduced a new perspective to the fight against poverty, namely that poverty prevents its victims from enjoying their fundamental rights and from fulfilling their responsibilities. Poverty concerns all aspects of life and, consequently, calls for coherent and comprehensive policies to eradicate it. Building on this evolution, the UNDP 1998 Poverty Report "Overcoming Human Poverty" examined how multidimensional approaches to poverty can be translated into improved policies and programmes.

With this growing general concern, the question of extreme poverty and of reaching the poorest has gained significance. Two recent examples illustrate this. The UN Commission on Human Rights started working on the links between human rights and extreme poverty.³³ In addition, UNICEF implemented its Executive Board Decisions 1989/8 and 1991/6 which asked to examine innovative ways to reach populations still excluded by undertaking a study published entitled "Reaching the Poorest."³⁴

The focus of this study has been the following: Many actions are undertaken for alleviating absolute poverty, but these actions often fail to reach a portion of the population intended to be the beneficiaries. This phenomenon occurs again and again, whatever the size or the objectives of the actions. It is therefore crucial to find an explanation. Is it because of the living conditions - for example in the most exposed parts of a hill closest to the sea, or in the streets with a plastic cover for a roof, or between graves in a cemetery? Is it because this group accumulates, in a lasting way, the same hardships that affect others in a less pervasive manner? Is it because they are not

³³ United Nations, 1996, *Final report on human rights and extreme poverty*, submitted by the special rapporteur, Mr. Leandro Despouy, E/CN.4/Sub.2/1996/13, 18 June 1996.

³⁴ ATD Fourth World and Unicef, 1999, *Reaching the Poorest*, Unicef Publications, New York.

perceived as credible partners? Is it because a sense of fatality still prevails, assuming that in any human group, there have been, there is and there will always be people left behind and abandoned from the good will of others?

It demonstrates, in any case, that the question “*How to reach the poorest?*” represents a genuine concern. It also acknowledges that this question is insufficiently documented. For this reason, it is difficult to get a factual understanding of the history of the poorest; it is hard to know them, their thoughts and their vision of the world; it is difficult to assess and to benefit from their first-hand experience of destitution. Without such an understanding, it will be nearly impossible to reach out to them. The study “Reaching the poorest” undertaken in co-operation with UNICEF’s Division of Evaluation, Policy and Planning represents an attempt to lead to rudimentary answers to this concern. Some of its findings and their implications, as well as further questions to address, are presented in this document

I. REACHING THE POOREST

This chapter starts with a brief presentation of the study in order to provide the background from which the findings, presented in the second part of the chapter, have arisen. It should be added that these findings also stem from other sources. In part three, implications deriving from the findings are grouped under four recommendations. They are, of course, not exhaustive and need to be confronted and complemented by others, as, from the start, the study was conceived as a process to be pursued.

I.1. Brief presentation of the study

The study was an implementation of the UNICEF Executive Board’s request that research be undertaken in order to discover new ways to reach out to the poorest population groups. UNICEF has been one of the first United Agencies to express its difficulty in reaching 20% of its target population. The goals of the study were: i) to bring to light the conditions which are necessary to allow the poorest to participate in the planning, execution, monitoring and evaluation of programs; ii) to analyse the underlying basic conditions necessary to involve the poorest - over the long-term - in developing the knowledge which is necessary for any action concerning them; and, finally, iii) to identify a core series of principles that could help any agency wanting to examine and improve the efficiency of its programs and policies with regard to the poorest.

A special effort was undertaken to identify projects in which the poorest had been real partners in order to study, in depth, the necessary conditions for such a partnership. It was not a sufficient criteria for selection that projects had offered the poorest merely some benefit. Out of thirteen pre-selected projects, seven were retained for further investigation: in Burkina Faso, Haiti, Guatemala, Thailand, Peru, Canada and Uganda. They fit into different contexts and their main concerns were varied: education, culture,

community development, health, or social mobilisation. The actions had the common feature of being conducted in consultation with many partners, including very poor families and individuals. Another shared point was the determination to develop, on a long-term basis, a network of solidarity and of support among these partners.

For the authors of the study, the expression "the poorest" was not a theoretical idea; it was to be understood as a question: "who are the poorest?" It was the expression of an approach, more than a designation of a specific group of people. This approach leads to meeting poor people and, through them, to discovering the poorest who are being left out. Many experts have tried to define poverty and the Copenhagen Summit has given a new impetus to this search for an appropriate definition. This study retained the following definition which is proposed by the Wresinski Report³⁵:

"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. Extreme 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 in the foreseeable future."

The reasons for this choice were the following: this definition affirms a continuum between the reality of extreme poverty and that of poverty in general; it links rights and responsibilities with poverty; and it recalls the necessity of a global approach. In other words, situations of extreme poverty must be examined taking into account the context of situations of deprivation which may affect larger groups in society. This definition thus puts the question, "How to reach the poorest?" in a wider perspective.

I.2. Major Findings

The detection of the poorest members in a community or in a group as such does not guarantee their effective participation in a given action or program. The study has revealed areas that are decisive in the process of reaching the poorest. Through examples, six of such areas are presented below.

