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REVUE
**QUART
MONDE**



INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENT
ATD FOURTH WORLD



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Extreme Poverty is Violence Breaking the Silence Searching for Peace

A participatory research-action project about the relationship
between extreme poverty, violence and peace

International Movement ATD Fourth World

Foreword by Federico Mayor Zaragoza



Documents
n 20

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Foreword

The future is yet to be shaped

In this publication, ATD Fourth World presents the results of its research on the relationship between extreme poverty and violence. The summary is both instructive and horrifying: extreme poverty, marginalization, the situation of helplessness in which thousands of millions of human beings live—and die—is unacceptable whichever way it is looked at and constitutes a great challenge that must be confronted on a global scale.

The immense richness of the experience that fills this report should be highlighted: over four years, in 25 countries, it has been possible to show the extent to which extreme poverty is a hidden form of “violence.” Today, more than ever, an active exchange is needed between recognized sources of knowledge and the wisdom of those most in need. I remember with special fondness the wisdom I found among the most destitute, those whom we have treated the worst, in these African women who each day invent, at dawn, how to manage until sunset.

Another aspect to highlight is the moral authority of ATD Fourth World and, consequently, the importance of its recommendations. The information they provide has the rigor of human closeness, and has been recognized by those who have communicated it.

One conclusion emerges with greater strength than in the past: only democratic multilateralism will be the solution for considered disarmament, for global security, to face the challenges which come from the human condition on Earth. Only in this way can we ensure a dignified life for everyone, without exception.

Yes, extreme poverty is violence and the silence must be broken. For centuries its victims were silenced. For century after century forced into silence.

The paths to peace are paths of encounters, dialogue, conciliation. Violence has always been linked to struggle, war, conventional personal security. ATD Fourth World reveals to us the most generalized, lasting and least recognized form of violence. It demonstrates that in this new age when every person should have the opportunity for an existence which distinguishes them according to their intellectual and creative characteristics, we should begin, in these dark dawns of the century and millennium, the pressing need to put in practice other forms of “security,” the great priority for all inhabitants of the planet.

It concerns another way of living: in the the “spirit of brotherhood” which is established in the first article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

“The violence of contempt and of indifference,” in the words of Father Joseph Wresinski, leads to extreme poverty, to death through starvation, that cannot be permitted for even one day longer, like something inexorable. A world order that invests each day four thousand million dollars in arms and military expenditure, at the same time as sixty thousand people die of hunger, is morally unacceptable. We must raise our voice, we must mobilize—now that this can at last be achieved through new information technologies—millions of people who can no longer remain impassive spectators to what is happening.

The International Movement ATD Fourth World truly deserves global recognition and the stimulus for the supportive action which attributing the Nobel Peace Prize would represent. I am willing to formulate the corresponding proposal or to adhere to such a proposal made by others.

Its members are creators of peace, capable of healing countless wounds from helplessness, from indifference, from exclusion. ATD Fourth World: thank you for your tireless action, for the generosity, for the hands outstretched and the arms open, at the forefront of human solidarity.

Thank you for initiating decisively a new page on reciprocal attention, on sharing, on compassion. The past is already written and all we can do now is to recount it accurately; but the future is ahead of us and it is our supreme duty, from this moment on, to shape it in another way. The great transition is from use of force to use of language. ATD Fourth World is at the front line to make this possible.

Federico Mayor Zaragoza

President, Foundation Culture of Peace

Former Director-General of UNESCO

13 August 2012

Knowledge that makes possible the recognition of the other

Today the globe is troubled by crises concerning food and the environment, finance and economics. However, these crises are symptomatic of an even larger underlying crisis linked to the production of knowledge.

Throughout the centuries and in every society, individuals and families who experience extreme poverty have been isolated, indeed abandoned, during times of crisis as well as during important moments of human advancement. Since they are the most affected by these crises, it would seem that they should be the first called upon in the search for solutions; yet societies ignore them. Societies do not necessarily ignore their unbearable living conditions, even if these conditions are poorly understood and analyzed; rather, societies ignore their existence as human beings, as members of a population with a unique knowledge based on lived experience, a knowledge we should value and share. Our societies ignore the knowledge of people living in the worst situations of poverty because it is assumed that to lack for so much must mean to lack any knowledge that is useful to others.

A major challenge for the knowledge economy of tomorrow is to create new knowledge through reflection and dialogue among people living in situations of extreme poverty, institutions and universities.

For this reason, ATD Fourth World's program of action for 2008-2012 consists of a determined effort to create this knowledge with families living in extreme poverty. ATD Fourth World has created spaces where people living in extreme poverty, together with people from a variety of backgrounds, learn to think and reflect together so as to call into question and take on the great challenges of our time.

Extreme poverty is a challenge that humanity must address in its search for a peaceful coexistence that would see an end to visible and invisible walls. This conviction was a necessary starting point for the work of the *Merging of Knowledge*,¹ recounted in this document, as it was carried out over three years, centered on the urgent need to understand the link between extreme poverty, silence and peace.

Here are two examples, from among the thousand participants in this research, that explain not only the situations that they endure, but how they have resisted. Mr. Clemente Huanccanqui from Latin America: *"We want to be strong, to walk together, fight together, converse together, participate equally in assemblies and before our institutions; but they do not let us, they react against us, even viewing us as if we were the enemy."* Mrs. Nadine Ducrocq from Europe: *"Through others, above all I am searching for inner peace, because within myself I am not at peace. Everything that you experienced comes back to the surface, the suffering of our childhoods comes back to the surface, being ripped from your parents, from your own family, your brothers and sisters, and being forbidden to meet with them. [...] I am learning to control myself to*

1. University Research Group. *The Merging of Knowledge: People in Poverty and Academics Thinking Together*. (Boston: University Press of America, 2007)

try and have inner peace and to share this peace, to make the government understand that if they were a little bit more fair toward us, if they were listening to us, they would understand; this hatred and this violence would not exist. It is up to them to take the first step so that there will be peace on earth."

Together, these creators of new knowledge lead us to understand the gravity of institutional violence generated by policies aimed at simply reducing poverty (e.g. the Millennium Development Goals), instead of enacting comprehensive policies based on all human rights. By creating new knowledge, they take us to the heart of the violence of neglect, voluntary or not, of the suffering endured by families and entire communities from generation to generation: "as if we were not even human beings"; "as if we had been wiped off the face of the earth." They impress strongly on us the despair of those who, despite being overwhelmed by extreme poverty, see no recognition for their ceaseless efforts to create harmony in their neighborhood, efforts representing an essential contribution to peace in the world.

Throughout their reflection and analysis, the participants in this research posed a central question: Because poverty continues to be considered by our societies as a danger to security, democracy and peace, and—what is even more grave—because people in poverty themselves are considered to be violent beings, is it not the time to create within the international community a Security Council sufficiently equipped to deal with the violence that is extreme poverty? This would be a Council that would continually examine the security that every individual, all peoples and every human community needs in order to build peace each day in "a world in which human beings shall enjoy [...] freedom from fear and want."²

Just as music remains silent without the instruments to play it, the experiences of people who live in great poverty will be heard only if our societies succeed in creating instruments that make it possible.

The work realized over these last three years is itself an act of peace. The participants have given us the key: it is knowledge that makes possible the recognition of the other; her story, his vision of the world, her singularity as well as his universality. It is knowledge that is capable of freeing humanity from violence between individuals and peoples.

Daring to travel down this path will allow us to end the misunderstandings fueled by ignorance. Our societies will discover that families and individuals living in extreme poverty do not want to be the beneficiaries of projects, programs, or specific anti-poverty measures. Rather, they aspire to play an active role in a model of globalization that is based on human dignity and that is not dictated by a race for profits but designed to promote a fair distribution of the earth's resources and the sharing of human knowledge in its totality.

The participants in this research have put forth proposals that invite us to produce knowledge through a process of *Merging of Knowledge*. This is the first and founding act for a genuine partnership with families living in extreme poverty; it is required to shape a world governance capable of pooling the courage, the intelligence and the commitments of all. And for that we can be guided by Joseph Wresinski's appeal, inscribed in stone on the very plaza where the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights was signed. This appeal, in honor of the victims of hunger, ignorance and violence, reads: "*Wherever men and women are condemned to live in extreme poverty, human rights are violated. To come together to ensure that these rights be respected is our solemn duty.*"³

2. Universal Declaration of Human Rights

3. Engraved on the Commemorative Stone in Honor of the Victims of Extreme Poverty, located on the Plaza of Human Rights and Liberties, Trocadero, Paris (France).

Already, men and women, young and old, are mobilizing and working together to create a new knowledge economy based on lasting connections with those who are the least heard. From time immemorial, all around the globe, people learned to store in village silos harvests and seeds for use in times of scarcity. Now, we must learn to store another type of vital “harvest” for the future of humanity: the knowledge that makes recognition possible. Future generations will draw from this knowledge in search of new actions on the paths towards peace.

Eugen Brand

Director General, International Movement ATD Fourth World
August 2012

Executive Summary⁴

"The violence of contempt and indifference causes chronic poverty, since it inevitably leads to the rejection of one human being by other human beings."

—Joseph Wresinski⁵

It is not possible to live in peace while the inhumane conditions of extreme poverty persist. The true dimensions of extreme poverty have been trivialized, often being described solely in terms of a lack of food, income, housing and education. When we place ourselves in a position of understanding and learning from the victims of such conditions, another reality emerges: acts of violence carried out in tandem with the denial of fundamental rights. Material deprivation reduces people to mere survival; insecurity causes families to break up; exploitation robs people of their potential; humiliation, exclusion and contempt reach a point at which people living in extreme poverty are not recognized as human beings.

*"Our lives are made up of violence."*⁶ This reality challenges not only all humanitarian aid and anti-poverty programs, nor only those institutions created by and for society as a whole; it also radically challenges all relations among individuals and peoples. The lack of understanding among human beings, and the unsuitability of proposed solutions, both stem from a limited understanding of reality. This understanding is incomplete because it has been conceived without the individuals concerned, which is in itself a source of violence and neglect.

Overcoming the ignorance and incomprehension concerning extreme poverty requires breaking silence about the resulting violence, and about how people try to resist it. However, those who live in violent circumstances cannot break the silence alone. They know that speaking out as an act of resistance can be turned against them. A collective and sustained effort to enable each person to speak out is necessary to build understanding and a fair analysis. The three-year action-research shared in this document, and the international colloquium concluding this research, made it possible to determine the conditions for this type of research. The participants' common desire for change created trust and resilient solidarity among them. This made it possible to take risks and dare to "speak out for peace."⁷

What sort of peace are we talking about? *"Dealing with the violence of extreme poverty without adopting the perspective of searching for peace would condemn us to looking for people to blame. But focusing on the search for peace without confronting the violence of extreme poverty and its consequences would turn peace into a privilege for a few."*⁸

In a circle of people, be they relatives, a local community, or society as a whole, peace means being given the dignified recognition afforded to human beings; peace is being useful to other people and one's family, and providing them with the means for a dignified existence; it is being able to affirm one's own personality and to be at peace with oneself.

Peace cannot be based on the silence of people who have to bow their heads because they have been deprived of the means to exist with dignity and defend themselves. In the face of violence that can damage people for life, institutions and policy-makers should take the first step.

*"If extreme poverty ended, peace would take its place."*⁹ By withstanding the violence of extreme poverty, those in the worst situations of poverty help us understand what peace means, in order to work toward it everywhere.

4. This executive summary, like the main body of the document, has been co-authored to present the fruits of the research ("Conclusions of the International Colloquium 2012"). See section 1.3

5. "The Violence Done to the Poor" (1968), www.joseph-wresinski.org/The-Violence-Done-To-The-Poor.html

6. Theme of the international seminar in Pierrelaye (France).

7. Theme of the international seminar in Frimhurst (United Kingdom).

8. Eugen Brand. Director General of the International Movement ATD Fourth World, in his closing speech at the international colloquium "Extreme poverty is violence – Breaking the silence – Searching for peace," January 2012.

9. Theme of the international seminar in Dakar (Senegal).



Jacqueline Page. The Palace. 2010

Introduction

For three years (2009-2011) the International Movement ATD Fourth World carried out a participatory action-research project that examined the existing links between poverty, violence and peace. More than one thousand people from twenty-five countries around the world have participated in the project. The majority of them live in conditions of extreme poverty and insecurity and have participated by providing their thoughts and life experiences.

The originality of this research relies on a *Merging of Knowledge* methodology¹⁰ that created the necessary conditions to allow those living in extreme poverty to participate in the production of collective knowledge concerning the complex subject of violence. Others, who are also committed to the fight against chronic poverty, joined them in their efforts to address this issue.

The results show how people in situations of extreme poverty are victims of continuing violence and how essential it is to construct peace and break the silence around the violence of chronic poverty.

Thus analyzing the link between fighting extreme poverty and striving toward peace demonstrates the efforts made by those living in extreme poverty to protect themselves from violence in the interest of peace, as well as the need to recognize those efforts and create peace based on them.

This participatory action-research project culminated in an international colloquium with professionals and academics in Pierrelaye, France, in January 2012. A public event to present the results was held in UNESCO House in Paris on the 26th of that month.

The objective of this report is to make available to others not only the knowledge produced during the project but also the most significant elements resulting from its process of preparation.

10. See section 1.3.



Guillermo Díaz. *They Ignore Us*. 2011

Part 1

Project description

1.1. Context

1.1.1 The current situation in the world

Today the feeling that insecurity and violence are on the rise is one of the greatest worries of public authorities, intergovernmental agencies, and civil society. In numerous cases, the reactions follow the trend of fear and mistrust of others. They result from the exercise of the state's power in terms of its security apparatus which, far from mobilizing civil society to create conditions for peace, strengthens enduring factors of violence. For example, constructing walls to isolate from each other populations whose material conditions and access to fundamental rights are very unequal, responds to symptoms of fear and violence while allowing their cause to flourish. The race to economic, social and environmental security, conceived for some to the detriment of others, aggravates and proliferates violence.

In the same way, when programs that aim to eradicate poverty do not involve the meaningful participation of people living in extreme poverty in their design, implementation and evaluation, the programs themselves become sources of violence.

In many agendas, this frenzied struggle for security results in setting aside or delaying the quest for peace. The International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence, initiated by UNESCO and which ended in 2010, constituted a primary resistance to these currents that perceive people in poverty as a danger to security, democracy and peace in the world. Knowing and understanding the violence suffered and how people living in extreme poverty resist it is the key to attaining sustainable peace.

1.1.2 The International Movement ATD Fourth World

On 17 October 2007, International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, ATD Fourth World made a plea for "Ending extreme poverty, a road to peace," along with a Call to Action in 155 countries. Making this call compelled ATD Fourth World to deepen its understanding, in the context of today's realities, and according to people living in extreme poverty, of the link between chronic poverty and peace. Furthermore, this responsibility to understand the link between extreme poverty and peace entailed addressing the issue of violence. It was necessary to create safe spaces where everyone, based on their life and history, could talk about the violence that each person experiences, individually and collectively.

In countries on the five continents where ATD Fourth World is involved, many of its different members are faced with intolerable conditions: people who suffer a violence that condemns them to isolation; people who suffer the violence of armed conflict as an additional burden to chronic poverty; people who continue to bear the scandal of shame and guilt alone, and to offer resistance that does not resonate with others, but on the contrary is turned against them.

"In an environment of poverty, in my environment, the word 'violence' is used to describe us. It is often used as an accusation. To label us, to point us out, people have always talked about the poor as violent people who frighten them. They talk about violent atmospheres, [saying] that our young people are violent, and we almost thought that this word, violence, was tattooed to our skin. This word was only in our vocabulary to talk about the physical blows we receive and give. Because we have looked together at what was most violent in our lives, we have realized that the poverty we were living in was in fact multiple violence, even though we didn't use this word, didn't dare use it."¹¹

Initiating this action-research project responded to the urgency of understanding a violence that is considered legitimate together with the adults, young people and children who have become its targets; it responded to the urgency of breaking a chain of guilt and shame, and it ensured that their resistance would be recognized.

People taking a stand alongside those who live in extreme poverty are themselves often confronted with extremely complex realities. They also need to understand what this violence means in order to make sense of their commitment and responsibilities, as well as to find the meaning and strength to persist in the fight to overcome extreme poverty.

11. Martine Le Corre. Full-time activist. Member of the research co-leadership team. Excerpt from her opening speech at the international colloquium "Extreme poverty is violence – Breaking the silence – Searching for peace," January 2012.

To build a common knowledge, it was crucial to hear from all these people about the knowledge they acquire from facing difficult situations and from the roles they play. This work provided each participant, as well as the whole of ATD Fourth World, with the means to contribute to cultivating a culture of peace in the world, a peace of value to all.

1.1.3 Wresinski's thinking¹²

In 2007, the International Movement ATD Fourth World inaugurated the Joseph Wresinski International Center, a center intended for collecting and preserving the history of people and populations in extreme poverty, as well as for research. It is a place of reference that allows this research to be anchored in a historical context.

Teaching an entire society about its responsibility to take a stand against chronic poverty by bringing to light the link between chronic poverty, violence and peace was the fight of Joseph Wresinski, founder of ATD Fourth World. This fight was intimately related to his own life experience. He recalled, *"From early childhood, lack of money, shame and violence were linked. [...] It was from my mother, who demanded dignity and justice, who shared the little bread we had with the neighbor's children, that I learned to fight, not to avenge humiliation, but to free an excluded people."*¹³

In 1968, when the French authorities were destroying Parisian shanty towns and scattering families with bulldozers, Joseph Wresinski wrote his first manifesto entitled "Violence Against the Poor":

*"The man who finds himself crushed under the weight of his fellow human beings' violence is alone. It is he who is hounded by contempt and indifference, against which he is unable to defend himself. He is able to distance himself only by leaving the normal paths. He must then become forgotten by the temporary settlements and shanty towns. He is excluded. The violence of contempt and indifference causes chronic poverty, since it inevitably leads to exclusion, to the rejection of one human being by other human beings. It imprisons the poor in a mechanism that grinds them down and destroys them. It impoverishes them. The constant privation of any communion with others, which enlightens and reassures all life, condemns their intelligence to obscurity, and imprisons their hearts in turmoil, anguish and mistrust, breaking their spirits."*¹⁴

In 1984, when addressing people involved in the fight for peace, Joseph Wresinski expressed the idea that one cannot fight for peace without the knowledge of people living in extreme poverty and without rejecting poverty with them. He asked, *"When are you going to form an alliance with the poorest, who carry with them a history of secular violence, a history that nobody has written or considered? [...] It is they who tell us from era to era, that as long as poverty endures, our societies will not be based on peace. Our peace remains the peace of certain people, it is a selective peace."* In this text he tried to make us understand the silence that those who have always borne the weight of fate have kept. *"All the Fourth World families¹⁵ are lucid, perfectly conscious of their vulnerability. It is so easy to reproach the humble for something, to mock their ignorance, to make them pay for their disobedience. They know that in reality they are only allowed silence."*¹⁶

Joseph Wresinski would have been nearly 100 years old now, of the generation who experienced the war in Europe from 1939-1945, during which entire groups of were completely denied their humanity. The men and women of this generation continue to remind us where this has brought us, and that no peace can be based on negating the humanity of certain people.

