

# The UN Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights can make a real contribution to the work of the Constitutional Convention

All Together in Dignity - ATD Fourth World Ireland  
calls for constitutional protection of economic, social and cultural rights.

In view of the economic crisis we have experienced in Ireland, with its disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable of our people, **ATD Ireland considers it critical that the Constitution recognizes the economic, social and cultural rights of every individual in the country.**

Furthermore, **the UN Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights**<sup>1</sup> (GPs), adopted in 2012, constitute an excellent tool for formulating and implementing human rights policies that effectively reach even the most excluded members of society.

The UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, Ms. Magdalena Sepúlveda, at the end of her visit to Ireland in January 2011 said: *“(Irish) Government must commit to a human rights-based recovery, where all economic, social and cultural rights are ensured without discrimination of any kind, in which there is equality of access to public services and where participation of civil society actors is guaranteed in all levels of decision making structures.”*<sup>2</sup>

On 22 and 23 February 2014, the Constitutional Convention charged by the Government to examine areas of constitutional reform will examine the introduction of economic, social and cultural rights in the Constitution. This examination was strongly supported by organisations across Ireland, including those involved with the ESC Rights Initiative. ATD Ireland has been active for 12 years in Ireland, fighting extreme poverty and social exclusion. Defending the ESC rights, such as healthcare, housing and social security, for all people has never been more relevant. The Constitutional Convention provides an opportunity to build a more humane and just society.

Based on international human rights norms and standards, the UN GPs, noted with appreciation by the UN General Assembly on 20 December 2012, are a practical tool for policy-makers to ensure that public policies reach the poorest members of society, respect and uphold their rights, and take into account the significant social, cultural, economic and structural obstacles to human rights enjoyment faced by persons living in poverty. **The GPs can make a real contribution to the understanding of economic, social and cultural rights by the Constitutional Convention in two principal ways:**

1. The GPs reaffirm **the indivisibility of rights**: *“Extreme poverty is a clear illustration of the indivisibility, interrelatedness and interdependence of human rights, given that persons living in poverty face daily violations of their civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights, which interact and mutually reinforce one another with devastating effects.”*
2. The GPs emphasize the concept of **participation** - that is to say that people living in extreme poverty should be recognized as rights-holders and agents of change. By underlining the necessity of free and autonomous participation, the Guiding Principles reiterate the importance of freedom of expression as a major human right. **Ensuring the enjoyment by all people of their economic, social and cultural rights is essential in order to promote their free and autonomous participation** in the development of public policies and programmes that are to the benefit of the entire society.

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*All Together in Dignity - ATD Fourth World is an international non-governmental organization with no religious or political affiliation which engages with individuals and institutions to find solutions to eradicate extreme poverty. Working in partnership with people in poverty, ATD's human rights-based approach focuses on supporting families and individuals through its grass-roots presence and involvement in disadvantaged communities in both urban and rural areas, creating public awareness of extreme poverty and influencing policies to address it. [www.atd-fourthworld.org](http://www.atd-fourthworld.org)*

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Charity Number CHY 18678 - **Directors:** Barbara Walshe, Isabelle Perrin, Martin Byrne, Ger Doherty, Mark Hogan.  
**26 Mountjoy Square, Dublin 1 - 01 855 81 91 - [atdfourthworld@eircom.net](mailto:atdfourthworld@eircom.net) - [www.facebook.com/togetherindignityireland](https://www.facebook.com/togetherindignityireland)**

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/OHCHR\\_ExtremePovertyandHumanRights\\_EN.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/OHCHR_ExtremePovertyandHumanRights_EN.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=10658&LangID=E>