1. Acquiring and sharing knowledge

The question of knowledge is at the heart of "reaching the poorest." What kind of knowledge is necessary? Who will build up this knowledge? With whom is it shared? When developing a knowledge-base, three points stand out: i) the necessity of enlarging

³⁵ Wresinski, J., 1987, *Grande pauvreté et Précarité Economique et sociale*, Rapport du Conseil Economique et Social, Journal officiel de la République française, Paris. English version available: Wresinski, J., 1994, *Chronic Poverty and Lack of Basic Security*, Fourth World Publications, Landover MA.

and giving value to all sources of knowledge; ii) the necessity of reciprocity; and, finally, iii) the necessity of finding new ways to share knowledge.

a. Giving value to all sources of knowledge

Research, inquiries and surveys are well-tried tools of knowledge developed and used by social scientists, policy makers and development agencies and are constantly improved. For example, the question of the participation of the beneficiaries has been given more and more attention and has led to new practices. The study revealed that still other approaches or sources of knowledge should be used in order to acquire a more precise knowledge of the poorest. Most of the time, these groups are completely beyond the reach of statistical data gatherings. Furthermore, surveys are usually not conducted for a sufficiently long period of time and lack the necessary preparation to enable the poorest to express what they really want to share; as a consequence, their answers might simply reflect what they feel the surveyors expect to hear from them or might be completely mythical.

The documentation of the projects explored included other tools which have proven essential in the building of knowledge, such as:

- family monographs: completed in co-operation with those concerned and checked by them in the final stage; these monographs were possible thanks to the information acquired and recorded daily, sometimes over years;
- interviews of “privileged actors:” those people who have developed such a close relationship with the very poor that the latter perceive them as standing on their side; they could be neighbours, social workers, teachers, policemen, health workers, clergy, academics;
- knowledge gathered through actions: reports and varied documents collected over years which describe the changes that occurred during the time of the projects represent another original source of knowledge; in this respect, many grass-roots workers expressed enough concern to be recognised as holders of a particular knowledge on equal footing with other holders of knowledge.

b. Establishing reciprocity

Implementing actions at the grass-roots level implies seeking to enter into a relationship with different concerned people: speaking with them of their common values, inquiring into their experiences of solidarity and their expectations for outside support and contributions. In order to acquire a genuine knowledge of the life of the very poor, a close proximity is vital. This can be realised, for example, by choosing living quarters in close proximity to the poor, by visiting people's homes, by participating in small group discussions, by regular local activities. Such means are appropriate ways to elaborate a better knowledge of a poor population.

But these means alone are not sufficient. What is also essential is allowing the population to get to know those who come to meet them. The people concerned have the right to know their partners precisely, to obtain a clear understanding of their intentions and plans. Knowledge of a population can be gathered only through trust. Reciprocity and mutual understanding are basic conditions to establish trust. A young man from the project in Cusco (Peru) echoed this : *“To know supposes to be humble and to be available. And the first act of humility is to accept this question: what can this person in front of me, so marked by misery, teach me?”*

c. Finding new ways for sharing knowledge

A working group in Canada illustrated the changes provoked in attitudes and actions which occurred when various people, including the very poor, joined together. Its participants came from different social and professional backgrounds: social services, community actions, religious groups, literacy programs, hospitals, welcoming centres for homeless, etc. In their daily responsibilities, they were facing similar questions, such as: How to build trust and develop projects with families trapped in a vicious cycle of survival? How to go beyond emergency responses? How to detect families who do not approach the structures that could help them? The participants started the working group because they felt inadequately equipped to confront these questions on their own. The objectives of their group were to share one's doubts and questions in order to take risks at work and to learn how to decode (understand) together the strengths and the hopes of the poorest families beyond appearances and problems.

Each meeting became a training session based on the experience, thinking and know-how of the poor. By exchanging their experiences, the participants discovered the strengths and hopes of the poorest families and worked toward a comprehensive approach which treats them with dignity and takes them out of dependency. Through sharing their knowledge, they developed a new partnership between themselves and towards other partners in society.³⁶ One health worker member of the group explained: *“... at the hospital, there is no place to talk about poverty. We're always in a situation of crisis and emergency. I'm caught between defending people's rights and the demands of the structure. I can't change anything by myself. I need support.”*

2. Developing actions based on the aspirations of the poorest, not on their problems

Many obstacles hinder the participation of the poorest in projects and services designed for their benefit. The preoccupation with daily survival requires all of their energy and attention, and perhaps what is most significant, it is often too shameful, too painful and too terrifying for the poorest to access services, especially those that address

³⁶ See also ATD Fourth World (UK), 1996, *Talk With Us Not At Us. How to Develop a Partnership Between Families in Poverty and Professionals*, Fourth World Publications, London /Paris.

only their problems. Projects most successful in reaching the poorest are ones based on the aspirations they carry deep inside but often have difficulty expressing.