It is in facing this extreme violence, in trying to understand it in order to eradicate it, that people have wanted to create peace initiatives for all, for example with the creation of the United Nations in 1945 and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. The latter states in its preamble that, *"the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people."*¹⁷

It is along these lines, along this continuum, that Joseph Wresinski focused his thoughts and his fight. He was convinced that in seriously facing the violence that destroys people in extreme poverty, that denies them their humanity, we progress toward peace.

12. Isabelle Perrin. International Leadership Team of ATD Fourth World. The following section is excerpted from her speech at the international colloquium "Extreme poverty is violence – Breaking the silence – Searching for peace," January 2012.

13. Gilles Anouil, *The Poor Are the Church: A Conversation with Fr. Joseph Wresinski* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2002.)
14. J. Wresinski, "The Violence Done To The Poor" (*France: Revue Igloos/Le Quart Monde*, 1968) 39-40.

15. The term "Fourth World families" was used by the speaker to mean families anywhere in the world living in extreme poverty, whether or not they are members of ATD Fourth World

16. J. Wresinski, "The Fourth World and Non-Violence" (*France: Public lecture during the tenth session of Theology and non-violence, organized by the Communities of the Arch of Lanza del Vasto*, 1984).

17. J. Wresinski, *Ibid.*

1.2. Addressing the question of violence with those living in extreme poverty.¹⁸

In 2008, ATD Fourth World expressed in “Striving Together to End Poverty,” its program of action for 2008–2012,¹⁹ “the challenge to merge different forms of knowledge: to recognize and take into account the knowledge gained in resisting poverty on an equal footing with other forms of knowledge. This kind of knowledge recognizes each person with dignity.” Although this is an approach with which ATD Fourth World and others have been experimenting for many years now, it remains outside the mainstream of academia. It is, therefore, significant that more than a thousand people around the world have committed to working in this way through this action-research.

There are different currents in society exploring similar directions. Already in 1970, Paolo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* called on educators to “treat the learner as a co-creator of knowledge” instead of someone told to memorize passively. In his work on participatory action research, Freire felt that people who had been forced to remain silent in the past should become masters of questioning to help others understand the world better. But in the world of academic research, people living in extreme poverty have continued to be treated as statistics and as objects. Joseph Wresinski, in 1980, denounced this, saying:

“Scholars [...] regard [them] as sources of information to be used for their own purposes. [...] They have, to some extent, subordinated [people living in poverty] to their own exploration as outside observers. [...] More seriously, these researchers have often, unintentionally and unwittingly, upset or even paralyzed the thinking of their interlocutors. This happened essentially because they did not recognize that they were dealing with a thinking that followed its own path and goals. [...] Observation has convinced us that even the so-called participatory observation practiced by anthropologists and ethnologists runs the danger of misusing, tampering with, and paralyzing the thinking of the poor. This is so because it is an observation for a goal external to their life situation, one that they did not choose and which they would never have defined in the same way as the investigators. Consequently, the observation is not truly participatory since the thinking of the investigators and that of the population which is the object of their observation do not pursue the same goals.”²⁰

The most traditional forms of social science try rigorously to weed out bias. But when studies are consistently designed by one population to use on a very different population, all the conditions of research become biased. The very words chosen to question people may have quite different meanings to researchers and to people living in extreme poverty. In the years since that speech by Wresinski, there has been a rise in interest from policy makers and academics in qualitative testimonies from people living in poverty. But in the vast majority of cases, this interest is solely in a person’s first-hand experience—not in their thinking or analysis. In some cases, this interest reduces the words of people living in poverty to illustrations of other people’s theories or even of policies that are in fact very ill-adapted to the realities of extreme poverty. This, in itself, can be a form of violence: hearing only one part of what people have to say, and then turning it against them.

The traditional western approach to knowledge has been an individual one based on competition: for grades, for professional recognition, for research grants. But collective knowledge is beginning to become one of the world’s natural resources, as people crowdsource projects by drawing on the knowledge of as many contributors as possible via the internet. And more and more people recognize that there is a wisdom in crowds that can go further than what the individuals in the crowd would be able to figure out on their own.

Collective knowledge is an increasingly important natural resource for the world, but the conditions of extreme poverty, the very violence of extreme poverty, have prevented many people from developing their minds and contributing to the world’s collective knowledge. In that same speech in 1980, Wresinski spoke of how social science research itself often contributed to harming these people’s very search for identity:

18. Diana Skelton. International Leadership Team of ATD Fourth World. The following section is excerpted from her speech at the international colloquium “Extreme poverty is violence – Breaking the silence – Searching for peace,” January 2012.

19. This “Contract of Common Commitments” document is the fruit of an international process of evaluation and planning and can be found at: www.atd-fourthworld.org/Striving-Together-to-End-Poverty.html

20. J. Wresinski, “A Knowledge That Leads To Action” (Paris: Introductory speech for UNESCO’s Standing Research Committee on Poverty and Exclusion, 1980)

“Those who think that human beings reduced to total poverty are apathetic and consequently don’t think, that they retreat into dependency or the simple struggle to survive day to day, make a serious mistake. They ignore the strategies of self defense that the poor create to escape the influence of those on whom they are dependent. [...] To hinder the poorest by using them as informants rather than encouraging them to develop their own thinking as a genuinely autonomous act is to enslave them. All the more so because their thinking is almost always a search for their history and identity, and they alone have direct access to an essential part of the answers. They ask themselves questions about their history and identity, much more than about their needs or even their rights, because they know, perhaps confusedly but profoundly, that it is through these questions that they will find the path to freedom. We do not mean to say that it is always a mistake to speak to them about their rights or to question them about their needs. However, such an approach can be liberating for them only to the extent that these exchanges take place within the perspective of their understanding of their historical identity, the only knowledge that can help them to be subjects and master of their rights and needs. [...] To talk to them only of their needs, or of those ‘social indicators’ which characterize them, without helping them to better understand their own history or the common traits of their lives is just another way of trapping them. [...] The only identity the poor have is through what they need, what they lack. [...] Is this right when we consider that their historical identity is one of immeasurable resilience and inalienable dignity? When we consider furthermore that it is an identity that carries an essential message to the whole society?”²¹

Overlooking the knowledge that comes from the experiences of those living in extreme poverty emerges as one of the principal causes of the failure of policies aimed at fighting extreme poverty, demonstrating the need to create knowledge jointly with those who live in extreme poverty.

1.3. Methodology and research development

1.3.1 Methodological principles

Taking the points discussed in the previous section into consideration, this research stems from the recognition of people living in extreme poverty as fully involved actors of knowledge, and recognizes that this knowledge emanates from experiences and ways of thinking—both individual and collective—that have spanned generations.

Moreover, this research recognizes the need to unite and merge this knowledge that is unique to people living in extreme poverty with the knowledge of other people who, prompted by the seriousness of extreme poverty, are committed to eradicating it.

Accordingly, this research has been carried out in line with the principles of the *Merging of Knowledge* methodology:²²

- **The position of co-researcher**

All participants should consider themselves, and should be considered by others, as co-researchers, not just benefiting from the possibility of expressing their own thoughts, but actively formulating research problems and questions, analyzing the information collected, and ultimately elaborating collective knowledge.

- **The presence of people living in poverty**

People who are living in poverty should have a meaningful presence throughout the entire process of elaborating knowledge. This should not involve just allowing them to give testimony of their own experiences, but also encouraging them to contribute their thoughts and analysis. Under no circumstances can other actors of knowledge replace them or speak in their name based on their intellectual ties or their proximity to people living in extreme poverty.

21. J. Wresinski, “A Knowledge That Leads To Action” (Paris: Introductory speech for UNESCO’s Standing Research Committee on Poverty and Exclusion, 1980)

22 The *Merging of Knowledge and Practices* was developed through several experimental projects run by ATD Fourth World between 1998 and 2000. The Guidelines for the Merging of Knowledge and Practices can be found at: www.atd-fourthworld.org/Guidelines-for-the-Merging-of.html

- **Belonging to a working group composed of “peers”**

Each participant should belong to a working group composed of others with similar life experiences, so that one’s personal experiences can be expanded upon, consolidated and confronted. This enables knowledge to be produced that goes beyond one’s own experience.

- **Instilling trust and safety**

A framework should be established to emphasize the safety and confidentiality of spoken and written words, particularly those expressed by people who face many insecurities and challenges as a result of living in extreme poverty. Similarly, the ethical framework should include values that are linked to dialogue between people: active listening, respecting what other people have to say, a willingness to take a critical position when self-reflecting, and the conviction that all knowledge is a work in progress.

- **Autonomous reflection**

Autonomous reflection should be preserved so that each of the actors of knowledge can construct his or her own thoughts before combining them with those of other agents who have different experiences. To do this, it is necessary to encourage the development and explanation of one’s own thoughts, as well as formulating one’s own questions.

- **Encouraging self-expression for everyone and rigorous exchanges of views**

Each person’s expression should be preserved in his or her own words without substitution of paraphrases by others. Identifying areas of disagreement should be encouraged, so that it is possible for each person to face the experiences and knowledge of others and to develop reciprocal understanding.

- **Allowing for as much time as necessary**

Each person’s own rhythm of understanding and expression should be respected, so that everyone can reach the end of what they want to say and the words are correctly understood. To do this, it is necessary to have the requisite amount of time for each exchange and to establish a timeframe for the research that is long enough for all to be able to participate meaningfully.

1.3.2. Research actors

In accordance with the principles established above, and with the previously mentioned “Striving Together to End Poverty” program of action for 2008-2012, ATD Fourth World has begun the task of renewing knowledge related to extreme poverty through a dynamic that brings together different people, in particular those living in extreme poverty who are already fully involved actors in current projects. This means setting a new challenge that goes beyond creating projects based on everyone’s participation, and achieves the elaboration of a comprehensive knowledge of extreme poverty.

Since its founding, ATD Fourth World has developed partnerships with people living in extreme poverty. It is today active with people and communities in 35 countries. This partnership is crucial to the research project, as it enables those defined in ATD Fourth World’s own terminology as *activists*, *allies* and *full-time volunteers* to become research actors unleashing their own knowledge and participating in producing collective knowledge.

Accordingly, the research actors are:

- **Activists:** people living in poverty who are committed long-term to working with ATD Fourth World to eradicate extreme poverty.
- **Allies:** people who through their profession, or while occupying a social position removed from extreme poverty, are committed to eradicating extreme poverty.
- **Full-time volunteers:** people who have joined ATD Fourth World’s long-term and full-time Volunteer Corps.

Therefore a network of actors was progressively created in which, over the course of the stages that will be detailed later on, approximately a thousand people in 25 countries participated.

Those countries are: Belgium, Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Canada, the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, France (including Réunion Island), Germany, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Ireland, Lebanon, Madagascar, Republic of Mauritius, Peru, the Philippines, Rwanda, Senegal, Spain, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

1.3.3. Research management

To manage and carry out the research, various entities with different responsibilities were created.

- **Co-leadership:** A group of five people had the overall responsibility of driving the research, and in particular monitoring the evolution of the research questions and adherence to the previously described methodological principles.
- **Coordination and Secretariat:** Three people had the responsibility of coordinating the different areas of research work, supporting the actors and groups of actors, and carrying out associated secretariat functions.
- **Correspondents:** In each of the participating regions—reflecting ATD Fourth World's own organizational make-up—a locally based correspondent had the responsibility of monitoring projects in each region, namely: Africa, Asia, Europe, the Indian Ocean, Latin America and the Caribbean, and North America.
- **Local leadership:** In each of the countries involved, one or two people had the responsibility of facilitating the research and supporting the actors and groups of actors.

1.3.4. Research questions

The extent to which the words “violence and poverty” are used as an accusation towards those who live in extreme poverty has already been mentioned. In carrying out this research, the weight of these accusations and stereotypes posed a real challenge.

Therefore, addressing the relationship between extreme poverty, violence and peace demanded a real effort to understand the actors' starting points in relation to the research, their concerns, their thoughts and their questions, as well as their need for silence, particularly for the actors living in extreme poverty.

The process of formulating appropriate research questions was slow, and it underwent substantial evolution based on the words, questions and thoughts of the actors. This method of designing the research questions avoided the use of stereotypes, preconceived categories and, above all, questions that could in themselves be violent.

Furthermore, the use of different languages, which will be explained later in more detail, helped to formulate a diverse range of research questions that were rooted in different cultural and linguistic realities. In the same vein, the evolution of the research questions benefited from the participation of actors—activists, allies and full-time volunteers—who had different life experiences.

1.3.5. Languages

The research was conducted in three main working languages: English, French and Spanish. However, the actors in the research communicated in an additional fourteen languages:

Arabic, Aymara, German, Haitian Creole, Malagasy, Mossi, Mauritian Creole, Quechua, Reunionese Creole, Sango, Swahili, Swiss German, Tagalog and Wolof.

The importance of the languages used lay in their ability to allow actors to accurately choose their words. Furthermore, the different linguistic realities enriched the research questions and the elaboration of knowledge itself. There are, for example, words that are unique to some languages or heavily used in one particular language. This allowed certain specific themes to be better understood in a particular country.

In all cases oral exchanges were transcribed in their original language and translated into one of the project's three main languages, so that the actors in the research could both carry out work in their mother tongue and be linked to the work undertaken by others.

Another important linguistic aspect of the project was the use of three main languages rather than only one. This meant that the task of developing knowledge could proceed simultaneously in the three languages, which enriched the final phase in which translations among the three main languages were produced, rather than allowing one language to predominate.

1.3.6. Research phases

The research was carried out in three key stages, though it must be highlighted that at different points the stages overlapped and drew on one another.

Each of the stages involved the participation of activists, allies and full-time volunteers, although numerically the participation of people living in extreme poverty was prioritized, with an approximate ratio for every ten actors of six activists, two allies and two full-time volunteers.

(a) The stage of interviews, forming groups of actors and using other spaces for collective expression

Three hundred people were interviewed based on an open series of questions about the relationship between extreme poverty, violence and peace. Rather than simply collecting experiences, the interviews aimed to understand the actors' reflections in relation to these experiences. In this first stage, the interviews served to orient the initial research questions and allowed actors to express their individual knowledge. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed in the original language, then translated into one of the three main languages, and subsequently studied with the actors who were interviewed. This final step enabled the actors to see themselves as true co-researchers, and allowed them to formulate questions and to identify their own contribution to the research.

More than 700 people participated in the research through spaces for collective expression that already exist within ATD Fourth World or the Forum for Overcoming Extreme Poverty²³ (for instance: Fourth World People's Universities, community forums, family meetings, online forums, etc.). These spaces allowed a large number of people to contribute to the knowledge production.

A total of 21 actors' groups were created in 19 different countries. The actors' groups, comprising activists, allies and full-time volunteers, carried out their work based on the contributions of each group member, and later incorporating the contributions of other actors' groups as the research progressed. The groups met for a period of one to three years, and were made up of between five and 15 actors.

The actors' groups served as a space for collective reflection that allowed the production of knowledge to progress based on a specific subject that had been identified by the actors as relevant. Again, all the work carried out was recorded, transcribed and returned to the actors' groups for subsequent work.

23. The Forum on Overcoming Extreme Poverty, facilitated by ATD Fourth World, is an space for dialogue and exchange among people committed in favor of poverty eradication. www.overcomingpoverty.org

(b) The stage of international seminars

Five international seminars took place over the course of the three years of the research, bringing together the research actors who were involved at a local level.

The seminars were prepared together with the actors, based on their questions and contributions. This had a direct bearing on the range of subjects studied in each of the seminars, as well as the formulation of questions. The international seminars were:

- **Grand Baie, Republic of Mauritius, December 2009**
Extreme poverty is an injustice and an act of violence in every possible way
25 participants from France (both the mainland and Reunion Island), Haiti, Madagascar and Republic of Mauritius.
Languages: French, Haitian Creole, Mauritian Creole and Malagasy.
Research questions:
 - What conditions experienced are unjust and painful, destructive and violent?
 - What enables people to react and resist? How do they do this?
 - The contexts of our different countries. Historical violence and institutional violence.
 - Behavior which is not understood because of conditions experienced and institutional violence.
 - What allows us to emerge from guilt and silence? How can things be changed?

- **Lima, Peru, August 2010**
Violence inflicted on the poorest: what peace do they bear? Breaking the silence
38 participants from Bolivia, Haiti, Peru and Spain. Participation at a distance by Honduran actors. Languages: Haitian Creole, Quechua and Spanish.
Research questions:
 - **“Extreme poverty is an abuse: This isn’t living, it’s surviving.”**
What conditions trap us in mere survival and what conditions allow us to live?
 - **“They treat us as if we were worthless.”**
What are the consequences of contempt and humiliation for people and for relationships?
 - **Historic violence: The effects of historic events in the life of the poorest. Breaking the silence: “Emerging from shame and guilt.”**
What allows us to emerge from shame and guilt?
 - **What peace do we bear?**

- **Frimhurst, United Kingdom, March 2011**
Poverty Is Violence - Speak Out for Peace
27 participants from Ireland, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Participation at a distance by seven actors from the Philippines.
Languages: English and Tagalog.
Research questions:
 - **“You learn to keep it all in.”**
What are the consequences for me, my family and my community when I am unable to express my anger, my feelings or my frustrations in reaction to the acts of violence they commit against me?
How do I handle these feelings or this anger so it doesn’t turn against me or our family, our community?
 - **“Authorities can literally take over your life.”**
How is violence perpetrated against people in poverty in the name of the protection, security and safety of others? What kind of protection, security and safety would we like? How do we try to protect ourselves and bring safety to our communities and our families?
 - **“Speak Out for Peace.”**

- **Pierrelaye, France, June 2011**
Our lives are made up of violence, we have to struggle for everything.
40 participants from Belgium, Egypt, France and Lebanon. Languages: Arabic and French.

