



**Message for the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty
17 October 2014**

Learning From People Who Think Night and Day About Poverty

For centuries, people around the world have built memorials to both suffering and heroism. We hold ceremonies to honor those who have endured injustice or died fighting it. Through such memorials and ceremonies, we remind ourselves of war, slavery, oppression, and genocide with the hope: "never again."

But when do we recall the suffering and injustice that extreme poverty inflicts on people whose resistance leaves no trace upon the earth? They are buried in unmarked graves. Their neighborhoods are erased from our maps. Their words are forgotten.

October 17, which many people refer to as the World Day for Overcoming Poverty, is a time to commemorate both the oppression and the courage of people in extreme poverty. This day expresses hope for an end to the brutality and contempt inflicted on the most vulnerable people everywhere. Commemorating this day demonstrates our belief that these people, scorned and ignored, are in fact vitally important to our communities and our nations. It shows that, together, we want to put an end to discrimination and to build a better future.

Fatimata, from Burkina Faso, writes: *"Beyond suffering, there is humiliation; that's the worst. Fr. Joseph Wresinski [founder of ATD Fourth World] was right to call for an end to humiliating hand-outs that crush human dignity. [...] Even in the deepest poverty, a person needs to share with others what little he has. [...] I wonder whether the well-known figures in the struggle against poverty are actually the ones overcoming poverty? There are so many projects, so many words and books, so many researchers — but, despite this, poverty persists. I believe that all these words are understood, from A to Z, but I wonder if we don't need to invent a new alphabet to reinvent our struggle?"*

This question reflects the words engraved on the Commemorative Stone, inaugurated on October 17, 1987, calling for "homage to the victims of hunger, ignorance, and violence." This ignorance about lives lived in poverty is rarely acknowledged. Our world suffers from not seeing the intelligence and creativity of people in poverty. Historians, researchers, and journalists often write *about* poverty, while the people resisting it in their daily lives have little opportunity to share their own thoughts and understanding. On October 17, we want to recognize the knowledge acquired by people living in poverty.

Thérèse, in Senegal, says: *"No one has a monopoly on knowledge. We each know different things. People talk about 'the poor this,' and 'the poor that.' But the poor are the ones who think night and day. Someone with no worries can lie down at night thinking only of sleep. But someone who doesn't know how to feed his family tomorrow keeps thinking, even when lying down at night. I think this means that we have to share all our thinking, and especially that of the poor."*

Our world suffers from being unaware of the courageous risks people in poverty take for peace, just as much as it suffers from the ignorance of stereotypes. Jean in the United States says: *"In Ferguson, Missouri, the media showed protests and looting after a young man was shot by the police. Why do the media not show the courage of low-income men who risked violence to protect their community from looting? It comes from their heart, it should be talked about too!"*

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All of us are connected by a shared determination to end poverty. So we must ask ourselves: what do we need to do to move forward? A man who works on a logging crew in France says: *"There's a man who just started working here. He is having a hard time doing the job. Others are complaining about him. But I know he needs the job and the money. Without it, what would become of him? If I have to pick up some slack so he has a chance to learn the job, I'll do it."*

This man talking about a new worker also needs his paycheck. His determination to increase his own physically challenging work to make sure that his colleague will not be out of a job calls to mind similar efforts. In many communities, people of all backgrounds go out of their way to build a sense of community with others who desperately need decent work, decent housing, and decent schooling — or who simply need to be welcomed as neighbors, colleagues, and friends. People who have had to struggle to make ends meet at one time or another often choose to work in services where they can help others.

October 17 is a time to recognize all those who take risks and who make tremendous efforts to overcome poverty: the logger quoted above, for example; a teacher taking extra time to support a child who has missed many classes; or low-income housing residents who paint over graffiti that humiliates a newly arrived family.

These actions show what it means to muster energy to fight poverty every day. They move us all forward. To build a world of peace and respect, we all need to learn from these actions and many other new approaches for defying poverty. Together we are already inventing "a new alphabet" to help us understand our past and shape a better future.



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