The project from Guatemala illustrated this point. The team in San Jacinto, a rural area in Guatemala, had the opportunity to participate in a health-care project to combat early childhood malnutrition. The project was conducted in partnership with the local health centre and another organisation. In that area, the death of small children was a reality which affected all of the families. However, the poorest families were the hardest hit by severe malnutrition. The fact that in spite of their long hours of strenuous work, they were not able to control the nutritional health of their young children, caused the parents great pain and shame. The team knew this from their years of contact with the community. It knew that a project focused solely on combating malnutrition would accentuate the parents feeling of failure; such a project would be perceived as a reproach.

After careful consideration, the team insisted that the project should be centred around a pre-school, because the community would be able to mobilise itself around their children's education. A nutritional program linked to a pre-school would enable the parents to engage themselves in a process of ensuring the overall healthy development of their children. Most importantly, a pre-school would send a strong message, especially to the parents who had already lost children to malnutrition, that others also had faith in the future of their children.

The story of Dona Maria illustrated some of the steps necessary to ensure the active involvement of families experiencing the greatest despair. Dona Maria brought her fifteen month old son to the health centre. The small boy was seriously malnourished and suffered bronchi-pneumonia. For the child's recovery, the doctor suggested home consultations. During these visits at home trust developed gradually and, one day, Dona Maria confided that four of her children had already died at an early age, two from malnutrition. For her first child, she had walked an hour-and-a-half to a health centre assuming that her child's illness could be cured. She learned there that there was no medication available to treat the baby's malnutrition. This was the beginning of the family's belief of being powerless in protecting the health of their children.

When her son's health improved, the doctor suggested that the family join the nutritional centre and pre-school. The parents were afraid; they were not yet ready to face the community. However, they agreed to send their son and daughter to the centre with a neighbour. After a while, they decided that their eldest daughter would accompany the two young children. The team frequently visited the parents to inform them of the children's progress. Little-by-little, the family started to participate more actively in the centre's activities. In 1985, when Dona Maria gave birth to a daughter, she took full advantage of the services available at the health centre and pre-school. As a result, this child never suffered from malnutrition. That same year, the pre-school organised a month-long Festival of Knowledge. Her husband actively participated with his children, and the rest of the community, in the workshops.

As Dona Maria and her husband began to believe again in their children's future, they regained their confidence as parents. Their story is not unique. It was necessary to re-adapt the project until they were able to find renewed hope for the future. Only when these families dared to hope again could they participate in community projects as they had always wished.³⁷ This evolution was important not only for themselves but also for the entire community; without their participation, the community was deprived of an invaluable and unique experience from which it could learn. It should be stressed, however, that nothing is gained once and for all, and that an appraisal of necessary changes and adaptations has to be incorporated into the process.

3. *The importance of cultural actions*

Human beings require beauty and creative expression as much as they require food, clothing and shelter. The poorest remind us of this over and over when they say, *"I want to show other people what I can do, what I have in my heart. I want to share with other people what I feel. It does you good to create something, it is a great satisfaction."* or *"When I draw and when I paint it is like a tenderness which comes out of me. I no longer have any need to talk of my troubles, nor to cry to exist. With painting and drawing we create a new image of ourselves, one we can be proud of."*³⁸

Artistic and cultural projects emphasise each person's natural and innate creativity. Through them, the poorest are able to discover their capabilities and potential. They gain the confidence to contribute to their communities and to broader society. *"All people, and more than anyone else those living in the most extreme poverty, need beauty and poetry just as much as they need bread. Not before and not after bread. At the same time. Every man and woman needs beauty and creative expression as the same time as they need food in order to maintain their dignity, to maintain within themselves this space of freedom where one can invent the future, and without which one might as well be dead."*³⁹

Cultural activities also provide a neutral atmosphere which allows people from different socio-economic backgrounds to share knowledge and experiences, become friends and build partnerships based on mutual respect. Because culture is an exercise in creation, it allows each person to place themselves on par with all others. Culture breaches the imprisonment of isolation. On the one hand it is necessary for culture to penetrate into very poor environments. On the other hand culture must allow itself to be

³⁷See Kabre, M.-B., and Beyeler, H., 1986, *Children Lead the Way in Burkina Faso*, Editions Science et Service and Unicef, Pierrelaye/Ouagadougou.

³⁸Hosselet, M., 1996, *Clin d'oeil a l'ami Picasso*, Editions Quart Monde, Paris.

³⁹European Commission and International Movement ATD Fourth World, 1995, *Culture and Human Activity for Overcoming Poverty*, Publication Office of the European Communities, Brussels/Luxembourg (Proceedings of the European Colloquium on the Role of Culture in Combatting Poverty. Brussels, 8-9 June 1995.)

impregnated with the experience of the very poor, with their suffering, hopes and courage.⁴⁰