Research questions:

- **Violence that keeps on piling up: “It happens all the time, tomorrow will be like today.”**

What specifically is it that accumulates and that does us harm? What does it destroy? How do we react to and resist this violence?

- **No longer feeling like a human being: “Tell them who we are, they are mistaken about us.”**

In what situations is our identity denied? What conditions allow us to be recognized?

- **Context of Europe and the Arab world: “We are part of citizens of our countries.”**
Actors of peace: “Our lives carry on despite the violence we encounter.”

To what peace are we referring?

- **What is necessary in order for society to understand the peace that we seek?**

- **Dakar, Senegal, July 2011**

Extreme poverty itself is violence. If extreme poverty ended, peace would take its place.

28 participants from Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Côte d’Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Senegal. Languages: French, Mooré and Wolof.

Research questions:

- **In what way is extreme poverty violence?**

Through what you or others experience or witness, what do you consider to be the most violent aspect of extreme poverty?

How do we strive together to resist the violence of extreme poverty? What do we risk or not risk trying, what have we managed to do or not?

- **To what peace do we aspire?**

What does “peace” mean for me? To be at peace or not to be at peace? To what peace do I want to contribute for my family and others?

What have I been able to do or not in contributing to peace?

- **The context and history of our countries: what creates poverty and what brings peace?**

These seminars enabled participants living in extreme poverty to have some distance from their daily environments and at the same time to contribute to producing knowledge through dialogue with people who, as a result of their own experiences, understand the difficulties of living in extreme poverty.

In accordance with the *Merging of Knowledge* methodological principles, the seminars were carried out based around a dynamic of “peer groups.” This involved the activists, allies and full-time volunteers meeting first of all independently within their peer groups, and subsequently merging the knowledge they had generated. This dynamic encouraged autonomy and the freedom of self reflection. It also turned out to be extremely conducive to generating collective knowledge.

The seminars allowed the question of violence to be approached from a historical perspective and from different political and economic contexts, so that it was possible to create interpretations of history and context based on the knowledge of people living in poverty.

The seminars also brought together the work of the different groups of actors and allowed knowledge of a very international nature to be generated. Over the course of three years they influenced the research questions and identified new themes that needed to be addressed.

During the seminars, interviews took place and were filmed with the objective of producing a series of videos as tools for subsequent phases of work.

Once again, everything was recorded, transcribed and given to the groups of actors, who then based their work around them.

(c) The stage of the international colloquium

Finally, an international colloquium was held in France in January 2012. Entitled “Extreme Poverty is Violence - Breaking the Silence - Searching for Peace,” the colloquium brought together 50 actors from 17 countries.

This colloquium, based on the contributions of the research’s participants from 25 countries, represented the final stage in bringing together the knowledge generated over three years, unifying it and allowing the actors to share ownership of it in its entirety.

After initial work among the research actors, a group of 25 academics and professionals, coming from a variety of institutions and countries, joined the actors—as outlined in section three of this report—to enter into dialogue on the relationship between extreme poverty, violence and peace. Finally, a day-long public event to disseminate the results and the dialogue that took place during the colloquium brought together 450 people at UNESCO’s headquarters in Paris.

1.3.7 The role of art

From the beginning this research project recognized the role of the art as a way of elaborating knowledge. This took two different forms over the course of the three years.

Firstly, a group of visual artists involved with ATD Fourth World undertook individual and collective artistic projects based around the theme “extreme poverty, violence and peace.”²⁴ As with the other actors, these actor-artists came from different walks of life, with some of them having lived in extreme poverty. Over the three years, different pieces of artwork were created and contributed to exploring the research questions. Some of these paintings, sculptures, and several selected photographs, were displayed at an exhibition that took place at UNESCO’s headquarters during the day-long public event that disseminated the research findings. A small number of the works created are presented throughout this report.

Secondly, the seminars gave the actors the opportunity to identify and share their own knowledge through visual and musical expression. As was the case for the actor-artist group members, these were important opportunities that allowed the actors to go beyond words in generating knowledge that is intrinsically linked to their experiences and emotions.

1.3.8. Dissemination of the research results

As has already been highlighted here, over the course of the three years of research the actors and groups of actors produced numerous oral, written, artistic and video documents that were used in the process of producing knowledge.

These pieces of work were ultimately brought together, through the presence of the actors themselves, during the international colloquium. A selection of them appear throughout this report.

Furthermore, a group of 25 people—comprised of activists, allies and full-time volunteers, as well as academics and professionals invited to the international colloquium—worked from the colloquium’s conclusion to co-author a document presenting the fruits of the research. In the last stage, five of those people finalized these findings as the “Conclusions of the 2012 International Colloquium.” This document is presented in the summary at the beginning of this report, throughout the introductions to the different sections within Part 2 and in Part 4.

24. The artists named their creative dynamic “Destruction/Reconstruction.”

This report, a video and the document “Conclusions of the 2012 International Colloquium”—all available in English, French and Spanish—bring together the findings of this re-

search. Additional documents highlighting the research's findings are available in some of the countries where research was done.

Moreover, the knowledge generated is recorded in the archives of the Joseph Wresinski International Center²⁵ where it is accessible to the actors involved and may continue to fulfill a useful purpose, within the methodological and ethical framework of this research project, to produce knowledge relating to extreme poverty and working toward peace.

1.3.9. Funding

The research was not fully funded from external sources. It was partly financed by ATD Fourth World's own international and local funds, as well as partly by: UNESCO's Participation Program (for the international seminars in Grand Baie, Republic of Mauritius, and Lima, Peru); the French Social Affairs Ministry (Directorate General for Social Cohesion); and the Regional Council of Ile-de-France (the latter two for the international colloquium).

1.3.10. Challenges faced

This research throughout its duration faced two closely linked main challenges.

The first of these was the difficulty of obtaining recognition, through funding, of the need to produce knowledge about extreme poverty, violence and peace in partnership with people living in extreme poverty as its starting point.

The second of these was the difficulty of obtaining recognition of people living in extreme poverty as citizens with full rights, accorded equal freedom of movement. This difficulty became apparent when visas to attend the international colloquium in France were initially refused for several participants who do not have academic qualifications or the financial security required by the relevant authorities, despite the guarantees offered by ATD Fourth World.

25 www.joseph-wresinski.org



Christian Januth. The Scream. 2010.

Part 2

The relationship between poverty, violence and peace

It is not possible to live in peace while the inhumane conditions of extreme poverty persist. The seriousness of the acts of violence carried out against people living in extreme poverty highlights the extent to which economic, social and environmental security has been conceived to favor some and to the detriment of others. As a result, people living in extreme poverty are forced to undertake countless efforts to resist violence and find peace. Like the violence they suffer, these efforts go unnoticed or unappreciated by the majority of society and its institutions.

2.1. Extreme poverty is violence

The true dimensions of extreme poverty have been trivialized, often being described solely in terms of a lack of food, income, housing and knowledge.

When placing oneself in a position of understanding and learning from the victims of such conditions, another reality emerges: acts of violence carried out in tandem with the denial of fundamental rights. *“Our lives are made up of violence.”*²⁶ Material deprivation reduces people to mere survival; insecurity causes families to break up; exploitation robs people of their potential; humiliation, exclusion and contempt reach a point at which people living in extreme poverty are not recognized as human beings.

This reality does not challenge just all humanitarian aid programs and programs aimed at fighting poverty, nor just institutions created by and for society as a whole; the radical challenge is also to all relations among individuals and peoples. The lack of understanding among human beings, and the unsuitability of proposed solutions stem from a limited and incomplete understanding of reality. This understanding has been conceived without the individuals concerned, which is in itself a source of violence and neglect.

2.1.1. Condemned to mere survival

*“We work in the morning to eat at night.”*²⁷

The material deprivation suffered by those living in extreme poverty condemns people, families and whole communities to mere survival: it condemns them to focus always on immediate concerns and prevents them from thinking about or preparing for the future; it renders them unable to provide their children with quality food, education and belongings; it forces them to live in dangerous places; it pushes them into making impossible choices. It separates families and forces them to compete for resources that are always in too short supply.

*“Surviving is making ends meet for the day, eating what we can buy with the small amount that we earn, because in addition to food there’s also clothes, shoes... We never buy anything new. Bundles of used clothes—foreign, second-hand clothes—come from the USA. This is what we poor people wear. I think this is a form of violence, because with the little money that we earn we can’t buy new or high-quality things. We’d like to live well and give our children the best that’s possible: milk in the morning and things like that. They have a right to it. It’s living well, healthily. There’s a lot of malnutrition because we eat only what we can get and we don’t know if we’re feeding ourselves properly because what we need to do is fill our stomachs.”*²⁸

Trapped in mere survival, those who live in extreme poverty lack the necessary means to protect themselves. They find themselves extremely vulnerable to violence that puts their lives and their physical well-being in danger: human trafficking and organ trafficking, the presence of violent gangs in their neighborhoods, and highly dangerous work.

“I lost three children because of extreme violence. One of my daughters was killed by a stray bullet, another daughter died in a fight and my son was murdered. All three were 15 years old when they died. I’ve not stopped being scared, because I still have three younger children. When they go out selling in the street and come home late, if it’s 9 o’clock and they haven’t come

26. Theme of the international seminar in Pierrelaye (France).

27. Yasmine Colette. Activist. Republic of Mauritius. Contribution to the international seminar in Grand Baie (Republic of Mauritius).

28. Raquel Juárez. Activist. Guatemala. Contribution to the international seminar in Lima (Peru).

back, I ask myself if something's happened to them. You always give advice to your children so we all stand together as a family, and you talk to them about the violence out there, but there's violence everywhere."²⁹

Being condemned to the bare edge of survival manifests itself as permanent violence for those living in extreme poverty. Faced with the impossibility of protecting their children from this violence, parents live with fear, physical and psychological exhaustion, pain and guilt, in silence. "*Extreme poverty makes mothers cry a lot.*"³⁰

*"I think the worst thing about poverty is the lack of hope. There's no hope, and every morning when you wake up, it's the same thing again—worrying about today's meal. Then, you don't know where tomorrow's meal is coming from, and [you're] looking at your kids hungry and helpless to do anything for them. And then when the next day comes again, the whole thing just begins all over. And I think that's why people in poverty die so young—it's every single day. You know that even if you get them through that day, the whole thing begins again the next day, and the next day and the next day. There's no hope at the end of it."*³¹

We are always in need.

Yasmine Colette. Activist. Republic of Mauritius. Contribution to the international seminar in Grand Baie (Republic of Mauritius)

My two children and I collect bottles together that we sell for money to buy our meals. It is really hard when I see my children working. There were days when I came close to getting myself killed in truck and machine accidents. It's happened twice. It is so sad. My son works with me. He also gets sick a lot because he has asthma. He works only once or twice a week, because it's very dusty there.

To make your own way in life, stealing is wrong, but you've got to have work to do, you've got to sweat. All work is hard. We have to do all sorts of work in order to be able to eat. I have to work a lot. I get up at 3 in the morning to get my children ready and I leave the house at 6 o'clock. Sometimes I get home at 6 p.m., 8 p.m., and sometimes later than that. I sleep only four to five hours at night but I have only enough money to raise my kids. We work in the morning so that we can eat at night.

The children don't complain but it hurts them. Sometimes they cry but they don't say anything about it. They are hurting but they don't say anything. They hurt inside. They might need something but I don't have enough money to give to them.

My children support me, but when they're sick I can't stay at home with them. I have to work every single day. My children stay home alone when they're sick. I am forced to leave the little ones with the older kids.

Sometimes I think about buying things for my children. Sometimes there are cartoons but I don't have a TV. They stand in the doorway of other kids' homes because they have TVs, and they get teased about it. Others say, "Tell your mom to buy a TV. You just cause problems when you come here," and my children come home and tell me to buy a TV or this or that. "How are we going to buy it if mom doesn't have any money?" It's hard. Like when my child cries, saying, "Mom I like that, I like that," but I don't have the means to get it. A lot of times they don't have what they need for school. Sometimes they don't have shoes, sometimes their uniforms are tattered, sometimes it's their schoolbag or they don't have pencils to write. The children sometimes steal notebooks or have ones that are torn up. Sometimes the children don't have anything in their schoolbags and the teacher tells them, "You can't do your homework. Don't come to school tomorrow."

Our children shouldn't go to bed without eating. Sometimes I don't have the 2.50 rupees to buy bread for my children and at night they cry because they're suffering, they are

29. Graciela Marin. Activist. Guatemala. Contribution to the international seminar in Lima (Peru).

30. Yasmine Colette. Activist. Republic of Mauritius. Contribution to the international seminar in Grand Baie (Republic of Mauritius).

31. Keith McAnaspie. Activist. Ireland. Contribution to the international seminar in Frimhurst (United Kingdom).

hurting, but I tell them that there isn't any and that they have to go to sleep. Poverty and exclusion don't prevent children from living but they don't have everything they need, what they really need, because sometimes they have bread and there is nothing to put on it. When there's rice, there are no clothes or shoes. We are always in need. When a child looks at his friends and sees what others have, it strikes a chord in his heart.

Sometimes, when my child doesn't have something and asks others for it, he gets punished for it. That hurts me. When my neighbors punish or insult my children because I'm poor, I can't say anything. I sit at home in silence. I cry and ask God to help me provide my children with what they need. Poverty makes a lot of mothers cry.

I hope that my sons get jobs, that they make money and that they will be able to buy things for themselves and not live in poverty like I have.

Our lives are made up of calculations.

Catherine Legeais. Activist. France. Contribution to the international seminar in Pierrelaye (France)

Our lives are made up of calculations. Every month we calculate everything. We don't have a choice. Someone who takes me to the supermarket every month told me, "You calculate everything." I said, "Yes, if we don't do our calculations and we get an unexpected bill, it's a catastrophe." I felt uncomfortable with this person and I said to myself, "Why don't we have a right to make even a small mistake?" What do you do when the unexpected happens? We either have to pay to the bill by depriving ourselves or go see a social worker to get help from the city council or social services. We always have to justify our actions.

Because of that, anger and misunderstanding come at us from all sides. It's not easy when you have very few resources. We are surviving. If we do go to ask for help, we are shifted from one person to another and have to explain our situation every time, we are made out to be guilty, as if it's our fault that we are in this situation.

Nothing is safe.

Beyrouba Diop. Activist. Senegal. Contribution to the international seminar in Dakar (Senegal)

Nothing is safe where poor people live. Every day you come home, you see your child and someone has thrown a stone at his head. You take him and ask, "Who did this?" You fight, you say insults. You could say that there is no peace.

When you live in insecurity, you cannot live in peace. Imagine living like this: 1) in poverty; 2) in insecurity and 3) without peace. Well, you are already dead. There is a living dead: all poor people are nearly the living dead. They walk around, but they are already dead. Their spirits have died.

That's what makes a lot of young people leave their homes. It's because they hate their families. It forces them into the streets. Poverty is troublesome because if you're living in the streets, you live in insecurity. You're not living in peace. People insult you and you are subjected to a lot of things.

For someone who leaves home to be out in the streets, it's difficult for him to survive because the parents are always going to have in their minds that their child is homeless. The child will, too. There will be hate, a lot of hate and little by little, the hate is going to spread from the children to the parents and from the parents to the children.

We live from one day to the next.

Actors' group. Canada. Contribution to the international colloquium, "Extreme Poverty is Violence – Breaking the Silence – Searching for Peace."

When you're poor, you never know if you're going to be able to pay your rent, if you're going to be able to pay for your electricity, food—everything. You worry about it constantly. Not having money sometimes causes family arguments, too, and tension. The father, the mother and the children can all have different priorities.

The daily pressure and tension caused by poverty affects your health. Because of poverty, our health is so bad that we live from one day to the next. We can't plan anything anymore.

Because I am poor I do not have the money to take my son to a private hospital.

Raquel Juárez. Activist. Guatemala. Contribution to the international seminar in Lima (Peru)

In Guatemala life is very hard for the poorest, for the excluded. One violence we experience is the fact that the hospitals are ill-equipped, so that when we become sick there are no strong antibiotics or equipment. I was in the hospital and my baby was in agony, and the doctor told me: "Don't you know that we are on strike to get medicine to save people's lives, we cannot do anything. If we do not have medicine, with what do you want us to save him?" In that moment I was so angry about being poor. Because I am poor I did not have the money to take my son to a private hospital. One night in the hospital costs 1,000 quetzales or more. That is violence against our rights, that we would not have access to health care.

You're between duty and poverty.

Actors' group. Guatemala.

My son is sixteen years old and could be working but I'm afraid to let him go out. The stress is constant for fear that something will happen to our children, fear that they will be recruited into gangs, because once they are in a gang, it's too late. They can't leave even if they want to. As a mother, you're caught between duty and poverty, because we need our children to help in some way, but sometimes it is better to live with constraints than to wonder if they're coming back or not. Stress is constant because of the constant danger we live with.

There is too much violence in the neighborhood. Even though it means losing the little we have, sometimes it is best to leave our homes behind to escape the violence. For your children, you do anything.

Maria Teresa Gonzales. Guatemala

Those who have got qualifications know how difficult it is. I was working by taking in laundry when my daughter's scholarship ended during her last year of studies. I worked and was there for her, even though we paid little by little. We ended up owing 18 months of water by the time my daughter got her qualification because we never paid the water bill, or the garbage collection, or anything else, because I didn't earn enough money to pay for everything plus my daughter's school.

Maritza Orozco. Guatemala

We work all the time and don't have time for our children.

Emma Poma. Activist. Bolivia. Contribution to the international seminar in Lima (Peru)

Many people say, "This isn't living, it's surviving." We work constantly. In Bolivia, for example, you see families from my neighborhood who have to work all the time. They often can't pay attention to their children, can't eat with them, and can't take them to school. The parents are very worried about bringing them food, and even though the children grow up they aren't often with their parents.

The parents say, "We don't have time to be with them. It's not that we want to neglect them or not take care of them well." But it's because we have to live like this, because the situation we live in makes it impossible.

