

# On Solidarity with Immigrants

*Closing Speech at the conference "Fourth World Solidarity – Immigrants", organised by the International Movement ATD Fourth World at the Salle de la Mutualité in Paris on 15 November 1980.*

Here we are at the end of this event, and I will try to summarise what you, the delegates, have said here.

The first delegation from Marseille which represented the South of France, has understood, thanks to its struggle, thanks to its difficulties, that if we want to be really free and respected, we must succeed in our bid, which we have launched three years ago right here at the Mutualité, namely that in ten years, there should not be a single child failing at school, not a man or woman in our cities that doesn't know how to read or write or how to speak before people. The people from Marseille have told us that they will join all of us in the struggle to succeed in this bid. And that is why we applaud the delegation from Marseille.

Our friends from Germany have shared with us how much they resented the fact that the state, the authorities, the social services, and sometimes even the churches, don't really understand them and often judge them. They told us that we have to fight for our dignity and our rights to be recognised. They have declared that no matter what our colour, we are all equals, we are all human beings who have a right to be represented and heard, the right to fight for justice. Thank you for that to the delegation from Germany.

The Swiss delegation spoke of their daily struggle for acknowledgement that the Fourth World exists in their country. They told us the Swiss are convinced that in their country, there is neither poverty nor destitution. So if a man isn't working and cannot provide for his family, the whole family is held in contempt and has no right to speak out. The families of the Fourth World in Switzerland are fighting for the whole family to be able to make themselves heard and defend themselves; to be able to love, to love as a family. For this we thank the Swiss.

And here are the delegates from Versailles, born in the shadow of the kings of France! They have made it clear to us that without accommodation, it is impossible to lead a social life. Without accommodation, one cannot live as a family and the families cannot get to know each other, support each other or defend themselves together. To the people from Versailles, we say that we agree and that we will fight together for accommodation for all the families there.

As always, the English have come over to us all the way from the other side of the Channel to remind us of the right of children to be raised by their families, to be brought up by their father and mother. To be born into a poor family, be it English, Jamaican, Indian or Turkish, must not be a curse for the children. That is why they have fought so many battles, which are ours as well. So we also say to the English: we are by your side, we are fighting with you.

The Belgian delegation, in the name of all the Fourth World families in Belgium, has reminded us of something that is often forgotten, namely that if the trade unions, the political parties, the various organisations don't recognise us and don't support us, we won't succeed. That is why we wish to

assure the people from Belgium that we will fight together to be recognised by the unions, the parties and organisations.

\* \* \*

So this is, in essence, what we have said to each other here this evening, and we won't forget the people of Marseille who were the first to show us how the families of immigrants and the families of the Fourth World live together. For tonight, we are together, not to celebrate the Immigrants or to celebrate the families of the Fourth World, but to celebrate that long march we have been pursuing together for 25 years, even though it has not not always been easy to march on like that side by side. Tonight, we are celebrating solidarity and fellowship, and as we do so, let us remember several things from the witness we have heard this evening.

First, it is true that the obstacles that remain are numerous. In our battle for unity, there are many pitfalls that may prevent us precisely to stay together, to show solidarity amongst ourselves. Thus, we are tightly packed together in overpopulated housing estates, with little provision in terms of social and cultural services, badly maintained by the Housing Associations and deteriorating rapidly. Badly housed, both immigrant families and families of the Fourth World, threatened with seizure and eviction, we often live on edge and end up mistrusting one another, avoiding one another. We sometimes stop our children from talking to each other; we shut our doors and we close our hearts. Sometimes we even are jealous of each other; we envy the Algerians who are in work, that Palestinian who was given accommodation, that Italian who got money from the local council, that black guy who has taken away our work as a dustman, the neighbours' children who are achieving at school ...

Sometimes we hate ourselves. Because of the misfortunes that weigh us down, we have entered the vicious cycle of suspicion and jealousy which gives rise in us to fear, as we heard from our first speaker this evening. The fear of one another, the fear of that neighbour, a stranger though living on the same floor, sharing the same conditions, the same threat of eviction, and is just as much held in contempt at the local council, in the district, by the social services and the organisations. It is this fear which leads us into insulting, hurting, threatening, and sometimes even coming to blows with one another. So there are many, many obstacles to our fellowship.