The “Street Library”⁴¹ developed in Guatemala City illustrates this. As its name implies, the activity takes place outside, right in the centre of a poor neighbourhood. There is no registration or pre-requisite for participation. This makes the activity easily accessible to the children and their parents. However, this does not guarantee the participation of the poorest. Outreach is still necessary. In Guatemala City, the “Street Library” took place on the edge of an enormous garbage dump where many children and adults worked scavenging for anything that could be washed and resold. One of the team members noted: *“We met very deprived families who have been driven from everywhere else. We planned to set up a street library there (with books and art material for children). A man told me: ‘We don’t want any books here. We have to fight just to feed ourselves. Children are dying of hunger. If you show books to the children, you will melt their hearts’. The activity happened nevertheless. And in the end, the man took a coin from his pocket and offered it to me. He said, ‘Here, this is for the bus ride. You’re doing a good thing. People do not live on bread alone’.”*

In New York City, the “Street Library” run in two neighbourhoods acted as a catalyst for re-establishing links between people. Parents, artists and crafts people were regularly invited to share their skills and talents with the children. Teachers, librarians, police officers and local officials were also invited to discover the potential of the community they had either lost touch with or given-up on. When these members of mainstream society visited the street library, the poorest began to be recognised as people who were capable of contributing to their children's future and their communities. The parents of children who participated in the “Street Library” gathered regularly to discuss issues of special concern to them. These meetings prepared them to meet with officials of schools, community organisations and government services. In this way, the “Street Library” served as a starting point for a comprehensive community project rather than being a goal in and of itself⁴².

4. Strengthening the family

The experience acquired working side-by-side with very poor families shows that when the prospect of development is approached from their viewpoint, the improvement of the

⁴⁰UNESCO/NGOs, 1996, *Culture, a way to fight extreme poverty*, Unesco, Paris. Contribution of a group of NGOs to the World Decade for Cultural Development (1988-1997) and to the First United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997-2006).

⁴¹In the “Street library”, books nurture the children’s curiosity and imagination through storytelling, poetry, theatre, puppet shows. The children participate in creative workshops such as drawing, painting, music, sculpture, woodwork or scientific experimentation. Where possible, street libraries incorporate computers into the activity: children around the world communicate with each other through the modem.

⁴²Fanelli, V., 1990, *The Human Face of Poverty; A Chronicle of Urban America*, Bootstrap Press, New York.

overall welfare of the family and the future of the children should be the objective. In this area, poor families feel they need outside help and support. It is a fact that extreme poverty is destructive to family and social life. Nevertheless, the family remains a powerful means of social identification since a human being feels himself first and foremost responsible for the development of those closest to him or her. Of course, when living conditions become too harsh, fathers do not hesitate to go away to sell their labour - this is documented by most in the projects of the study. Also, children will take the risk of living in the street. But everyone will still keep the hope of returning home with the few resources or belongings they have gained.

The UN report on human rights and extreme poverty⁴³ mentions that *"gestures of solidarity among persons living in extreme poverty can sometimes help to preserve family bonds."* An account from Asia illustrates this: *"Sometimes one of the children goes out begging, which is an offence in the country. One evening, he is arrested by the police and sent to a juvenile correctional home. His mother goes to visit him regularly. She can't take him home because she has no residence certificate. She will have to get the full support of other residents of the shantytown to have herself and her children put on the residence certificate of her own mother, who is herself registered on the certificate of a friend. Only then can her son go back to his family".*

By contrast, assistance provided by official social services is sometimes seen as an obstacle to the assumption of family responsibilities. For example, a woman in North America states : *"I was in a shelter with my children. I was so closely watched by the social services that I did not dare do anything. I did not dare scold my children when they were naughty. If they heard us shouting, someone from the children's welfare office would come to see what was happening... I was so afraid that my children would be taken away from me that I did not dare do anything."*

Threats to family life are particularly serious, because the family is the first line of resistance and often the only defence against poverty and exclusion. Therefore, the questions to be put forth relate to the security of the families (resources, work, housing, health), their potential for carrying out certain projects and enabling one member or another to learn new skills. It is necessary to ask: Is this particular action reinforcing the family or breaking it apart?

5. The role of the poor in identifying others poorer than themselves

In Belgium, the city of Charleroi developed a large project in the framework of the anti-poverty program financed by the Commission of the European Communities, for a duration of four years (1990-1994). Several working committees were established for the definition of the program and the evaluation of its progress. One dealt with the issue of citizenship, with the objective of *"enabling the most deprived to express themselves and*

⁴³ United Nations, 1996, op. cit.

to ensure that their rights as citizens be respected; to promote the participation of the poorest in the elaboration, implementation and evaluation of the actions undertaken within this program." For this working committee, the challenge from the start was how to reach out to those most marginalized, those whose daily life is one of being uprooted, wandering and long-term dependency? How to know them, to meet them and to enter into a dialogue with them in a sustainable way?

The outcome of that process made it clear that it was thanks to the people experiencing hardships themselves that those most hidden and most downtrodden became progressively involved and were able to communicate their opinions and formulate proposals. A couple, for instance, living in a neighbourhood where many very deprived families took refuge, introduced the committee members systematically to neighbours in more difficult conditions: *"They live very hard things, you must go and see them, they can teach you a lot"*. In turn, these people helped the committee meet others that nobody else knew. Nobody else could have been the bridge that builds the confidence and trust that leads to mutual respect and partnership.