There are children for example who are bedraggled, dirty, and don't have clean clothes. Sometimes people give them a nasty look and say, "Those children are dirty." Others don't see how the parents work to give them something to eat. It isn't that parents don't care. It's because of their jobs. Every day, they leave in the morning when their children are still sleeping and arrive late at night when their children are already asleep.

People don't understand this situation.

Adoption and orphanages cause a lot of pain.

Jaqueline Plaisir. Full-time Volunteer. Haiti. Contribution to the international seminar in Grand Baie (Republic of Mauritius)

Parents actually want the best for their children. They are always looking for solutions and the orphanage seems like a good solution. But there are tragic cases. We've seen people who want to put their child in an orphanage only for a certain period of time because they're in a very difficult situation; but when the person returns for the child, the child is gone. The child has been adopted and there is no trace left behind, or the orphanage disappears and so we don't know where the children are.

Adoption is a big problem because the parents don't really understand what people tell them about it. In Haiti, adoption is not closed, meaning that the child will always know of the biological family. When people explain that to the family, they say, "When your child turns 18, he or she will come see you and will be free to see you again." Which is true in theory, but in reality they don't tell the child what's going on with his or her family. With international adoptions, sometimes they don't even let the children think that they are Haitian, so there is no chance that the child will come back. And once the adoptive family returns to the parents' country, they usually obtain a closed adoption "for the good of the child," so the child will carry the name of its "new" parents.

There are also parents who tell me, "My child is in the orphanage. I learned that he's going to leave." And all of a sudden, the family gets very scared and they panic: "If the child is about to be adopted but I take him back now, he's going to hold it against me in three, four or five years. What can I offer him? Nothing." And when the parents go to the orphanage, they are given a little bit of money to help the rest of the family, but it's a minimal amount, and it's written in a notebook: "The parents are selling their children for 200 gourdes," which is about \$5. Things are recorded that way. So the question of adoption and orphanages, true and false orphans, is very painful and it is difficult for families to talk about.

When you lose your children its like part of your life has been taken away from you.

Séamus Neville. Activist. United Kingdom. Contribution to the international seminar in Frimhurst (United Kingdom)

The reason Social Services took my son and my eldest daughter was because they have special needs. When you lose your children, it's like part of your life has been taken away from you. You are grieving but the child is still alive. That is the saddest thing about it. You shouldn't be grieving for a child that is still alive; you grieve for a child when it dies. It creates a hole in your life, a gap that can't be filled. Even today it's a gap that can't be filled because my eldest daughter is like a stranger to me. I know she is my daughter but I don't know her, she is a complete stranger. She is not my little girl any more.

When my second daughter was born, a professional said to us, "She could replace her sister." You can't replace a child for another. They are two different persons. They also say that after a long period of care or adoption, you can pick up the pieces and make up for lost time. But the time is lost. That time you can't make up for, it's gone.

We had a family support worker around the time my eldest daughter was adopted. I said to her that anything could happen in 14 years and [the support worker] turned around, thinking she knew it all, and said: "Nothing will happen in 14 years." But it did, I lost my wife. My eldest daughter never got to see her mother, which is a great shame. She would have liked to have seen her mother. When my wife passed away, I saw my daughter for the first time after 15 years. She was 18 years old.

The poorest people couldn't defend themselves in the conflict.

Actors' group. Central African Republic. Contribution to the international colloquium "Extreme Poverty is Violence – Breaking the Silence – Searching for Peace."

It's really hard to talk about what the poorest people experienced during the armed conflict in Central Africa because what happened in our country cannot be forgotten in the minds of the weakest among us. Even the richest people cannot forget it.

Conflicts increase the poverty we live in. If there are conflicts, we who live in poverty cannot go out and make money. In our situation, we can't take a break because we don't have any savings. So we have to leave the house every day to make money in order to feed our children. If we don't, our homes fall apart. But because of the gunshots it's hard to leave the house. You don't dare go into the fields.

Poor people leave their homes because of war. They flee to the bush and there are people who come afterward and break into their houses and take all of their belongings.

Those who had the means were lucky to escape, to cross the country or leave the country. But the people who couldn't afford to leave truly suffered. They went deep into the bush and ate things that are not proper for a person to eat. Some people have stayed there. They think they're safer in the bush because they're scared that one of these days it's going to happen again. If they dare go back the village, they'll suffer the consequences.

In such horrifying conditions, everyone got scared. Even when a dog would run after a person to play around, people got scared. They left everything behind. They started to flee, telling themselves that the soldiers were coming to shoot them. Everyone who experienced that, who lost all of their belongings, is still brokenhearted by the violence. Acts of violence that people saw with their very own eyes, those images are embedded in their memories.

We poor people couldn't defend ourselves. We couldn't protect ourselves or our families, not even our shared property, such as the church, for example.

In the events that we experienced, the situation the poorest people were in was worsened by the fact that they didn't have the right means to protect themselves, or at least to get help from someone for protection. A well-off family has all the means of communication to call the police or peace-keeping forces to keep them safe if need be. On the other hand, those who live in very destitute conditions don't have those means of communication. All of a sudden they're exposed to muggings and break-ins. People live in fear, not knowing whether someone will intervene for them.

In these conflicts, they take poor people and use them like donkeys to carry the rebels' loads. They march in single file lines. Sometimes the loads are so heavy that they can't go on but they're killed if they refuse.

During the conflicts in some countries, the richest people use the poorest to do bad things and give them a very small payment in compensation. However, the things that they do may be very bad. It's not normal. And when the fighting gets to be intense, the richest have every chance to get far away from the country but the poorest people stay and suffer the consequences that no one can bear.

People have killed their families and friends. Afterward they're expected to live together, but what kind of understanding can there be between them? What can they say to make peace? People who have guns think of their guns as their God since they're rich enough to have firing equipment. When they have a gun, they tell themselves that they are people and that people who don't have guns are animals. Poor people are not animals! May justice be served to prove it.

We are forgotten in these conflicts. For example, after the armed conflicts in our villages, organizations would give handouts to support the people who were stripped of their belongings but the people in charge of distributing the goods don't give anything to the poorest people. People use other people's misery to make themselves richer and the help sent by international organizations does not go to the people who really need it. The poorest people keep on suffering.

2.1.2. Not being treated as a human being

"The worst thing about living in extreme poverty is the contempt, that they treat you like you are worthless, that they look at you with disgust and fear and that they even treat you like an enemy. We and our children experience this every day, and it hurts us, humiliates us and makes us live in fear and shame."³²

Alongside the violence of deprivation there is another violence, equally extreme, that is linked to humiliation, contempt and denying the humanity of an individual: the violence of not treating someone as a human being. *"Like we were not even humans."³³*

Inhumane treatment is violence that is recreated in many other forms: disrespect, humiliation, discrimination, insults and the denial of fundamental rights, culminating in the physical violence suffered by people in extreme poverty at school, at work or in the street. *"It wasn't just that I had nothing, but that I had been reduced to nothing."³⁴* It manifests itself in the form of people who find themselves degraded, trapped in stigmatized categories, and labeled with humiliating names. The experience for those who suffer it is both unbearable and a daily one, yet invisible and considered normal or trivial by the people who carry it out or witness it without reacting to it.

"That people disrespect us by calling us names like 'social case', 'bad mother', 'incapable', 'good-for-nothing' demonstrates how they are judging us and do not know about the reality we face. We experience the violence of being discriminated against, of not existing, not being part of the same world, not being treated like other human beings. This everyday violence is abuse."³⁵

The indifference and contempt to which people in extreme poverty are subjected is so violent that they end up submitting themselves to such judgments, doubting themselves

32 Edilberta Béjar. Activist. Peru. Contribution to the international seminar in Lima (Peru).

33 Cootis. Activist. United States. Contribution to the seminar "We were not meant to live like this" (New Orleans).

34 Mame Diarra Diouf. Activist. Contribution to the international seminar in Dakar (Senegal).

35 Laetitia Dubourdieu. Activist. France. Contribution to the international seminar in Pierrelaye (France).

and seeing themselves only through the eyes of others: useless, incapable and reduced to “waste.”³⁶ These humiliations result in suffering, indignation, anger, feelings of injustice and neglect, and distrust of other people and institutions, silencing its victims. *“It’s like they’ve killed you, they even take away your desire to live.”*³⁷

Extreme poverty destroys humanity, since it creates barriers that make mutual recognition, understanding and communication impossible. A twofold violence arises: on the one hand the violence of extreme poverty, and on the other the violence of distorting the intrinsically human reactions of the people in this situation. Crying and tears are viewed as an attempt to manipulate, anger and opposition are seen as a form of aggression, and even silence is misunderstood.

We are neither recognized nor treated as human beings. **Moraene Roberts. Activist. United Kingdom. Excerpt from her speech during the public day of the international colloquium, “Extreme Poverty is Violence – Breaking the Silence – Searching for Peace.”**

What is it that makes us human beings? We have intelligence and we think, we have a voice and can communicate through language. We have emotions and we can show them. We have dignity and choice.

Poor people are denied these intrinsically human traits; we are neither recognized nor treated as human beings.

People living in poverty are not able or allowed to speak up when faced with acts of violence against them. In situations of injustice their words are misinterpreted and used against them. So, to complain is seen as non-cooperation, to protest as aggression, to explain as making excuses. To be frustrated at your own total powerlessness is seen as aggression.

Those who do speak up are either disbelieved, disregarded or punished. “We keep it all in to avoid making it worse.” Even those who speak up for others often face a backlash, within their jobs or their communities, being told things like, “If you lie down with dogs you get fleas.” Well, people in poverty are not dogs.

Human emotion is a powerful thing, yet many who live in poverty feel that they are not allowed to express normal emotion, because they are not perceived by others as normal. In the UK the poorer a family is, the more likely it is that their child will be taken from their care by the local authorities and adopted against the will of the parents. And after that all you do, say or feel is controlled. Constantly the poor are treated and spoken to by authorities as though they are lesser human beings.

A young person described how as a child, he ran away from home to escape domestic violence. At 10 years of age he went to the police station, as that should have been a safe place, but he could not get in. Lying across the steps outside he hoped to get help, but the police officers leaving and entering the building simply stepped over him. No one asked why this child was there, no one cared; eventually he had to go home. When you step over a ten year old child alone on a step, you don’t see a small human being, you don’t see a human being at all.

The life experiences of many tell of this disregard for the rights and welfare of poor people, even to the point where social workers and others see living in poverty, not as a shame on society, but as the fault of the poor, and a sign of neglect of their children.

Often in the UK media, it is said that those who are poor should not be allowed to have children; but every human being has the right to form a family and live as a family.

Poor people are reduced by authorities and services to a number; a case file; a label like prisoner, runaway, homeless, care-leaver. It’s as though they had no identity.

36 Parfait Nguiningdji. Activist. Central African Republic. Contribution to the document “Conclusions of the 2012 International Colloquium.”

37. Edilberta Béjar. Activist. Peru. Contribution to the international seminar in Lima (Peru).

Sometimes the steps are quite subtle in the way that they do it and sometimes you don't realize immediately what is going on, that you're being made into something other than what you should be. Then at some point you think about it and you think, "They wouldn't do this to someone else, well why are they doing this to me? I am not a bad person, I am a poor person."

Even in death, when all people should be equal, the poor are denied their identity. During the seminar we visited a cemetery that had—like most cemeteries—an area where the destitute poor are buried. Over time the soil had settled and we could see rows on rows of mounds. There were no gravestones no names, nothing to show who lay there. In death as in life the poor became nothing, as if they had never existed. In death as in life all choice and dignity were taken from them, yet they were human beings and so are we who still live in poverty.

Every day you're humiliated and abused.

Leandro Huilcas. Activist. Peru. Contribution the international seminar in Lima (Peru)

The society we live in doesn't realize what it does, marginalizing people with fewer economic resources. In Peru, rural laborers, dock workers, and migrants from other communities are mistreated and discriminated against because of the work they do or the clothes they wear. This is the case of Cusco's dockworkers. They work but sometimes they are insulted when they receive their wages, called things like *cholos*³⁸ or drunks, or sometimes they have the wages thrown at them. Sometimes in addition to being called a drunk, because they wear an *ojota*³⁹ or the clothing of their community, they are called, "Hey, ojotero." When a poor person walks in the street, it's as if he were bothering other people. People say, "So go on, go!" Sometimes others corner them and don't let them pass. The dock workers' lives are like this every day. They do their work using tricycles to pull carts or sometimes with ropes. When they ask permission to pass (because to pull that kind of load they need space), they hear only insults and curses. There is other abuse, like when a poor person goes on a bus they aren't given a seat, only because they aren't well dressed or are a little dirty. When they are near others, others say, "Go over there, you stink."

It's the truth. These things happen to us.

Abuse is aimed most often at the poor, because you have fewer economic resources, because every day when you don't have enough money, in order to bring bread to your family, you have to endure people shouting at you, humiliation, sometimes even physical violence.

Abuse comes from people who have more economic resources, those who have money. Because they give you work, they scorn you and say, "Thanks to my money, you live." But everyone needs to work for a living and they don't understand this. Because they give you work, they abuse your rights, your self esteem, and this affects you most, that they treat you like an animal, like you're useless.

Definitely, when they make you feel bad, you aren't motivated to do things, sometimes failing only because they don't value you.

The people who marginalize you or abuse you don't realize what they are doing is wrong, they only blame the poor and never admit their own errors.

They make you feel like you're worthless to society.

Leo Sánchez. Activist. Spain. Contribution to the international colloquium, "Extreme Poverty is Violence – Breaking the Silence – Searching for Peace."

It is important to feel useful to others. For me the worst thing about poverty is the loneliness within each person, feeling marginalized, feeling out of place. Everyone needs everyone else, people need each other.

³⁸ People of mixed racial ancestry

³⁹ Typically rural flip flop shoe

When they make you feel like you're worthless to society, like you're useless, the emptiness is so great that you don't know how to fill it. In your heart you know that you're able to do things, and not just little things, but great things with others, but others probably don't see it. So it's like an emptiness, a struggle with yourself that often works against you, making you more marginalized when you understand that you are worthless to them, that you don't feel useful; and it's then that you start to destroy yourself. It's like being dead while you're still living.

When you feel like you're worthless to society, it isn't that you are, but that society, institutions, social workers make you feel you are. Deep down, you know that you are worth something, that you can give something, that you have the ability to share with others. You know you can, but you need others to recognize this and support you. This situation causes you to fail, suffer and makes everyone around you and your family suffer. This suffering would be unnecessary if others would put themselves in your place and we put ourselves in others, for the good of humanity.

On the contrary, everything proposed to the poor is an obligation, and doesn't allow them to exercise their rights. It's as if they were objects placed in the neighborhoods, in the middle of the mud, with no infrastructure or basic services, isolated from the city.

We were made to move on and our shelters were burned down.

Jean-Pierre Rakotondrabe. Republic of Madagascar. Contribution to the international seminar in Grand Baie (Republic of Mauritius)

At the time of the "Francophone" summit⁴⁰, there was funding for a green policy in the capital city of Antananarivo. We were made to move on and our shelters were burned down. We were moved to a pit (it was the bottom of a quarry), and in the rainy season the water rises up as far as your knees. The council had the poorest taken away at night in lorries, just like rubbish being collected up and dumped elsewhere. We were promised we would be given a place where we could lead a better life—but we didn't even have time to get our things together and the shelters where we lived were burned down. People became really downhearted. This didn't happen only once, this happened on two or three occasions. When we reached this new place, we couldn't find anything to eat; some of us went back to town and then were chased out again.

We were starving and it was just like nobody cares. It was like we were not even humans at the time.

Cootis⁴¹. Activist. United States. Contribution to the "Not Meant to Live Like This" seminar of New Orleans (United States)

When Hurricane Katrina came, that really changed my life. I was in prison before Katrina and we were getting prepared for its coming. I thought we were going to move from this system into another prison system before the storm came. Instead they said that we were going to stay. What happened was that the prison guards started locking us in our cells. They didn't say that they didn't care about us. They showed it to us in their manner. They left us. We couldn't do anything. They left us in our cells for days without food, without water, with nothing, without electricity. Water was rising up to the first and the second floor, I was on the third and luckily I escaped [drowning]. We were wet, we were smelling bad because of the contaminated water we were in. We were starving and it was just like nobody cared. It was like we were not even humans at the time. We were numbers, we were like animals.

40. A bi-annual event held by the International Organisation of La Francophonie.

41. The person interviewed chose to use this pseudonym to protect his privacy.

There are employers who treat people like animals all day long.

Georges Mattar. Activist. Lebanon. Contribution to the international seminar in Pierrelaye (France)

At work, there are employers who treat people like beasts of burden all day long. The agreements made between them are not respected. They increase the number of hours, lower the salaries, they don't pay for commuting and they exploit people as much as possible. With an animal, you would be afraid to make it sick and you would treat it better than that. I make \$1 per hour and they require me to fill three or four positions, whereas I was hired for only one.

The police rounded us up by force.

Robert Le Bihan. Activist. France. Contribution to the international seminar in Pierrelaye (France)

With what we are seeing and what is happening, I have the impression that there are going to be more and more people on the streets because the families who could have got out of poverty can't manage now. I don't know what's happening but prices keep rising.

Violence occurs in the streets when people are sleeping at night. There were young people who would come and throw rocks at us. Other times there were people, passersby, who would walk by and treat us like good-for-nothings. There were also times when we would go into offices to fill out paperwork but we wouldn't go back because we could tell they considered us not very clean with our [belongings in] bags. When we would look for work, they would tell us "no" every time and by then end of it we stopped going. We gave up trying. We stayed in the streets.

The police rounded us all up. They didn't ask us what we thought, and they took us away by force, made us undress and take a shower. Our clothes were disinfected and came out all shriveled afterward. It was a manhunt for poor people led by the government. I was very hurt by that. It was one assault heaped on another assault. Once they let us go, if they saw us again, a half an hour later, they made us get back in the bus to go get a shower, to eat and be disinfected, but what they were doing was pointless. It was an attack on our freedom. It surely wasn't meant to help people.

We had our bags with us because you can't leave your belongings in shelters, so they spotted us. They spotted us so often that then we walked around without bags but they already knew who we were.

In the shelters, we didn't have names. We had numbers and if you missed a night, your bed was given to someone else. When you don't have a name or when someone dies in the streets, it's just like going to the cemetery and not seeing a name on the tomb. People are buried anonymously.