\* \* \*

However, and that is the second point to remember, in spite of all these obstacles, our battle has brought us to the point with one another where we are come together tonight as brothers, and that we realise we now indeed have a better understanding of one another. From now on, we will know that it is not the skin colour or the way we do things that matters; what is important is the future of our children. The important thing is that we work together to respect one another, that together we demand the right to be respected. What matters is that we should be able to love one another, in our families and family to family, because we are brothers.

\* \* \*

The third thing we have learnt together is to stop being naïve, to stop allowing others to ruin our solidarity. We will no longer permit ourselves to listen to those who tell us that strangers are taking

away our work, that the families of the Fourth World pollute our cities. We have no right to listen to those who tell us those things and we won't. We have no right to allow ourselves to be manipulated by the propaganda of people who want to use us, to set us one against the other to serve their own political agenda, their ideologies, or to protect their interests.

\* \* \*

Our fourth observation is that thanks to our battle and the discovery of our fraternity, we have become a Movement. Madame Rio said it: "We have become a movement that takes a message to the entire world. A message which we ourselves own and which the world needs in order to progress." It is true that the suffering we are all experiencing, immigrants and families of the Fourth World alike, has given us a message of hope. The desire to fight this suffering together has roused the hope which was dormant in our hearts, in our minds, in our lives. This eternal hope that we will stand upright and be recognised as complete human beings has finally come to light for all to see. Today we are able to proclaim: from now on we will be human beings that are recognised as such. The endless suffering that is our part has given rise to this immense hope and the will to make it a reality together means it no longer remains hidden in our hearts, but we are able to take it as a message to the world.

We have to take it there. For the world won't make progress on the strength of its military or economic conquests, of its ideologies or the profits gained from each other. Quite the contrary! For those who possess, those who know, those who enjoy the privileges be they ever so small, don't want the world to change. They hinder its evolution instead. Whilst we, because of our suffering and our hope, want the world to progress. Those who are changing the world are people like us who, rising above all bitterness, have found hope again in our fellowship. It is because we put our hope in fellowship that the future of humanity is in our hands.

Because we are the excluded of the earth, we are able to think up a world without exclusion. Because we have known injustice and contempt for so long, we are able to conceive of a world of justice and respect among people. Because we know what it means to be dependent, we are able to conceive of a free world where there will be work for everybody. And above all, because we have been deprived of friendship and love, we know that nobody can live without love or friendship, and we can conceive of a world of solidarity and love.

The world is in need of us to learn about freedom, justice and fellowship. Those who truly wish for a new society where no-one is ever humiliated, have a need for the Fourth World and immigrants to proclaim together their certainty that the world can change and that it will change because we want it to change. (...)

\* \* \*

Of course, nothing has been gained so far, everything still has to be done. Nevertheless, we can tell ourselves that we are a movement that counts. Thanks to our battles for a guaranteed minimum wage protecting the whole family against impoverishment, family organisations have started to recognise and support us. Thanks to our solidarity in factory and workshop, we were able to remind the unions that a split between qualified and unskilled workers is against the interests of all of the workers. Thanks to bid: in ten years, not a single child in our cities without schooling, not a single

adult without a profession, we have applied ourselves to learning to read and write and to demand vocational training.

Because as we know, we have no right to respect without a profession. Without a profession, we have no inalienable right to work or accommodation. Without a profession, we won't be human beings amongst other human beings (...).

And finally, and contrary to all expectation, we have been able to render life in our housing estates more humane, more fraternal. We have been confirmed in our certainty that we are able to get on with each other, to understand one another, to respect and love one another. As we began on our march together, there grew in us a deep solidarity that exists among all disadvantaged families, immigrants or of the Fourth World in France. Whatever our nationality, our ethnicity or our opinions, at the heart of our housing estates we will henceforth continue to walk in fellowship. Now that we have started, we won't be able to stop and others won't be able to forget the movement that we are making up together. (...)

\* \* \*

We have started it and we must carry on, continue to gather at the Fourth World Houses and create such Houses where they don't exist as yet. We must have the desire to build Fourth World Houses where we will be able to talk, exchange views, respect one another, and practice together our fellowship in the struggle. And we must rejoin in great numbers the union of families where all the disadvantaged minorities that we represent (...) must find a place. Instead of staying amongst ourselves we must mobilise all those who want a society without exclusion. If we go to meet the others, those even more desolate than us, then – believe me – the struggle we have begun will come to an end. The world will respect us because it will respect all human beings.

Here we represent the hope of the Fourth World, but we must not allow ourselves to forget that we can, that we must, also be the hope of the world.