The same process is documented in the "Art and Poetry" project in Bangkok. The team did not come with pre-conceived ideas about what should be done. Rather, they noted their daily discoveries trying to pay attention to the situation of the poorest. At the same time, they developed contacts with people and organisations concerned by this situation. Through cultural activities run in a poor area in Bangkok (Klong Toey) they got to know poor families, and in turn these families made it possible to meet other, poorer families living in a slum that no one knew about. They were the ones to indicate where these rejected families lived. They also insisted that the team went to meet this community and offered to be intermediaries.

These examples demonstrate that people living in precarious or poor conditions are well aware of the existence of others, around them, poorer than themselves. When a program clearly states in its objectives its determination to include everyone, the poor are the first ones to understand this and to recognise what is at stake. Their unique knowledge should be given its full value and treated as a key element of the process, so that it contributes to the development of actions.

6. Revealing and building on the potential within a community to unite around its poorest members

The "Courtyard of Hundred Trades" started in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso with the support of friends from the country.⁴⁴ From the beginning, the project director chose to develop natural relationships with the children and young people living on the streets in particularly difficult conditions. He met them while picking up his mail at the post

⁴⁴ Aussedat, M., 1996, *La Cour aux Cents Métiers*, Editions Quart Monde, Paris.

office, shopping at the market, or paying his electricity or water bills- all places where these children spent their days trying to earn a living. He refused to respond to their immediate demands for help and instead asked them systematically, "to whom can you turn for help?" He discovered and revealed the existence of an informal network of people who already had built relationships with the children and represented a real link with society: civil servants, small businesses, trade owners. These friends were often the only link existing between the children and their families.

At the same time, the project director established working contacts with people who, privately or in the context of their official responsibilities, expressed concern about the situation and the future of the children and who were willing to go a step further with them. In San Jacinto, Guatemala, the team encountered, in the community itself, men and women deeply concerned by the situation of those suffering the greatest deprivation. Without particular means, these people were on the lookout so that the poorest members of their community were not totally abandoned. The team wrote : *"We followed their footsteps to discover this side - often not well-known - of the history of a population: its solidarity with its poorest members. They led us towards people really hit by misery. They showed us how they shared the crop of corn. They taught us their own respect towards these persons. For example, in this community, everyone knew that it was possible to come and talk to Don Andreas with total confidence. A catchiest, he was deeply touched by the suffering of those around him. He always tried to find ways to help and when he could not, at least he offered his presence. Many could bear witness to what he did: for example, he gathered the men of his village to build the house of a women living alone with her children, with no roof over their head. This was part of his daily life and contributed to change the daily life of the community."*

What lessons can be retained from these examples? First, an immediate response to the demands of the children in the street would have broken the solidarity already existing around them. It is essential to discover this solidarity, to respect it and to build upon it. Second, because the project director himself had few resources to help, the children themselves took initiatives to help him: giving advice on how to care for the trees in his courtyard, offering a hand by sweeping the courtyard, introducing him to their friends. They were in a position to help instead of being assisted; it made them proud. This spirit inspired the whole project and was present throughout its implementation. Third, within each community, there is the potential of people to refuse an unacceptable situation and to unite around its poorest members. Often, they are individuals belonging to the community, who are not necessarily considered "leaders" but whose daily acts express their solidarity with the poorest. These people are essential in the establishment of a consensus within the community to be on the lookout for those at risk of being left out.

II. IMPLICATIONS

The implications derived from the findings of the study can be summed up under four recommendations.

II.1. An investment over time

For everyone committed in the fight against poverty, at different levels and in different responsibilities, the necessity of long-term investment hardly needs to be stressed. Reaching out to the poorest, enabling them to become partners necessitates taking the time to know them. The obstacles are many; their living conditions, for example, isolate them, sometimes hide them. Taking the time to meet them and acquire an in-depth knowledge is indispensable. It has also been demonstrated that the poorest do not easily express what they really think. They lack the means to do so and are too dependent on others. Relationships of trust and confidence must be established before they truly enter into a dialogue with others.

The same may be said of the non-poor. Establishing a relationship of trust between all concerned parties can take various forms, depending on the context. Right from the start, all partners must know that their investments require a lengthy time commitment. Duration is not sufficient in and of itself for changes to take place. Imagination, creativity, flexibility and the ability to question one's actions and knowledge are just as important. For this, time is required, and this naturally also has an impact on the planning and financial support of such action. Financial support needs to be secured in order to allow all partners sufficient time to enter into a mutual knowledge and mutual dialogue that will result in innovative actions. It must be stressed that duration does not imply a lack of time constraints. Setting realistic goals, which are constantly re-evaluated, remains essential.

II.2. Planning and evaluation

With regards to planning, the establishment and reappraisal of knowledge deserves particular attention. It is neither the drastic living conditions of the poorest, nor their needs and problems that must be known, for such knowledge could stigmatise them, re-enforce their feeling of humiliation and prevent other fellow human beings from identifying with them. It is, instead, vital that the project has the possibility to discover the values, aspirations and areas for which each person is willing to invest the best of himself. Such values and aspirations should constitute the basis for trust on which any action must be built. At the same time, it is just as vital to discover the values and expectations of the community, group and neighbourhood with which the very poor are connected. Even if these links are fragile, they do exist. These surrounding groups have at their disposal members who invest their energy and their know-how to put an end to the sufferings of the very poor. These persons represent an indispensable asset for the action to be undertaken and should be identified.