The worst kind of violence you can experience is humiliation.

Lourdes Guadalupe Chavez. Activist. Honduras. Contribution to the international seminar in Lima (Peru)

Poor people suffer violence by being marginalized, by not being trusted, by being looked down on. That was what I went through during the two months that I worked for someone else, so I decided I wouldn't do it again, it's better to sell things in the street, even though there are always people who try to humiliate you. One day, a man asked me: "You live by the river and you make those sausages with river water?" Since it was a disrespectful question, I answered, "Yes, of course!" I'm not sure how to describe it, but the worst kind of violence that you can experience is humiliation.

2.1.3. Institutional and political violence

Violence against people in extreme poverty carried out by institutions and those who represent them affects these people's freedom and their physical and mental well-being, as well as that of their families, compromising their future and societal cohesion. However, this violence has become so trivialized that there is no questioning of the functioning of institutions—whether public or private—whose responsibility is for humanity as a whole to live, guaranteeing universal security and access for all to fundamental rights.

“They built a highway to link the city to the airport. It should have passed through a residential zone, but the route was changed so that it was the poor families that were displaced and impoverished.”⁴²

“[When our children were taken away and placed in foster care, we had to use] what they call a ‘letterbox’ system, that’s set up by the social services. So, you’re allowed to write one letter a year, send a photograph, and you’re only allowed to put certain words. You’re not allowed to say that you miss them, or that you’re fighting to get them back, because they interpret that, that it will upset the child.”⁴³

“My country says it has achieved its Millennium Development Goal for universal primary education, when in reality it has increased access, but not quality. Many children fail their exams at 10 years old and don’t know how to read or write.”⁴⁴

In different forms, we clearly see the exclusion of people in extreme poverty, the distance institutions keep from them, injustices that have been committed, and violence carried out by institutions through their representatives.

In spite of the seriousness of these actions, institutions often claim to have taken all appropriate measures and to have acted legally. They place the responsibility for violence back on people living in extreme poverty. People living in extreme poverty who reject the assumption that they should simply submit themselves to an institution develop defense strategies that are turned against them. They end up by being judged by institutions as people and families who are impossible to manage.

Moreover, the institution's failure is often deflected onto the professionals who have to face these situations when unequipped with the necessary means. Those who attempt to assume their professional responsibilities by taking a person in poverty's reality into account in their work run the risk themselves of being excluded. Furthermore, both their professional experience and that of people living in poverty are often held in disdain, rejected or seen as threats to the institution, rather than being seen as knowledge for working together to achieve goals.

“After Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans, I worked as a case manager. I had the responsibility of helping people to develop plans for recovering. The agreement was that people could be helped more than once. However, when people found themselves having problems I had to beg the manager until he finally provided them with the help they needed. An elderly man, angry about what he had been given, said to me: ‘After all that I had to show you, I was brought a used mattress, and it’s stained!’ I called my supervisor to complain about it, and somebody higher up said, ‘Beggars can’t be choosers.’ I felt humiliated and disgusted all at once.”⁴⁵

Institutional violence becomes political violence when it is legitimized by laws or is carried out by the State. This entails legislation and public policies which, imposed by institutions, keep the poorest individuals and populations in inhumane conditions, even against condemnations and recommendations that judge these policies to be contrary to human rights laws and principles. These include repeated evictions, a lack of health care or legal assistance, refusing access to education, separating families and exclusion from all forms of participation in society. Through the same institutional methods, policies with the stated objective of reducing poverty by just a fixed percentage are in themselves violent, since they assert from the start that not all will benefit from them.

42. Moustapha Diop. Activist. Senegal. Contribution to the international seminar in Dakar (Senegal).

43. Amanda Button. Activist. United Kingdom. Contribution to the international seminar in Frimhurst (United Kingdom).

44. Sheila Bunwaree. Head of department, Sociology. University of Mauritius. Republic of Mauritius. Contribution to the document “Conclusions of the 2012 International Colloquium.”

45. Dierdre Mauss. Ally. United States. Contribution to the international colloquium “Extreme poverty is violence – Breaking the silence – Searching for peace.”

This violence carried out by institutions, therefore, often has violent historical roots. The failure to understand such historic violence from the perspective of people in extreme poverty leads to its perpetuation across generations and condemns people, families and entire communities to live without the knowledge and understanding of their own resistance and life-history, living with the weight of silence, ignorance and shame over their own origins. This profound ignorance maintains prejudice and foments exclusion and discrimination.

Addressing poverty was a bridge too far.

Sean Dunne. Ally. Ireland. Excerpt from his speech during the public day of the international colloquium, "Extreme Poverty is Violence – Breaking the Silence – Searching for Peace."

I am the Coordinator of a community drug rehabilitation program for recovering heroin addicts in the inner city of Dublin. This project emerged out of a report commissioned by the government on the extent of heroin use in the inner city. An important finding of that report was that poverty played a major part in heroin use. Furthermore it pointed out that the method of use was through injecting and sharing needles and caused the spread of HIV and the AIDS virus. It recommended, among other measures, that treatment and rehabilitation be put in place and that the causes of addiction be addressed.

Communities were invited to identify gaps in the AIDS/Drugs Section of the Health Board services leading to the establishment of rehabilitation programs, training and development services under community control in co-operation with employment, and education and youth programs. Needle exchange, and methadone treatment services were established and accessed by the poor, and inpatient respite services were established for the then terminally ill AIDS patients. Fear arose in the community as little information about the virus was available. The virus ran through large families and young people began to die. Because of the fear, sufferers often died without the support of the community and were initially buried in body bags. Many large families lost two, three and four children without being cherished by the community or the health services.

Because families could not afford the burials, the Health Board would only fund cremation, the cheapest form of burial. Mothers sewed quilts with the names of their loved ones embroidered on. An annual service by the family support group is held in the inner city attended by the whole community. The community determined that no other family would go through the violence and loss of the bereaved, and established appropriate services to prevent a recurrence of this epidemic. Parents went back to school and secured the necessary qualifications and skills to establish these services.

A Drugs Task Force was established in the twelve identified areas suffering from the subsequent heroin addiction. These were composed of all state agencies that encountered addiction in the course of their work. i.e. the Garda⁴⁶, the educational services, the employment & training services, the community and medical services.

The community began to feel good about themselves despite the lack of adequate funding. However it was felt that, in the corridors of power, addressing the causes of addiction, addressing poverty, was a bridge too far to cross and they began clawing back funding and representation by the community [even] when the financial situation in Ireland was at its best. Now as we are in recession their strategy is to dispense with the community services and channel the funding to the failing banks, which caused our problems in the first place.

Although the community is sufficiently organized to mount protests, there is silence from the government. The community is now in fear for the future. Dialogue between the community and the authorities has ceased. Jobs are disappearing and incomes are dropping at an alarming rate.

46. The Irish police force

The work now has to be between the sufferers of government policy, so that at least, we can be clear on exactly what is happening and why. So that the void of silence from the government be filled by dialogue between families and the poorest of our community. So that we bear witness to the events that affect the poor, thereby giving support and hope.

When people find out what I work at they say, “How do you manage with the violence?” I tell them that I have never encountered any violence from the participants, the families or the community. But I certainly have problems with the violence which permits such situations to happen and is prepared to let them happen again and again.

Demolition is violence. It means hunger.

Actors’ group. The Philippines. Contribution to the international seminar in Frimhurst (United Kingdom)

Demolition of our homes is violence. It means hunger. You can’t work because of the everyday repeated demolitions. It is violence because you can think bad things against the demolition workers. They burn our wood, they tear up our tarpaulins. When we’re demolished, I can’t talk. I don’t want to work, so it’s a double pain—“hunger-hunger”—if you have an empty stomach you can’t think straight. I told my wife, “If I lose my faith in God, I could easily stab this leader of the demolition crew when I am angry. I am disgusted with this man, it’s hunger.” My concern is experiencing hunger. We don’t have regular work, my daughter does not have milk, I can’t say anything, no rice to cook. I said, “Hunger! Hunger!” That’s why you can do violence, again all because of an empty stomach, because of demolition, because of those who are rich and in authority who don’t understand us poor people.

School determines who is poor and who isn’t.

Boubakar Sarr. Activist. Senegal. Contribution to the international seminar in Dakar (Senegal)

From the time I started school, the teacher was the one who made me suffer. I would get there early in the morning bringing my school supplies in a plastic bag and wearing “thiarakh,” plastic shoes. He would tell me, “You’re dirty. Go sit in the back.” Right in front of the other students and my classmates. So one day during the break, I saw someone with nice shoes and I took them from him and left. So who was the violent one? Me? The teacher? Even if that’s how school is, it determines who is poor and who isn’t. In the educational system, they make more of an effort to give classes and a good education to the students who aren’t poor. They cast you aside and your future is ruined.

They’ve abandoned us.

Claire Exertier. Full-time Volunteer. France. Contribution to the international seminar in Pierrelaye (France)

For the past year, 8 year-old Martin has been living with his parents, without receiving an education because no one can find him a place in a specialized establishment. His parents keep saying, “They’ve abandoned us. We’re told to figure something out for yourself ... but who is going to help us? We were just asking for help! One day something bad is going to happen. Martin is going to have lots of problems, we’re all going to be at the end of our rope but there isn’t going to be anyone to help us find a solution!”

Also, his older 11-year-old brother was just returned to his parents. Like Martin, he had stayed with several foster families but none of them worked out. He was recently expelled from middle school and last week he ran away from the family he was living

with. The police found him in the streets and brought him to the Social Services offices. They called his mum and said, “Our offices are closing in 15 minutes. Your son is here and you have to come get him. We can’t do anything for him.”

The acting guardian laid out before me the entire past of this mother.

Colette Januth. Full-time Volunteer. Belgium. Contribution to the international seminar in Pierrelaye (France)

A very young mother, with a child who had been hospitalized, had disappeared after being summoned by the juvenile court. I went out looking for her for several days to convince her to show up at court. She was convinced that there was nothing left to do, that her child would be put into foster care. I offered to accompany her and help her prepare. Together we went to meet the acting guardian, but the meeting went horribly. The guardian laid out before me the entire past of this mother, and presented her as limited and incapable. Despite my protests and our request for her and her child to be allowed to live together in a “Maternal Home,” she said that the decision had already been taken and would not change. When we left the meeting, I asked the mother to forgive me for the added suffering that I had caused.

We don’t have the money to buy everything the school requires.

Edilberta Béjar. Activist. Peru. Contribution to the international seminar in Lima (Peru)

Abuse is everywhere in school, when they single out our children or yell at them, because they don’t do their homework, because they haven’t brought the payment, because they aren’t well dressed. Many parents don’t have the money to be able to buy everything the school asks for, what they require. If we don’t buy it, they tell our children not to come any more and this makes them feel bad, makes them less enthusiastic, less strong. This is why there are many children who don’t want to study, because they are afraid or are treated badly. The parents feel this same fear of going to school because they haven’t been able to get the money they need to buy things.

My children were taken away from me because I was living in the streets.

Madame Marqué. France. Contribution to the international seminar in Pierrelaye (France)

My children were taken away from me because I was living in the streets. That night, I had found a shelter that takes in people from the streets. They don’t accept children. The Director of Social Affairs didn’t want children in the shelter. Instead of finding solutions for families, they immediately said, “The children are in danger. We’re going to find foster placements for them.” After that, they don’t do anything else for the mothers. Foster care is not what the children need. There are other solutions. But since I don’t have a choice, there are no other solutions for me but foster care.

At the shelter, you don’t have the right to eat, to cook, to have children or to see friends. So it’s hard. My children are in care; we can’t break the cycle. My children are going to have their own children one day, and if that happens they’re going to have a problem and their children are going to be taken away from them, and so on.

They adopted her and they didn't adopt me.

Michel Brogniez. Activist. Belgium. Contribution to the international seminar in Pierrelaye (France)

I had an unhappy childhood. I didn't have a normal childhood. I lived in several children's homes until my military service. They first put me and my two year-old sister with the nuns. She was very shy. She was also traumatized. But they separated us in the home. In bed at night, I cried a lot for my mother who wasn't with me and who I couldn't see. It hurt me so much. I felt alone. Children need to have affection. I would go hide to cry even though I was with other children my age every day. I thought that it was my fault that I wasn't with my mother. I knew I had been abandoned.

I went to see my sister a lot since she was the only family I had. There was a building for the girls and one for the boys. Of course, I was punished because I wasn't allowed to go to the girls' building. The punishment was to make me wear a skirt or dress in front of all the other boys for an entire day, and everyone would say, "You're just like a girl." The Sisters humiliated me. They put me in the park between the girls' and boys' homes with the bed sheet that I had wet on my head under the hot sun. They made me ashamed that I wet the bed. I wet my bed until a late age. I think it was due to what I had experienced.

Then they told me, "You're going to go to the seaside." A bus came to get us. There were only boys. We spent three weeks at Ostend at the seaside. My sister had got into the bus because she was wondering where I was going. They made her get out. They told her the girls would go afterward. My sister was 8 years old and I was 9. She hugged me tight. We were to be separated from then on but I didn't know it. I think my sister knew because she had got into the bus. Someone adopted her and didn't adopt me.

Afterward, I wasn't returned to the same establishment as before so that I wouldn't know that my sister had been adopted. They did it when I left for vacation. They took away the only person who mattered to me.

When children leave the home, what isn't normal is that no one tells them about their family. They have to know it, even if the family is mean or has problems. The child has to know why he or she was placed there. We trigger poverty in the orphanages by taking away people's identities.

There were a lot of children in the homes at that time. How many of them got out of poverty? How many? I would say not even a quarter of them, a handful. There's friends that I don't see anymore who I spent my childhood with. We all tried to get out of poverty, to keep smiling, but what went wrong? There were tons of lives that were ruined. Why? That's the question. Why? A lot of children were taken away from their families and it has taken a toll on society. It also created resentment and hate. But why?

Police have powers to protect the city, not to abuse it; but a lot of the time they abuse it.

Keith McAnaspie. Activist. Ireland. Contribution to the international seminar in Frimhurst (United Kingdom)

The police would just stop me and tell me to take everything off: empty my pockets and then they would tell me to take my jacket off, and they'd say, "Have you any sharp needles or anything sharp on you?" Because, they'd be saying, "If something sticks in me, I'm going to kill you." So I would have to start taking off all my clothes. I would be so embarrassed, because people would be walking by that knew me, so they thought I was a bad person. Police have powers to protect the city, not abuse it. And a lot of the time they would not protect the city, they would abuse it. They would take you back to the prison and beat you up. And then, the reason they wouldn't bring you to court if they found

anything on you was because you'd be black and blue all over, and the judge would see that then. And if you told your solicitor, "I've just been beaten up," who are they going to believe? They're going to believe the police officers.

The day they arm probation officers, I leave my job.

Karen Hart. Ally. United States. Contribution to the international seminar in Frimhurst (United Kingdom)

"Always act with people as you expect them to behave, and expect them to be, and thus we can meet our expectations." This says it better than I can. Treat people like human beings and they are going to behave like human beings. If you call people offenders and felons, and degenerates, then what do you expect these people to react to you with? If you're being disrespectful to them, why shouldn't they be disrespectful to you, and everybody else? We can't expect everybody to be superheroes, and rise above things that we ourselves cannot even rise above.

Every three years approximately, the State of Wisconsin has a big move to get probation and parole agents armed. In many states, they are already armed. The day they do that is the day I leave my job. When I walk into a house as a probation officer, I know that there are guns present. I have seen them sitting out. And I've got to say: "You've got to get rid of them!" If I start flashing a gun, what are they going to do? I give them no choice but to defend themselves and kill me. I might kill somebody myself. I might be killing someone over an argument. I'm not going to carry a weapon.

At this point, the worst I can do to them is take their liberty for a little while and I think that's better than taking a life. I think that to deprive somebody of their liberty, to put somebody in jail, is an awesome responsibility, that you shouldn't take lightly at all. We have probation-parole agents that will put a person in jail for the slightest thing in the world, and I'm sure there are many of the public who are happy with that kind of response, but I think it is an awesome responsibility that I can actually take somebody's freedom away for a moment, three days, or one day, or six years.

We see them born, but they don't exist.

Rocío Suárez. Full-time Volunteer. Senegal. Contribution to the international seminar in Dakar (Senegal)

Some children are affected the moment they are born. Some of them won't even be born because their parents don't have any money. Without money to give birth, it is sometimes a pilgrimage, from the neighborhood to the health center, to a clinic from there, from the clinic to the hospital sometimes, then after several hours, all the way back to the health center. You have to count on luck. On the chance that the baby will not be born prematurely during the pilgrimage. On the chance that after the birth it is not the mother who is risking her life. On the chance that the birth is a time of joy and not mourning. Because this pilgrimage brings with it one single question: Can you afford it?

During the pilgrimage, the family is silent: the silence of shame, patience and not being noticed in order to risk the chance of being like all of the other mums able to experience the joy of childbirth.

Life begins as soon as they are born, but most babies start out by not existing. In today's society, you don't exist if you aren't registered at city hall. Most of the children in the families that we know legally don't exist. We see them when they're born, when they take their first steps and start to become high-spirited. But they don't exist.

These children are born and all they hear is the cry of shame. Their parents can't pay the birthing fees and so the health center denies them birth certificates. How do you deny

such rights if they are required for the registration process? Why are we able to deny the “existence” of a baby who has just been born?

“Not existing” is a station in life passed down through generations. When we want to make it mandatory for society to recognize children, requiring society to register their existence on a piece of paper, we realize that the parents don’t exist either. How can you exist if the people who have given you life don’t exist?

I and others inherited violence.

Gilberte Moellon. Ally. France. Contribution to the international seminar in Grand Baie (Republic of Mauritius)

In Reunion Island, the history of detention centers for abandoned and delinquent children began the day after the abolition of slavery, when the colonial society had to control these emancipated youths, left to their own devices or no longer having parents to ensure their integration into society. Before the abolition of slavery, the children of slaves, considered property of the master, started working very early. These children were excluded from the colonial educational system. In addition to the masters’ role, the clergy had the mission to instill the slaves with religious instruction.

After the abolition of slavery in 1848, these children who wandered around the streets of Saint-Denis looking for food and shelter were considered vagrants; they were punished under colonial legislation and locked up in educational centers. It was in this context that center *La Providence* was created. It was the first reformatory school and it included a prison for vagrant children.

In 1869 this prison was replaced by the prison *Ilet à Guillaume*, located on a plateau 700 meters above sea level. The prison is surrounded on all sides by steep slopes and cliffs. You have an eagle’s eye view, it is difficult to access and any escape is doomed to failure. Until 1879, the year the prison closed, many children convicted for vagrancy or simply stealing food were sent there. At its peak, the prison held 240 of these young inmates, largely the descendants of slaves, aged between 8 and 21 years old. Sentences at the prison were from several days to several years.

These children were involved in large construction projects that lead to serious accidents, some of them deadly. These projects included water systems, housing, a small church and plantations. The system at the prison was extremely severe; including the use of chains, handcuffs and whips to force the children into submission. There was a temporary end to the system of incarceration of abandoned and orphaned children in the colony of Reunion when the prison *Ilet à Guillaume* closed.

A half century after these tragic events, a new educational structure was created: “Association for guilty and abandoned children,” based on the model of *Ilet*. The notion of children’s culpability, whether they are orphans or detainees, persists in the memory of Reunion Islanders from this period that is evoked in the story of the “Association for guilty and abandoned children.”

Many of the former child inmates, still haunted by the painful memories of being locked up in a system scarcely different from the prison *Ilet à Guillaume*, find it difficult to speak about their pasts. There are some who refuse to bring up their childhood. The more painful an event in a person’s life, the deeper the memory of it is repressed. They prefer to remain in silence and act as if nothing had ever happened.

I am filled with the feeling that, together, I and others are the inheritors of a large part of the violence that haunts Reunion Island and the Comoros: slavery, forced exile, indentured servitude, stigmatization, extreme poverty and immigration.

2.1.4. Projects and services that are ill-adapted to people's needs

In the current social and economic context, in which all projects have to be economically viable in the short term, many institutions—whether public, private or run by civil society—do not invest the necessary time into getting to know and understand the realities faced by the people and families that they propose to work with, nor their hopes and expectations.

“An association comes to help the poor, giving away wood, canvas, cement, but they don't offer to help people build their houses. If you're a single mother and you don't have money to pay for labor, if you don't have a place to store the materials you've been given, they end up getting damaged, the cement gets hard and can't be used. NGOs⁴⁷ come along with projects without having been with the families, without knowing what things are really like for them.”⁴⁸

Over the years families living in extreme poverty have built up a way of resisting it that is based on family and social ties and the desire to find collective solutions. This is as important for them as projects and the changes to which they aspire. However, when aid, development projects and services do not recognize their importance, these ties are at risk of being undermined—even unintentionally—which can in turn easily lead to the rupture of these forms of resistance and everything that these families hold in common.

“We lived in a very poor neighborhood, but the majority of us had managed to get work nearby. The neighborhood has been destroyed and all the families have been rehoused in a so-called ‘model’ neighborhood. We have homes, but many people have lost the bits of work that they had and we can't live without money. I managed to get an article published in the newspaper saying that we needed help. Without consulting us, a truck came to the entrance to the neighborhood and unloaded tons of clothes. There were photographers present to show the arrival of this aid, but this created discord among the residents. We needed help to get our children into school, to have our neighborhood accepted by the rest of the city.... Instead of helping us, this aid brought us down.”⁴⁹

A project that breaks social ties is in itself an ill-adapted project since by the time it has been concluded the lives of the people living in poverty have become even more difficult. It divides the poorest communities, leaving their inhabitants weakened and impoverished. *“They come to give rice to some people for six months and don't visit the homes of the poorest. They way they act separates people, which is a form of violence.”⁵⁰*

The question of ill-adapted projects and services brings us once more to the question of understanding and knowledge, and the type of relationship this requires. When projects—even those designed to help—are based on only partial knowledge, they result in overly short-sighted responses and trap people in situations that offer no access (to job training, housing, microcredit, etc.) unless people tell lies. Ultimately, as these projects do not achieve the results those managing them expect, they end up adversely affecting people in the most vulnerable situations of poverty.

“Why did they take away our homes, the shacks that we lived in? They were ours, why did they take us away from there? To make us suffer? They're watching me, you're being preyed on, because this apartment thing is a deadly trick for those of us who don't have a job. Because they give you the apartment and you go there and you're happy there with your children, because you have hot water and you feel at peace, but if you can't pay they take away the apartment and they take away your children. My 80-year-old mum is now out on the street, kicked out with her oxygen canister, because she can't pay. I don't think they have any right to do that. They give you some help, but it's not to help you, it's to trick you.”⁵¹

“The help, as it's thought out, doesn't correspond to our needs. We experience it as something imposed on us to satisfy those who thought out the projects who wanted to impose on us their values.”⁵²

Many proposals for lifting people out of poverty are based on their ability to benefit from the opportunities provided. If they fail to do so, they are blamed for that failure. *“If others have managed it, why you didn't you?”⁵³* Moreover, providing only an opportunity does not guarantee a right; only those with more resources can take advantage of these kinds of programs. Reaching people in the most extreme situations of poverty demands going further than providing opportunities: it requires guaranteeing rights.

47. Non-Governmental Organizations

48. Mariline Legentil. Activist. Republic of Mauritius. Contribution to the international seminar in Grand Baie (Republic of Mauritius).

49. Ricarl Pierrelouis. Activist. Republic of Mauritius. Contribution to the international seminar in Grand Baie (Republic of Mauritius).

50. Jean Diène. Ally. Senegal. Contribution to the international seminar in Dakar (Senegal).

51. M.A. Activist. Spain. Contribution to the international seminar in Lima (Peru).

52. Activists' group. Exchanges during the international colloquium “Extreme poverty is violence – Breaking the silence – Searching for peace”.

53. Actors' group. Spain. Contribution to the document “Conclusions of the 2012 International Colloquium.”

They always told her that they knew better than her what was best for her son.

Mary Dawson. Activist. United States. Excerpt from her speech during the public day of the international colloquium, "Extreme Poverty is Violence – Breaking the Silence – Searching for Peace."

Sarah [name changed for confidentiality] is part of the group that prepared for this meeting. She often spoke about how she cried out for help over and over and over again for her son, age 17. She had been crying out since he was 5 years old. But she didn't have the knowledge to obtain the resources to help her son who suffered with mental health issues that caused difficulties with learning and socializing with others. She went to the school, she talked to the teachers, the counselors, the principal, the social workers, and the Board of Education. They always told her that they knew better than her what was best for him.

Now he is in jail instead of being in a mental facility where he could receive the medication he needs. Sarah hasn't been able to visit or talk to him at all. When she called the jail to ask if he was receiving his medication, she was told it was none of her business. Sarah has not seen her son in 6 months or more. He was put in an adult prison, but he is only 17 years old, with the mental capacity of a child.

Before this happened Sarah asked if her son could be put back into the mental facility; she had seen that it had helped him in the past. But the social workers put him into a group home, and that facility was unable to meet his needs. They did not listen to her or him. When he was in the group home he felt threatened by other residents. And that's when he stole the keys of a health care worker's car to get away. Although he committed a crime, they could have admitted him into a mental hospital as his mother had asked. If someone had just looked at his mental record, they would have seen his mind was childlike. But most importantly, if they had respected and listened to Sarah as a concerned mother, he would not have gone to the group home and then ended up in jail. But instead she felt uneducated and unable to express herself. For that, her son suffered, Sarah suffered, and all of us of the Fourth World suffered because she is a part of our lives.

Jail is not what Sarah's son needs, he needs a mental facility that will give him medication and monitor his behavior and help him better control it. I've experienced it with my son and others, and I know it can work, if you have the people in place who are concerned enough about other human beings, people who use their skills and are moved by compassion for their job. That's what makes any facility or program work.

The requirement is also violence against professionals.

Françoise Vernevaut. Ally. France. Contribution to the international seminar in Pierrelaye (France)

I work for a job-placement agency serving the long-term unemployed. I know our goal is a positive outcome. This mandatory requirement forces professionals to set priorities that do not necessarily include listening to people.

If you need results, if the people that come to our sort of agency are required to have a job a maximum of two years after coming to the company. Getting a job is what we need to work on. We have to find work for them so we can't worry about whether they have any vacation or leisure activities; we're can't even worry about whether they have housing. We're going to focus solely on finding them work. When that happens, we listen to them less. If we had listened to them about things other than work, maybe we would have found a way that would allow them to make progress and to find work in other ways.

I also think that the deadlines are too close to each other, too short. They don't give people who are sometimes in a very, very difficult situation the chance to stop a minute

and tell themselves, “I’m going to slow down a little bit for six months, for a year, because I need health care. I’m going dare to take time off, to think about other things. I’m going to allow myself time to see what problems my children are having and not worry about work for a little while because I know that, at least for a while, I am going to be working and feeding my family.”

This requirement upsets us and I think that hurts us professionals, and since it hurts us, we also respond in a violent way to the very people who we should instead be supporting and catering to, not coddling, but reassuring them. Most of the time when they leave, they don’t have any work.

They minimize our ability to fight against the chronic poverty that we live in.

Jean Diène. Ally. Senegal. Contribution to the international seminar in Dakar (Senegal)

It is true that where there’s chronic poverty, there’s no peace. Trying to have peace is like trying to make ends meet every day and not being able to do it. There is truly no peace in that. The person who lives in peace is the one who is able to make both ends meet every day.

Someone who has never experienced the destitution of extreme poverty cannot even pretend to know what it’s like. Only those who know it or have truly experienced it can really fight it. Often, the United Nations leads campaigns against extreme poverty, but they can’t fight it efficiently because they simply can’t get a handle on it. They haven’t experienced it. They don’t know what it is. Those of us who’ve experienced it and know what it is are able to fight it more efficiently.

Nowadays, they tend to minimize our ability to fight against the poverty we live in. We often see institutions and organizations come to tell us that they are there to help us— but their strategy is just to distribute money or food to anyone. They don’t try to really understand what poverty is. They often choose to give money to the people who’ve gone to school and who are a little more easy to approach, although those people don’t even know what poverty is. The money and food that they distribute often becomes a source of conflict between neighbors. They give the money or food to people who actually shouldn’t get it. At the same time, they forget about the ones who truly need it.

Sometimes, the people who need it go to see the people in charge of the institutions or organizations to tell them, “You are here to help the poor and you gave it to a man who has means. You left me in the lurch when I really needed it.” That’s when the problems start. Often, those of us here who are trying to fight against poverty with the families who live in it, we’re the ones who shoulder the responsibility.

They made the children walk around with t-shirts reading “Street Children.”

Mahamadou Kone. Full-time Volunteer. Burkina Faso. Contribution to the international seminar in Dakar (Senegal)

We’ve been receiving support from a coalition working on behalf of street youth and children for a long time. The coalition goes out at night to meet children in the streets and they feed them, care for them. It’s a very good thing, but before joining the coalition, we wondered what the place of parents would be, so that they are able to fulfill their responsibilities. Does the younger brother who stayed behind in the village have access to the same care, to the same opportunities as an older brother who left home to live in the streets of the city? And then we wondered if this kind of organization promotes a rural exodus. Is it worth it to stay in the village?

On January 28th, the coalition proposed organizing a protest with the title: “Say ‘no’ to the stigmatization of young children living in the streets.” We thought it was a great idea and we thought, “Why not work with them?” So we worked with the youth. What they brought to the table was a message that reflected what the day was all about: “What people think of us is not how we see ourselves.” The message was given to the president of the National Assembly of Burkina Faso. We thought we were really making progress with them. But on June 12th, just before the International Day of the African Child, the coalition made the children walk through the streets wearing t-shirts with the words “Street Children” on the back. During the coalition’s Board of Directors meeting, we decided to talk about it because we were all in disagreement about it. We told them, “Our protest was meant to proclaim ‘No’ to the stigmatization of children living in the streets but today we’re making them parade around wearing ‘Street Children’ written on their backs!”

A person in charge said to us, “If the funding sponsors don’t see the children in the streets, the event won’t be a success. You can’t make an omelet without cracking some eggs.” It’s an act of violence to benefit from the poverty of others in order to fill your pockets. Today the question for us is, “How do we change our partners’ vision?”

Today’s society thinks that we can eliminate extreme poverty by accumulating material goods.

Jaime Muñoz. Full-time Volunteer. Senegal. Contribution to the international seminar in Dakar (Senegal)

Extreme poverty eats away at everything human, like liberty and the desire to live in peace. First and foremost, it is an act of physical violence that makes itself obvious, that becomes an urgent reality. It is unfortunate for people in poverty and for us because the person living in extreme poverty ends up being reduced to a single dimension in the eyes of others. He or she is reduced to the material emergency that he or she lives in.

It inflicts a terrible violence that goes unnoticed, with the destruction and negation of people and relationships, of everything that every culture and tradition understands as what it means to be human. When you’re forced to live without the material necessities required to live with dignity in any given culture, others disregard the permanent negation that you’re subjected to: of liberty, of self-awareness, of your desire for truth, of thought and the liberty to act, of what it means to be magnanimous, and of other values that are recognized as constituting the best of humanity.

Today’s society—with its attachment to material things and money, with the intensification of individualism—is becoming incapable of viewing a certain man in poverty as any more than the bodily nature of human beings (someone needing food, shelter, and health care). Today’s society acts with arrogance by thinking that it can bring an end to suffering solely by sharing material goods. It thinks that it can end poverty and exclusion with the accumulation of goods. This prevents the world from having to think about the essential issue, which is the effort of each and every person to create the conditions for liberty and liberation in a land of extreme poverty.

When we met this man, he was living in utter destitution, maybe the same way as he still lives today - his home half flooded, the roof so caved in that you had to crouch to enter. For months, the whole family lived in a small narrow space in the entryway because the inside had become unbearably hot. But we didn’t see all of that until later.

We found the man busy working all by himself, moving around the smelly mud that was about worsen the flooding even more. We and a few young people joined him. That was our mission: to build on people’s courage to face their woe and to turn that woe around. From that day on, he became someone who speaks out on behalf of others, not just to improve his personal situation but to help find solutions for everyone else. Together, we had a space and words that gave us a certain liberty, rather than being constrained by the ongoing emergency to which this man’s family was subjected.

And then all of a sudden he got sick, paralyzed. Unable to afford appropriate care and isolated, he used up all his resources to look for an unattainable solution. Since we had a relationship with him, we all went to visit with him as a friendly gesture. At one point his situation was dire, but together we had a possibility of bringing about discreet, ongoing social solidarity, providing him with long-term moral support and health care.

Despite our relationship and our continuous concern for enabling this man and his family to participate in decisions concerning his health care, little by little, his misery and dependence decreased the freedom in the relationship that we believed we had reached together. His social and family situation got even worse. Today, what we know enables us to understand more and more about this family's life and how exclusion led to its destruction. The man has always tried to keep his liberty of thought. He continues to take on initiatives that are hard to understand, and he takes the time and patience to make us understand his way of seeing things. He abandoned his family to go back to living in the flooded entryway, completely alone and paralyzed. He refused the offer made by a distant relative who wanted to save him from the worst flood season, by inviting him to come, by himself, to the village. When young people from our Movement offered to help him make a small improvement to his home, he turned them down too. All of his refusals were made because of his quest for respect, dignity and one more chance to live among others.

In this human relationship that we try to maintain, in my opinion, the greatest violence is when he talks to me about the future. He talks about a field that he has and says how he wants to develop it into a mango production field. He talks to me about his plans very proudly. It's extremely violent to believe that another person, even someone we love and about whom we sincerely worry, has no future. It's truly painful to discover that, deep down, I don't take seriously this man and the ambitions he is sharing with me. I don't know how to help him make it to tomorrow.

In face of the glaring need to share a possible future together, we lack faith and we see only the poverty and destitution of the man who is right before our eyes. Even despite the difficult and extremely violent position he is in, he always manages to surpass being pitied or looked down upon. He asked me news of one of my kids who came with me one day. He prays for us. He gives us advice about behavior and integrity in life, about effort, about truth. He tries to create a space between us where humanity is more important than need, than emergency or deprivation.

To be reaffirmed, liberty of consciousness and action must be acquired in the search for meaning in experience, with yourself, with peers. Individualism in industrial society gives a false sense of priority to every individual about their destiny. The poor man finds himself cut off from a deeper meaning that would give him a true sense of liberty to build sustainable action with others. Families that live from day to day are, at the most, able to confide in those who want to help get them out of their situation.

The response given is too small.

Full-time volunteers' group. Exchange during the international seminar in Grand Baie (Republic of Mauritius)

Some families' homes, for example, are too small, which means everything is bursting at the seams. Microcredit is given to help change their situation and people are expected to pay it back. But the families say, "I can't, it makes me feel awful having to repay money when my child is desperately hungry even though I've been working." One person from the microcredit company told me, "There are those who pay the money back, but there are others who tell me lies!" And yet, it is precisely those people who don't repay it who need more than microcredit. But since it is microcredit that they find, then they accept it; but they have to lie when they say they are going to pay it back, because they can't! As aid, it's just too small!

2.2. Breaking the silence

Overcoming the ignorance and incomprehension concerning extreme poverty requires breaking the silence about the resulting violence, and about how people try to resist it. However, those who live in violent circumstances cannot break the silence alone. A collective and sustained effort to enable each person to speak out is necessary to build understanding and a fair analysis.

2.2.1. Silence

“There is violence that you can’t forget but have to keep quiet about.”⁵⁴

Whatever type of violence they face, people remain aware that what they are living through constitutes violence. However, when a person is trapped in extreme poverty, the feelings of powerlessness, guilt, fear and anger, as well as the loss of hope for the future condemns to silence the people who try to survive the violence of extreme poverty.

“Staying silent is also a way of resisting, a way of not falling into a cycle of violence. But silence hides violence.”⁵⁵

Faced with the danger that any show of opposition will make the situation worse, and faced with the possibility of making enemies, or that their proposals will be completely ignored or used against them, those who live in extreme poverty find themselves condemned to silence. *“You learn not to get upset because it can go against you.”⁵⁶* It is not a question of the sort of silence related to privacy, to which everyone has the right, but a silence imposed on those who think they will not be given consideration, who suffer from fear, who are accused of being guilty of worsening their own circumstances.

Alongside the silence to which people living in extreme poverty are condemned, there is another type of silence: that of the rest of society and the professionals who—having normalized the violence of extreme poverty or being powerless against the dimensions the violence has reached— do not protest against it.