With regards to evaluation, traditional criteria are necessary to determine if progress is made in relation to the fixed objectives. At the school in Haiti, for example, the evaluation criteria were: How many children attended school? How many finished the primary cycle? How many teachers took advantage of a training program to improve their professional skills? How many parents were involved in the parents committee? However, more subtle criteria were introduced in order to evaluate the participation of the poorest, such as: Did the participation of the poorest families in the school enable them to get out of their isolation and to take part in the life of the community? In Burkina Faso, in addition to the number of children and young people welcomed at the Courtyard and to the number of those who acquired a skill, the qualitative criteria introduced were: How and to what extent did the project enable the beneficiaries to feel more responsible towards other children still excluded?

Thus, the dynamic of evaluation should be anchored in a very simple question: did the poorest have the opportunity to advance towards more autonomy and freedom rather than continuing in a cycle of dependency and assistance? Nothing is gained once and for all. Progress which appears well-established might be compromised by external factors such as an unfavourable economic climate, decreasing interest on the part of the social interventions, or a change to staff less inclined to confer priority to the poorest, etc. Paying attention to the positive and negative signs with regards to the satisfaction of the needs of the very poor and the changes necessary in action is a permanent exercise. In order to appreciate the need for evolution in objectives and to envisage modifications in the delivery of an action, periodical evaluations and adjustments in planning are essential.

Evaluation is a process to be included from the planning stage onwards in any action. It offers the opportunity to consult the population concerned and to enable it to contribute to the realisation of the action in all its dimensions. It serves as reminder to be on the lookout so that the reality and the expectations of the very poor are taken into account. It is also a recognition of the poorest as indispensable partners.

II.3. Building global partnerships

The challenge is to build an agreement between the various partners, including the poorest, regarding a number of objectives. These goals should be aimed at reducing poverty and ending extreme poverty. The need for such mobilisation must be identified at the start of any action. It should already be part of the planning process. This mobilisation begins with the detection of local supports which will then lead towards larger services.

The setting up of the Art and Poetry centre, in the Tha Din Daeng neighbourhood in Bangkok, is such an example. It was made possible thanks to the collaboration between the ILO regional office, the Ministry of Labour and ATD Fourth World. Time is needed to achieve such collaboration. Each partner must have the time necessary to follow through with its own approach. The establishment of dialogue with persons and

institutions able to offer support to a sustainable action against extreme poverty must be an objective present from the beginning.

At the same time, special attention must be given to the partnership of the poorest. Partnership does not mean obtaining a temporary co-operation in order to guarantee the success of a precise action. Partnership has to demonstrate that the poorest have a role to play - an important role - for the whole of the community. In that sense, they are not only persons "to reach," but people getting the opportunity to retrieve a respected position in their community which benefits others as well as themselves. During one of the workshops of the Courtyard of One Hundred Trades in Burkina Faso, for instance, the young people living in the streets fabricated toys and pedagogical materials for pre-schools which completely lacked such means. In this way, these young people could contribute to the realisation of the expectations of their country and the ambitions elaborated by the public authorities.

II.4. Support for training

Goodwill is not sufficient for partners whose history and experiences are so far away from one another, to really meet, understand one other and dare to take risks together. Training appears a key issue. The objective of training those who intervene in the life of the very destitute is to enable them to be in the best position possible to meet and act with the very poor. The challenge of training the "poorest" lies in allowing the space, time and freedom necessary so that their partnerships can be the expression of their thinking and their points of view. The necessity of training, in a very large sense of the word, must, therefore, be taken seriously. On-going training must be designed as a personal and collective responsibility. It must be updated according to the knowledge acquired, the setbacks experienced and the advancements realised. In that respect, learning from and networking with others (including the very poor themselves) should be recognised as part of the training process and financed as such.

An integral part of the training process is the recognition that "reaching the poorest" requires the commitment of determined individuals. As illustrated in all of the examples presented, the poorest were reached thanks to the significant human investment of the individuals participating in the actions. It is vital to stress that the poorest themselves are the first to make this investment, as demonstrated in their daily acts of resistance to poverty, humiliation and exclusion. The specific and unique contribution that the poorest can offer in the training process should be acknowledge, taken into account and made available.

III. CHALLENGES TO THE NECESSITY OF REACHING THE POOREST

Questions are often raised about the usefulness and the relevance of "reaching the poorest." Why is it necessary to try and reach the poorest? Is it justifiable to invest large

sums of money for the benefit of a small part of the population? Why should special efforts be made for the poorest since they should automatically benefit from programs designed for all? Another question often put forward is the following: can small-scale initiatives which at times reach the poorest really be useful on a larger scale? The study "Reaching the Poorest" did not address directly these types of questions. However, by approaching the problem from a grass-roots perspective and looking at a number of action-research projects, several points can be drawn from the study which partially respond to these questions.