“If we accept it and make it seem normal, we perpetuate the situation, we’re part of the cycle. In other words, you’re complicit.”⁵⁷

It is difficult to speak up when people humiliate you. Activists’ group. Dialogue during the international seminar in Lima (Peru)

54. Moïse Compaoré. Ally. Burkina Faso. Contribution to the international colloquium “Extreme poverty is violence – Breaking the silence – Searching for peace.”

55. Leo Sánchez. Activist. Spain. Contribution to the document “Conclusions of the 2012 International Colloquium.”

56. Actors’ group. United Kingdom. Contribution to the document “Conclusions of the 2012 International Colloquium.”

57. Silvio Campana. Ally. Peru. Contribution to the international seminar in Lima (Peru).

It is very difficult to speak up when people humiliate you, and many times you’re embarrassed. Later, when you go home, you feel very sad and powerless about not being able to do more and you can only stay as you are. Surely, then, because you weren’t able to speak up, nobody else will listen, nobody else will want to know what you wanted to say, and you’re left powerless to express yourself.

It is very difficult to think that you might always live isolated from everyone else. And I couldn’t stay quiet any longer. I had to find the strength to defend myself.

Julián Quispe. Peru.

I started working when I was 10 years old. When I was 13 or 14, I was no longer working only as a nanny, but was doing all the household chores. Since I had no experience doing domestic work and the lady of the house was not teaching me, she would mistreat me, even hit me, insult me, for what I was doing poorly. Because of everything she was doing to me, I would start to cry and even this upset her. I put up with all of this in silence and after two years decided to leave.

This experience shows us the sacrifice, the humiliation and the labor abuses that people experience: out of necessity we lower ourselves. And with these experiences, we feel lower than other people, and we think that we will always have to live this way.

Emma Poma. Bolivia.

This subject is very difficult for me too, because I have lived it myself, felt it. I am a woman who has been abused and humiliated all my life. I have cried all night because I have felt humiliated. How many people there must be like me, who suffer this humiliation in silence without being able to tell anyone! How many people must cry at night like I do, without being able to talk about the suffering they keep inside! When we are humiliated like this, many times we think only about dying.

Edilberta Béjar. Peru.

You learn not to get angry because it can go against you.

Patricia Bailey. Activist. United Kingdom. Contribution to the international seminar in Frimhurst (United Kingdom)

You learn to keep your mouth shut and keep it all in. Some of the younger mums didn't know this, but I knew from experience you keep quiet. This was my way of helping my daughter to be able to keep her son. Often the staff can be unfair but you learn not to get angry because it can go against you. They go through your social worker reports and pick on you; it is unfair, but you just have to keep it all in otherwise you will lose your baby. I know that they wrote about me. Often, I wanted to complain but I didn't, I kept it in for my children.

This loss of ability to get indignant happens on all levels.

Silvio Campana. Ally. Peru. Contribution to the international seminar in Lima (Peru).

It is important not to lose the ability to be indignant. If you hear about a situation like the woman in Guatemala whose daughter died in the hospital because she couldn't pay for medication and it doesn't move you, you'd better worry. Because if you hear about this and don't feel anything, something is wrong, you've already normalized this situation. It is a strategy of the medical profession not to identify with the patient, and also in the legal profession. The lawyers do the same by assigning numbers to people in order not to identify them. It is easier to treat a number than a person. It's a defense mechanism; but it's serious if this happens to you daily and you lose the ability to be indignant. I believe that this inability to be indignant happens on all levels.

We let the most powerful people have their say but we forget about the weakest.

Actors' group. Central African Republic. Contribution to the international colloquium, "Extreme Poverty is Violence – Breaking the Silence – Searching for Peace."

People living in extreme poverty are useful for peace. They are useful to others and useful for the world. But if we forget them, the world becomes divided and there will never be peace. If some people remain in their category and other people remain in another category, there is already a division.

In meetings, we let the most powerful people have their say but we forget about the weakest. The International Criminal Court is following up on the disaster caused by the Banyamulenge in our country in Central Africa. When a meeting is organized to ask

people to explain what happened, we always let people who express themselves well be the ones to talk. And yet, in these conflicts, the weakest are the people who had the most serious problems, but we don't let them speak. How will we ever really know the truth about what caused it?

The authorities and the partners who are combating poverty publish statistics. They announce them over the radio or in the press. But these organizations didn't seek out the poorest to hear what they had to say. As a result, they make up things about them in order to provide statistics. It's an act of violence against the knowledge that these families have because they don't have to chance to talk about these percentages. How do we allow these families to talk about their courage, their hopes, about how they fight night and day to get out of poverty without always saying what is wrong? That is a lack of knowledge. It is important to let these families speak for themselves about how they live.

2.2.2. Creating the conditions for breaking the silence

Even if a person has always been condemned to silence, nobody can speak in her or his name. To build meaningful peace, it is first of all essential to understand the reasons for the silence and to create the conditions for breaking it.

For people to end the silence, speak of their own experiences and express freely their thoughts and words requires an environment of trust, as well as the assurance that they are endangering neither themselves nor their families.

Within spaces or mechanisms for participation and expression—created by civil society or public administrations—it is necessary to create conditions in which people living in poverty can freely express themselves, building on factors that strengthen and mobilize them, rather than what humiliates or shames them. It is the strength they gain that empowers them with a sense of agency to speak out, act in solidarity with one another, avoid humiliating each other, and ultimately feel in a position of equality from which they can freely enter into dialogue with society and its institutions. *“We know where, with whom and when we can talk.”*⁵⁸

For professionals and researchers, accepting the challenge of breaking the silence is based on the premise that their own actions can provoke violence.

All these individuals have an ethical obligation and an important role to play in the task of denouncing violence committed against people living in poverty—which some do at great professional or personal risk—though denouncing it is not in itself breaking the silence. To break the silence it is necessary to recognize the knowledge possessed by those who have had silence imposed on them, to have the will to merge it with the knowledge generated by universities, NGOs and institutions in general, and in the process to create new knowledge that will transform institutional practice and the lives of the people in extreme poverty.

Poor people don't have anyone on their side.

Nelly Schenker. Activist. Switzerland. Contribution to the thematic forum on “Extreme Poverty, Violence and Peace” in Munich (Germany)

58. Raquel Juárez. Activist. Guatemala. Contribution to the document “Conclusions of the 2012 International Colloquium.”

The subject of violence is very complex and we are quickly hurt by it ourselves. I remind myself all the time that violence is imposed on us by other people, by society. That is why I tell myself during these meetings (and all meetings) that we must be sure to listen to each other without interrupting. And ensure that everyone is able to say what is on their minds.

Ever since I was little, I've always felt that the poorest people never had anyone on their side. Until the worst happens, there's no one they can talk to or express their frustration and their joy to - discussing, sharing and becoming friends. Violence is what happens when we look at each other as if we had the plague. Most of all, when we don't get close to a person. No one wants to stretch out their hand. What is our crime? What have we done to society? (I also often ask myself: What did I do wrong?)

Most children who live in poverty are already worried about the things that adults worry about. We expect much more from them than from other children. They have to worry like we do. Right from the start they have to defend themselves because of what their parents are like: "What? You're that man's son?" "Your mom's a druggie, a slut." They hear things like that at school. When they go to school, they don't have bags full of brand new notebooks and pencils. No, they have bags full of worries, criticisms and obscenities.

A good family support aide made it possible for me to talk about the work of ATD Fourth World with a teacher and to tell her what it means to live in poverty. She was flabbergasted and she said that she had no idea what it was like. She was tremendously interested. We talked about it over the course of an entire year, and she took time out of her day for me.

If we can't have conversations like that, there is an enormous amount of anger that grows between us. At my mother's house, we were subjected to a lot of anger. Anger, rage. They have nothing to do with violence. Tearing up a book, throwing a plate on the floor, letting your anger out, that's different from violence. Sometimes we bang our fists against the wall so much that it hurts. You feel the injustice within you and you're angry because you don't know how to move on. Anger helps you to land on your feet, to get back up. Violence, on the other hand, runs much deeper and can cause profound pain. Violence is terrible.

If your back is up against the wall, you want to free yourself and sooner or later you retaliate. It's a form of release. Otherwise you end up getting sick from the pain, and also from the fear. Or you suffocate. You're going to wake the other person up, teach him a lesson. Sometimes you have to do something stupid to show him that you're there.... Or worse: when you're at the very bottom, you ask yourself, "Should I commit this crime so that everyone else knows that I exist? I'm a human being, too!"

Someone I knew did just that, and I understand why. To him, as a man, everything was taken away from him, his own dignity. First the baby, and his wife at the same time. It's the worst thing that can happen to a person. Another person would have lost it or killed someone. He didn't do it despite the rage he felt and his immense pain. But he made another serious mistake: when you're a difficult person to be around, what he did happens easily. They push us to our limits, until we become violent.

Naturally, he had to be punished. But in a situation like his, you always have to pay twice, and that's what's hard. And society adds to it. Everyone says, "See, that's how he is and now we have proof." But who stretched out their hand to him before? Who supported him? Who was on his side? Didn't they just help to push him further down?

The most important thing in life is for people to spend time together. That's what I mean by having someone on your side. Everyone is stressed out. If you go to social services, you really feel like no one has any time. It's terrible. I think that a lot of social workers suffer themselves.

I couldn't do it alone.

Actors' group. Canada. Contribution to the the international colloquium, "Extreme Poverty is Violence – Breaking the Silence – Searching for Peace."

For a long time, I tried to rebel on my own against all situations of injustice, but I couldn't do it alone. I ended up joining community groups and then I saw that we were much stronger together. We can analyze situations together and get a better understanding of the true causes of poverty.

This silence must be broken.

Maritza Orosco. Activist. Guatemala. Contribution to the international seminar in Lima (Peru)

I've been through suffering. But making friends with others helped me a lot, because I got support and advice. Maybe if I had stayed quiet, hurting on the inside, trapped with what was going on in my life, I would be dead now. Sometimes it's fear or not trusting others that holds you back. I was used to thinking, "Tell others about my life? That would make things worse, they would just laugh." But it didn't turn out like that, when I started to know more about the Fourth World Movement and I started coming and learning, my life began to change because I saw that I had to let out everything that I was bottling up inside of me. I think that is what we have to do for other families: earn their trust, show them that being shy doesn't go anywhere because by not wanting to talk, you keep everything bundled up inside and you become silent. We have to help people break that silence.

Rebelling makes society understand what we are living.

Julian Quispe. Activist. Peru. Contribution to the the international colloquium, "Extreme Poverty is Violence – Breaking the Silence – Searching for Peace."

I am going to talk about the importance of participation for the poorest of the poor. For us, participating means leaving our isolation, breaking our silence and overcoming our fear.

The poorest people are not allowed to talk during community round-tables. Those who are the most informed believe they are right and don't allow the poorer people to talk. For someone who doesn't have the chance to talk, it is difficult to speak up. Sometimes you want to talk, but they won't let you, don't value you, you get looks. The younger people insist you stay quiet. These are young people who have left the community for a time think they know everything. They don't value the older people and make them stay quiet. I would say that knowledge and education allow us to have a good life. Meeting others lets us get to know different people who think differently, it opens a door to find out how to live well and with dignity. If you talk, you can change things, rebelling makes the society we live in understand.

It's now that I'm beginning to talk. Participating in meetings has helped me to speak up. In meetings I see other people who talk and see that they aren't afraid and I say that I can do things too. I tell others that they should be strong and they say, "You are the same as the others, we are all the same." There are people who ask to speak to me and I value what they tell me.... Conversation is necessary for change to occur. I believe you need to talk to people. People don't know. Before I was afraid, but now I'm strong, not humbled. Even though I haven't studied, I defend myself now. The meetings have helped me overcome my fear.

2.3 Searching for peace

“Dealing with the violence of extreme poverty without adopting the perspective of searching for peace would condemn us to looking for people to blame. But focusing on the search for peace without confronting the violence of extreme poverty and its consequences would turn peace into a privilege for a few.”⁵⁹

In resisting the violence of extreme poverty on a daily basis, people and communities in extreme poverty set off on paths towards peace that must be known, understood and recognized; otherwise it will not be possible to build a meaningful peace for everyone. *“If extreme poverty ended, peace would take its place.”⁶⁰*

“So long as I can’t feed my children, I won’t be able to say that I have peace.”⁶¹

2.3.1. What peace?

Peace cannot be based on the silence of people who have to bow their heads because they have been deprived of the means to exist with dignity and defend themselves. Peace is being given the dignified recognition afforded to human beings; it is being useful to other people and one’s family, and providing them with the means for a dignified existence; it is being able to affirm one’s own personality and to be at peace with oneself.

That a society enjoys social cohesion or has reconciliation processes for resolving armed conflicts does not guarantee peace for people in extreme poverty. The trivialization of the violence of extreme poverty requires living under a delusion: keeping silent about the fact that this so-called peace does not include certain people; cultivating cynicism by proclaiming universal values while denying that people in extreme poverty share the same values; taking pride in a form of peace, although it condemns people in extreme poverty to bear the physical and psychological consequences of violence. In difficult times, it is these people who, bearing the brunt of accumulated deprivations, pay the highest price for economic crises, armed conflicts and even the processes of peace and reconciliation which, by not taking these people into account during the reconstruction process, fail to ensure that they can reclaim the little they once had, nor participate in democratic processes.

Those who find themselves subjected to the violence of extreme poverty want, above all, to provide a different life for their children. However, the reality of extreme poverty, and the suffering, humiliation and anger it creates, prevents them from having the means and the inner peace to guarantee a better future for their children.

“For me peace is being dead and buried. In the ground, I would not have so many worries weighing on me, nobody would call me to give me bad news, there would not be so many professionals asking me questions.... Day after day, I don’t have any peace, there’s always someone behind me, watching me, questioning me.... Every day I wonder if we will make ends meet.”⁶²

It is clear that peace is not possible without recognizing the violence suffered by those who live in extreme poverty, and that it cannot be built without changing the everyday reality of those who live in extreme poverty, nor without including those who do not have peace.

“Peace is not just when everything goes well for you and those around you, because peace is something you live as a community, at home, in the neighborhood, in a country. Myself, I am in a family, I am in a neighborhood. ‘How can we talk about peace? What type of peace are we talking about?’ If everyone asked themselves these questions every time they woke up, we would see that the peace we aspire to and that we say exists in fact does not exist.”⁶³

59. Eugen Brand. Director General of the International Movement ATD Fourth World, excerpt from his closing speech at the international colloquium “Extreme poverty is violence – Breaking the silence – Searching for peace”, January 2012.

60. Theme of the international seminar in Dakar (Senegal).

61. Boubacar Sarr. Activist. Senegal. Contribution to the international seminar in Dakar (Senegal).

62. Lucienne Loquet. Activist. France. Contribution to Fourth World’s People’s University (Caen).

63. Segá Ndione. Ally. Senegal. Contribution to the document “Conclusions of the 2012 International Colloquium.”

I am in pain. I'm suffering so much that I can't go on.

Nadine Ducrocq. Activist. France. Contribution to the international seminar in Pierrelaye (France)

Through others, above all I am searching for inner peace, because within myself I am not at peace. Everything that you experienced comes back to the surface, the suffering of our childhoods comes back to the surface, being ripped from your parents, from your own family, your brothers and sisters, and being forbidden to meet with them. The State really hurt us. They owe us. And they don't want to accept that. So I try to have inner peace towards people, not to be violent anymore toward my neighbors.

Peace means accepting that I have a pain inside, immense suffering that prevents me from moving on and trying to understand what I can do to go on and leave part of it behind me. With ATD Fourth World, I try to understand how I can go back in order to move forward, to try to speak more calmly and say the right things, but without getting annoyed toward social services, the State—everyone. I try to be that way toward my children, too, so that they don't see how I am, because it's not an image you want to give to your children, to have them see their mother angry, outraged. It's not an image or an example that I should be giving them. I don't know how to go about it because no one ever taught me; and through the people I meet in ATD Fourth World, through volunteers, through allies, I am learning to control myself to try to have inner peace and also to share this peace, to make the government understand that if they were a little more fair toward us, if they would listen to us, they would understand; this hatred and violence would not exist. It is up to them to take the first step so that there will be peace on Earth.

No money, no peace.

Osnel Teleus. Activist. Haiti. Contribution to the international seminar in Lima (Peru)

Poverty doesn't let me live in peace with my family. It's a kind of violence. I have a family, my wife and my children depend on me. My parents need my help too. Being the head of a family is a huge responsibility. Right now I don't have a job, I don't have money for the rent, and I have no way to get money. When you're the head of a family and you have no money and no way to take care of your family's needs, it's nothing but suffering. The man is the provider for everyone in the house and when he can't take care of everyone's needs it breaks the family apart. No money, no peace.

When I think about it all, I see why I feel humiliated. I can't even help my friends. I feel useless. I have to think about all this and make sense of it all, to be able to get over the humiliation I live with every day. No money, no peace.

Peace is being able to tell your own truth and to be heard.

Mahamadou Kone. Full-time Volunteer. Burkina Faso. Contribution to the international seminar in Dakar (Senegal)

You can't have peace until you can tell your own truth and the person you are talking to can be in a position to understand and not generalize. I've come to understand that even when there is a popular uprising, there's always a mounting of frustrations, and the truth from people isn't heard. So now when you want this truth to be heard, and it isn't heard, often, there will automatically be confrontation. For me, peace is being able to tell your own truth and to be heard.

Peace is very fragile.

Actors' group. Lebanon. Contribution to the international colloquium, "Extreme Poverty is Violence – Breaking the Silence – Searching for Peace."

We are people who have difficult lives and we go through painful things but we refuse to accept poverty within ourselves and we always look forward to having a better life. We refuse to accept exclusion. We support each other. We believe that a human being has dignity and that he lives in peace through his dignity.

I don't have peace within myself. How do I share peace? Peace is very fragile. If you tear it, it's very difficult to put it back together. When you have questions that you can't find answers to, peace disappears. We have to get rid of hatred. It's very difficult to get the relationship back.

2.3.2. Building peace

Those who suffer the violence of extreme poverty most severely find themselves having to take action day by day to resist it and defend themselves. These people must compete for their survival, and postpone the achievement of meaningful peace: some people relinquish their rights to justice, worried that contributing to sending a father to jail will endanger the survival of his children; some people rebelling against discrimination and contempt, fight to obtain respect between neighbors; some people bear the weight of guilt because they were able to save themselves, but were unable to do more for others.