- The starting point for the study was the acknowledgement by agencies, such as UNICEF, who make particular efforts to ensure the widest coverage for their programs, that a considerable portion of the target population was not being reached. In some cases as much as 20% of the target group not only was not reached but was, in fact, experiencing worse conditions after the implementation of their programs. The progress of the majority seemed to go alongside the deterioration of the situation of the weakest. For example, in one community in Guatemala, the installation of a water supply system for the majority led to further hardship for the poorest because the water they had previously used, was now being diverted away from their living area. Linked with this, is the generally accepted trickle down theory which supposes that eventually even the poorest will benefit from projects aimed to benefit the majority. However, this is far from guaranteed and these actions need to be corrected in order to reach these goals. Some projects described in the study gave indications of such adjustments, underlining for example the importance of cultural activities, or the necessity to rely on members of the community who are attentive to the weakest. If such adjustments are failing, the weakest members undergo worsened conditions. This is clearly in contradiction with all the efforts to establish a human rights approach whereby every person should live in dignity and be respected. The universal value of human rights as maintained by the United Nations agencies cannot be submitted to criteria of simple efficiency.
- Maintaining a portion of humankind in conditions of extreme poverty comparable to slavery or apartheid, represents a danger to peace and harmony everywhere, as nobody can be guaranteed protection from this evil. The example of contagious diseases such as tuberculosis illustrates this potential danger. The World Health Organisation warns that tuberculosis is on the rise especially among vulnerable groups, such as the very poor. These groups do not have the possibility to protect themselves and can benefit only sporadically from health services. As a consequence, this disease is more and more impossible to cure, becoming in turn a risk for society as a whole. Therefore, the improvement of the standard of living of the poorest can lead to an improvement for the community as a whole.
- The question of financial viability should be considered along with that of sustainability. An example of this is the community development project in Peru, which was only able to secure financial support for three years. Despite the

investment and commitment of the project team and the villagers, this short time allowed by the financial institutions was not enough time to fully establish the project and to ensure the participation of the poorest in a sustainable way. In other cases, in order to prove their efficiency, projects have to manage in a short period of time with an amount of funds that surpasses the immediate needs and the capacity to manage them. Projects are sometimes endowed with assets that they then have difficulty maintaining after this outside support stops.

- The significance of small-scale projects for policy making is often questioned and not taken into account. One of the reasons is that it is more difficult to measure the contribution of people and material aspects are given priority. In the evaluation process, more emphasis needs to be placed on qualitative criteria in order to have a more accurate assessment of this human investment. In all the actions explored by the study, the commitment of the people themselves has proven to be a key element in the success of the actions and their outreach beyond the initial targets. The “Courtyard of One Hundred Trades” in Burkina Faso addresses the importance of not judging the success of a project based only on the quantitative results which can be easily measured. What is equally important is to consider the multiplying effect which goes beyond just the children’s participation in the workshops. By participating in this project the children gained the courage to rebuild relationships with their families and others in the community. The significance of the multiplying effect that the people themselves can have is rarely given due consideration. When the poorest are enabled to live in dignity and solidarity with their surrounding environment they can make a real contribution to their community as a whole.

CONCLUSION

The objective of this paper has been to look at ways of responding to the growing concern about extreme poverty, based on the study “Reaching the Poorest” which explored action-research projects initiated in different settings. This exploration demonstrated that it is possible to design and implement actions with the goal of reaching the poorest and thus including everyone. It highlighted six points to take into consideration for that purpose, namely: i) sharing knowledge, ii) actions based on the aspirations of the poorest, iii) the importance of culture, iv) strengthening the family, v) the role of the poor in detecting people poorer than themselves, and vi) building on the potential of others to unite around the poorest. From these points, four areas of recommendations were identified: i) investment over time, ii) planning and evaluation, and iv) partnerships and training.

Questions are often raised about the relevance of reaching the poorest and while this paper did not attempt to answer these questions, it has tried to look at them in light of the findings of the study. The findings of this study are obviously not exhaustive and the search has to be continued in order to gain a better understanding of what is needed to

“reach the poorest.” It would be to the benefit of everyone if the Bretton Woods institutions tackle the question of extreme poverty and look at their input towards eradicating it. It would also benefit everyone if partnerships on this issue between these institutions and civil society be developed on solid grounds. ATD Fourth World and its network of correspondents of the “Permanent Forum: Extreme Poverty in the World” are wholeheartedly ready to contribute to this development.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Many of the projects described in this paper are also discussed in French in the following issues of the *Revue Quart Monde* (Editions Quart Monde, Paris): n° 162, mai 1997, Bangkok, pourquoi la culture? (pp. 52-59); n° 163, septembre 1997, Au Québec, ensemble pour casser la misère (pp. 52-59); n° 164, novembre 1997. Interroger les communautés paysannes du Pérou (pp. 86-93); and n° 165, février 1998. Atteindre les plus pauvres, Ouganda (pp. 64-71).

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER 5

Fifty representatives from bilateral, international and non-governmental organisations, working in all continents in the struggle against poverty met in Pierrelaye, France, from 15 to 18 May 1996 at the joint initiative of UNICEF and the International Movement ATD Fourth World.

The theme of the meeting was “Reaching the Poorest” and the starting point was a study carried out by ATD Fourth World and UNICEF between 1993 and 1996.

The participants, exchanging information and experiences, discussed the problems encountered and possible strategies and tools for action. They felt that the experience should be shared with other concerned people around the globe. Their conclusions are captured in the following statement:

Reaching the poorest: a call from Pierrelaye

The reality of poverty:

Poverty and extreme poverty are spreading and worsening throughout the world. Poverty, and even more so, extreme poverty are characterised by a deprivation of access to services and resources. When poverty becomes persistent, it impedes the exercise of rights and responsibilities and leads to exclusion from the community. Extreme poverty is a serious attack on human rights.

The main victims of poverty are children, whose futures are gravely compromised by the deprivations they endure. Their rights remain unrealised despite the commitments made by the peoples and the governments of the world in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Poverty is not inevitable; it results from the ways we have structured our societies, from our own attitudes and behaviours- which we can change.

People living in great poverty survive because of their own efforts. They are the first to act in resisting their condition, drawing on their own life experience which is indispensable in the fight against poverty.

Throughout the world, men and women, generally with scant means, have made a commitment alongside these populations. Their experience and contributions are not sufficiently recognised.

Reaching the poorest concerns us all and must be our priority action for fulfilling human rights. By not taking such action we deny our own humanity and betray universal values.

Guaranteeing the full exercise of human rights by the poorest will mean security and progress for the whole society.

Reaching the Poorest

Reaching the poorest is crucial. It calls for a new way of thinking, a continual questioning of our motivations, objectives and actions. It does not mean setting up programmes geared only for the poorest but rather ensuring that the poorest are fully taken into account in policies and programmes for all.

Reaching the poorest is a question of justice, equity, respect, and solidarity. Enabling the poorest to exercise their rights and to assume their responsibilities is the ultimate test of a fair and humane society. Its prerequisite is the building of a true partnership between the poorest and the whole of society.

The Necessary Tools

Access to basic services: As long as the poorest must devote all their energies to the search for basic necessities - food, shelter, health, education, employment - talk of partnership is futile.

Cultural development: To be partners, the poorest must have access to culture, and the means to enhance their social, spiritual and intellectual lives. They must have the tools to develop their own knowledge and to enrich it through access to other knowledge in society.

Role of the family: As the primary framework in which people resist poverty and exclusion, the family is the best springboard towards a better future.

Partnership and human investment: The extreme solitude and abandonment of people living in extreme poverty requires other men and women to take a lasting commitment alongside them. This should be done in a way that allows them to share responsibilities and to be full partners. This partnership and this investment must be recognised and supported by local, national and international agencies.

Knowledge: No authentic partnership can be built in ignorance of the situation, and of the opinions and aspirations of the people concerned. This knowledge is one element of action and it must be reciprocal. The poorest have the right to know those who join them to decide freely on association.

Capacity building is an essential part of building such a knowledge base. Training provided to individuals and institutions who are partners with the poorest should enable them to develop their knowledge of the poorest and transform their way of seeing, meeting and learning from them.

Sustainability: Reaching the poorest requires time to nourish relationships and to understand and accept the tempo of their lives so as to enable them to witness change and speak freely. Without such knowledge, there can be no common basis for determining and sustaining their actions.

Evaluation: In partnership, the poorest must be full participants in the development, implementation and evaluation of actions. The evaluation process must enable the population to exercise real control over joint efforts and to continue to identify those that are still unreached.

Commitments

In reaching these conclusions, we will ensure that we:

Continue this exploration, building on the knowledge gained thus far in reaching the poorest and expand the network through the exchange of information, including promoting the widest possible dissemination of the study “Reaching the Poorest”;

Ensure that our work, and beyond, the voices of the poorest, their efforts and initiatives are fully expressed and recognised in the development of policies and programmes;

Promote world-wide action challenging national and international institutions to focus on strategies that allow the poorest to exercise their rights and responsibilities;

Promote the reflection and discussions in our own organisations and other fora, so that the question “Have we reached the poorest?” and did they benefit, becomes a criterion for the evaluation of social and economic development efforts;

Strengthen collaboration with organisations, institutions and individuals seeking to eradicate extreme poverty;

Seek out organisations and individuals who are developing partnerships with the poorest, build links with them, help make them known, visible and heard;

Continually evaluate the process of reaching the poorest and the mobilisation of human and financial resources to eradicate extreme poverty.

And finally, we urge governments, international organisations, members of the United Nation system, NGOs and civil society to:

Recognise the importance of quality human investment over the long term for the poorest, stand firm in their commitment to eradicate poverty and mobilise the necessary human and financial resources;

Assess the implementation of international agreements, declarations, programmes of action and policies through the prism of the question: Have we reached the poorest? and review the progress made in enabling them to exercise their human rights.