However, going beyond what they experience, those who suffer the most from the violence of extreme poverty look for ways to reject its continuous cycle and affirm peace as a collective responsibility that affects everyone.

*"That is what peace can construct, it is necessary for people to feel responsible for the injustices that other people live through, because if we do not denounce these injustices, peace will never take root in the world."*⁶⁴

Even though they are subjected to the violence of extreme poverty, the poorest people and communities make numerous efforts to live in an atmosphere of togetherness and justice, and to find paths towards meaningful peace: people who mobilize themselves so that services reach the poorest in their community; people who educate themselves to make sure that others who have also suffered police brutality are able to exercise their rights; people who risk their own safety to speak out for their neighbors who have been subjected to the worst humiliations; people who set up projects in their neighborhoods to improve everyone's lives.

*"We are the ones who create peace, between our neighbors. In my neighborhood life is very difficult, above all because of overflowing drains when it rains. This is why I said to my neighbors that we needed to find a solution so that we could have peace. When it rains, none of the streets are passable, trapping children in their homes. I found myself having to call my neighbors to find a solution. We sat in the road and took up a collection, stopping cars to ask them for help. People gave 5 francs, 100 francs.... Within three days we were able to buy a truckload of gravel to put on the road, and now people can use it."*⁶⁵

However, the task of building peace must not fall uniquely on those who find themselves confronted with the violence of extreme poverty and its consequences. Institutions and States need to take the first step to establish dialogue and to create the conditions to bring an end to all violence. Society as a whole needs to understand, recognize and unite its efforts to build peace for those who live with the violence of extreme poverty.

*"Peace will begin the day you realize that the person in front of you is exactly the same as you: a person to be respected. That day peace will begin."*⁶⁶

64. Moustapha Diop. Activist. Senegal. Contribution to the international seminar in Dakar (Senegal).

65. Khady Sy. Activist. Senegal. Contribution to the international seminar in Dakar (Senegal).

66. Michel Brogniez. Activist. Belgium. Contribution to the international colloquium "Extreme poverty is violence – Breaking the silence – Searching for peace."

There are also other families who lost loved ones and who wanted peace like me.

Ivanite Saint-Clair. Activist. Haiti. Contribution to the public day of the international colloquium, "Extreme Poverty is Violence – Breaking the Silence – Searching for Peace."

When we live in chronic poverty, violence affects us more. We live in fear. It makes our situation worse. If you have peace, one person is not afraid of the other.

I have five children. Their father passed away. I fight every day so that they don't go hungry and so that they can go to school. Despite my efforts, one of my daughters died because of physical abuse and two others were subjected to other acts of violence. It hurt me very, very much.

When we live in poverty, we want to get back our rights but we are not listened to. A lot of people have asked me why I haven't accused all of the people who have done so much wrong. I haven't gone to court because I thought that they would kill me if I claimed my rights. I said, "I don't want to shed any blood. I don't want to see anyone take their last breath. I don't want to leave them to fight everyone else." I know that violence leads to more violence.

What kept me going was the other families who live close to my home. Every time they passed by my house, my neighbors came to talk to me, saying, "Don't give up. Stay strong. You can't stay here by yourself. You have to go out, go for a walk and meet other people."

That's why I came back to the meetings. If you don't participate in anything, your mind stays full of problems. When I meet other people, we talk, we think about things. You regain your strength.

There are also other families who lost loved ones and who wanted peace like me. If you look for revenge, there can no longer be peace. We became examples for the neighborhood so that there was peace. If you keep fighting, arguing, fearing each other, there cannot be true peace. Even if you look for peace, there are people who will humiliate you. They think you're nothing because you don't speak up.

There is always someone among us who appeals for peace so that we can live decently. That's how Mérita was. She's passed away. She was like a mother to everyone in the neighborhood. Everyone said, "Now that Mérita isn't with us anymore, the neighborhood is going to be ruined. We won't have peace anymore," but it's not true. There is always someone who keeps working. For the Fourth World families, Father Joseph [Wresinski] is the one who showed us the way. We're following in his footsteps.

When we find peace, it's a blessing for everyone because peace is also pride.

I helped those who go through the same challenges.

Ronald Schexnayder. Activist. United States. Contribution during the public day of the international colloquium, "Extreme Poverty is Violence – Breaking the Silence – Searching for Peace."

I'm what we call an activist, a person giving true personal testimony of such violence... creating knowledge, then peace.

New Orleans is known to have corrupted police. I got stopped and got charged with robbery, which I didn't know anything about—I was in another state at the time it happened. However I wound up staying in jail for several months.

At first I became so angry I became ill. Then I said to myself, “I need to know the law to prove my innocence.” So I went to the law library in the jail, where I met the writers. They told me what books to read and I kept reading and reading and reading. I found out how the judicial and court room procedures worked. I found out about people and organizations, and I wrote, asking for help.

During that time others came in with a copy of their indictments and charges, and I found out what they needed to do. I got many of them released. I filed motions for bond reduction, so that they could leave on bond, or we managed to get their charges dropped. However, it didn’t work for me. I had to complete my unjust sentence of eight years, which meant I had to stay in prison for five years.

When I was in prison we protested because of improper and unsanitary living conditions. They gave us spoiled food, they didn’t give us proper clothing, soap, toothbrushes. We didn’t get recreational time, sunlight or fresh air. We refused to come out of our cells, it was like a riot. We did petitions. We filed a civil suit against the jail. This went on for two weeks. That was when they beat me up. I smuggled out a letter to the FBI and they came to investigate.

We won the suit. They started giving out work shoes, toothbrushes, better food, stuff like that. After we ended the protests I had to go and turn myself in to the jail officials. They sent me to a worse prison with people with a sentence of 50 years or more, even people on death row.

After I got out I took a law course, because I kept being stopped and harassed by the policemen, and getting [accused of] charges that weren’t really true, so I took it upon myself to go to school and took up a course in paralegal training, so I would know the law and what rights I have. And I helped those that go through the same challenges—things happen to them and they don’t know the law. I started doing voluntary work—going out and helping people, giving out free legal aid and assistance.

Having been charged and doing time for something I didn’t do, voluntary work is the only way I can get the anger out and have peace. And just reaching out to try and change the rules. Or whoever is responsible, to have them punished ... if I can get them off the police force, or just get them laid off for a little while, it’s good. And let the people see that these policemen are corrupt. You know, they shouldn’t be on the police force.

This way I create peace for me, others like me, and peace for the community.

Peace is not a material good; it’s a group effort.

Jaime Muñoz. Full-time Volunteer. Senegal. Contribution to the international seminar in Dakar (Senegal)

Sometimes we confuse the conditions we need to establish peace with peace itself. I tell myself today that the peace of rich people can be seen as a commodity, a material good to package up and take with you. But when you look closely, it’s a peace that’s made of injustice and isolation and that’s why they have to defend themselves. You defend material goods. But for me, peace is not a material good. It’s a group effort, or a common fight for understanding and unity. And the group effort is first and foremost the effort that each person makes. It’s not a material good because it’s not a result. If it were the result of something, people living in poverty wouldn’t have an innate understanding of what peace is.

Sometimes it’s clear that the result of our effort is tranquility, and that’s peace. It’s the consequence of a completed effort or the knowledge that you made an effort, that you wanted to do more, that you wanted to make an effort to latch onto the humanity that

exists within other people. And making the effort makes you want to have peace and tranquility.

But the peace of people in poverty is an effort that can be shared. That is why I say that peace is not something you accomplish but that it's an effort. A personal effort and an effort that you make with others. And it's in this effort that we find what is human in ourselves. That's why we perceive peace, we perceive harmony, we perceive the truth that is in other people.

Solidarity is not limited to the level of speech, but little by little, it translates into action.

Faustin Ndrabu. Ally. Democratic Republic of the Congo. Contribution to the international seminar in Dakar (Senegal)

In my neighborhood, there are many families who are among the most oppressed and most tired from the poverty in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. These families don't have anyone to watch over them.

Furthermore, there is also a group of children in my neighborhood who are called the Tapor children. Tapor is an international movement of friendship between children from all backgrounds.

So, inspired by the feeling of solidarity that was noticeable among the Tapor children, about thirty poor families from my neighborhood decided to put their heads together and share their ideas, talk about their problems and try to find solutions together. The group that I'm talking about is called the Family Solidarity Association.

Even if life continues to be hard for these families, the fact that they belong to a group is important because it allows them to break loose from isolation and break the silence. The group members start to speak out little by little while respecting mutual tolerance and overcoming fear.

For these families, solidarity isn't limited to the level of speech, but it translates little by little into action. They provide support to companions who are repairing their homes, they visit the sick in the hospital and they pay visits to each other.

They recently decided to unite their efforts to repair a bridge in the center of their neighborhood that was in very bad shape. At the same time, they repaired the footpaths in the neighborhood.

At the end of their work, a resident in the neighborhood who was walking by said to them, "It is true that we when work together with determination, we are able to accomplish many things."

Fear is something that we need to overcome.

Maria Victoire. Full-time Volunteer. United States. Contribution to the international seminar in Frimhurst (United Kingdom)

Exclusion is violence.

Others call the residents of these neighborhoods bad people. But they need to come and talk with us, as we have known these families over several generations, we know that they have something to share with the world. They have something to share with their society.

You cannot build peace if you don't get to know who these people are, who these families are, who these young people are. Others say, "Don't go this place, you should make sure to be home at a certain time, you don't need to see all this." But we feel safe. And we answer that you can talk with these people, and these young people can listen, they can hear you. We build our dreams together with them. But if you are afraid of going there, who will talk with them? Who will listen to the families? You need to go to these places, and I think that sometimes fear will block other people too. And fear is something that we need to overcome. On both sides, too.

Give yourself the opportunity to overcome that which divides a community.

Koffi Gnagoran. Ally. Côte d'Ivoire. Contribution to the international seminar in Dakar (Senegal).

Very often, it is the ones who have already suffered enormously from poverty, who have also been excluded and have trouble participating in community life or having access to services, who are the most important in times of crisis, and who are risk dying or being even more forgotten. We must find them, ask what they think and keep it in our minds.

We can't give up. We just have to go there, talk with people and give it our all in order to stand together. If people see that you come to see them, that you sit down with them, they can offer you a way out. You have to build off of their ideas.

A lot of victims of war think that accepting help is degrading and humiliating and that it destroys them. They want to take charge of themselves by all lawful means. With volunteers, we were able to establish a theater group, ballet, poetry and storytelling activities with displaced children to educate the population about national reconciliation and peace. Our hope is found in these two words: reconciliation and peace.

When all of us come together around very poor people, we are giving ourselves the chance to overcome what divides communities (ethnicity, religion, political affiliation, social class...). We give ourselves the chance to create more unity.



D'Ange. Untitled. 2010

Part 3

Dialogue with the academic and institutional world

3.1. During the development of the research

Aware of the need to place this new knowledge produced with people in extreme poverty at the center of important debates on the current state of the world, it was deemed appropriate to create opportunities to exchange ideas with professionals and academics over the course of the research project. The list of examples presented below, which is not exhaustive, served as the basis for preparing the previously mentioned international colloquium “Extreme Poverty is Violence - Breaking the Silence - Searching for Peace.”

- Two **international events** dedicated to reevaluating current thinking on Joseph Wresinski’s approach to public policy allowed a dialogue to be established between researchers, students and people involved in the fight against extreme poverty, including people living in poverty. The first of these, entitled “Democracy Put to the Test by Extreme Poverty”, took place in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, in February 2008, and was organized in collaboration with the Haitian organization “Knowledge and Freedom” (FOKAL).
The second, entitled “Democracy Put to the Test by Social Exclusion” took place in Paris, France, in December 2008, and was organized in collaboration with the Political Science Department of “SciencesPo” University, and the French Association of Political Science.
- During **Summer University “Campus” seminars in 2009 and 2011**, organized by the Joseph Wresinski International Center in Pierrelaye, France, academics and professionals from Asia, the Middle-East, North America and Europe gathered to address the questions of the violence of extreme poverty and the struggle for peace.
- In New Orleans, United States, a session took place in October 2009 at **Loyola University** entitled “Not Meant to Live Like This.” Among its participants were people living in extreme poverty who lost everything during Hurricane Katrina, many of whom were never again able to live in the city. Among other subjects they reflected on experiences of violence.
- In preparation for the international colloquium “Extreme Poverty is Violence - Breaking the Silence - Searching for Peace,” **round-table discussions, study days and workshops** took place in Belgium, Canada, France, Guatemala, Haiti, Mexico, Peru, Switzerland and the United States, with the involvement of academics. In this context the Joseph Wresinski International Center, in Baillet-en-France, organized in March 2012 a workshop with 16 participants from France, Japan and the United Kingdom. Its objective was to test the conditions for a meaningful dialogue between research actors and academics.
- **The University of Massachusetts-Boston’s Center for Social Policy** participated, within the framework of a long-term collaboration, in different events aimed at allowing an exchange of ideas with the research actors and preparing for later exchanges. This led to a workshop co-organized in Intervale, New Hampshire (United States) in December 2011 to consider the way in which commitments emerging from the research could be made public.

“In my work for the last 15 years and longer, part of my work has been participatory action research. However, the opportunity to be very closely connected to ATD Fourth World has enabled me to see how incomplete the way in which my colleagues and I have been carrying out the work has been. Participating—the Merging of Knowledge process—is a very powerful one. And I personally, and in my role, am making a commitment to try to do, use, and have a deeper partnership with ATD Fourth World to do it right in our work in academia in Boston.”

“There are many forces inside academia that are against building knowledge by using a Merging of Knowledge approach. In my experience, the forces inside academia support competition, they support professors or researchers being the experts and the ones who demonstrate that they are smart and that they’re the experts in the room. The forces in academia support competition rather than collective knowledge generation, and the forces in academia reinforce those experts being teachers, and rarely learners. And these stances that I’ve come to understand over these three years—and I’ve known in other ways, but now understand in a new way—are harmful. They are part of the problem. They are part of the violence. So, I feel, for myself, a responsibility to use

my position, and the influence I have in my position, to move forward on a journey that offers an alternative way of being, and an alternative way of doing social science, of doing participatory action research. I am committed to that quest. What I feel that this way of being calls for—when I think about what is called for from me—is to be present, to be able to push against those forces, and to allow the transformation and the collective knowledge generation to happen, to be ready for discomfort—to allow discomfort, to allow challenges to the assumptions that I am walking around with in my head, to be present with a sense of curiosity, and a readiness to be deeply listening. An openness to allowing transformation to happen is required—a transformation of thinking, a transformation of spirit and heart. This is required not only to honor my own thinking—not to discount the contribution I have to give—but to know that every other single person in this room and in this experience also has a contribution to give, and that together we can create knowledge that draws on the experiences that each of us has lived and known.”⁶⁷

3.2. International colloquium “Extreme poverty is violence – Breaking the silence – Searching for peace”

The project culminated with an international colloquium held in January 2012, bringing together academics, NGO professionals, international institutions, and civil services.

The objective of the colloquium was to encourage dialogue and reciprocal learning between professionals and academics in relation to the themes that concerned us, “Extreme poverty, violence and peace,” and research actors.

In total, 75 individuals met over a three-day period: 50 research actors from the ATD Fourth World Movement—30 people living in situations of extreme poverty (activists) and 20 people who, within ATD Fourth World, are committed to the eradication of extreme poverty and stand alongside those who experience it (allies and full-time volunteers)⁶⁸—and 25 academics and professionals from other institutions.

The colloquium brought together individuals from 35 countries, collaborating in three languages: English, French and Spanish, with simultaneous interpretations in Arabic, Haitian Creole and Quechua.

The objective of the colloquium was to establish a dialogue between research actors, academics and participating professionals that resulted in the *Merging of Knowledge*⁶⁹, tackling the themes with each participant’s knowledge as a base. No one person’s words were favored to the detriment of another’s; rather, the goal was to create the conditions for a genuine exchange between people with diverse experiences aiming for the creation and the use of knowledge. The actors in this research are professionals accustomed to intervening in anti-poverty programs and services; academics who specialize in the study of themes surrounding extreme poverty; and individuals who, on a daily basis, face the challenge of understanding the violence.

“I was amazed how the lack of education or the abundance of education didn’t play any part in de-meaning our discussions. The discussion wasn’t about how much education you had, or how [little] an education; the discussion was about knowledge, understanding.”⁷⁰

“I really liked the words that were used like ‘mutual understanding,’ which supposes dialogue, listening and a communal approach where it’s not certain people thinking on the behalf of others.”⁷¹

The dialogue that took place clearly showed the importance of an exchange that goes beyond the freedom of those who live in extreme poverty to bear witness. This exchange allowed for the creation and the liberation of everyone’s knowledge, favoring mutual understanding.

67. Donna Haig Friedman. Director, Center for Social Policy, University of Massachusetts-Boston, United States. Excerpt from her speech at the international colloquium “Extreme poverty is violence – Breaking the silence – Searching for peace.”

68. For a better understanding of the terminology used, see section 3.2

69. For a better understanding of *Merging of Knowledge* methodology, see section 1.3.

70. Ronald Schexnayder. Activist. United States. Evaluation, international colloquium “Extreme poverty is violence – Breaking the silence – Searching for peace.”

71. Jacqueline Uwimana. Coordinator and founder. Association Umuseke. Rwanda. Evaluation, international colloquium “Extreme poverty is violence – Breaking the silence – Searching for peace.”

“Some research protocols can engender violence: Are people considered objects, subjects, or as research actors? In our practice, wanting to do good, do we produce violence?”⁷²

The methodology used was based on *Merging of Knowledge* principles, combined with the common desire for change, allowed for the shared questioning that is necessary to create effective programs to eradicate extreme poverty, in the name of peace.

“Everything that I learned during those two days about the perception of poverty calls into question what I knew before. As a member of my country’s parliament, I want to change my way of speaking because I have new words. Perhaps from my platform in the parliament, I will take a chance by using these new words ‘extreme poverty is violence, and overcoming extreme violence is also seeking peace.’ This is so profound that I do not know how to express it.”⁷³

A public day to disseminate the results arrived at during the research and the dialogue held during the international colloquium was supported by the UNESCO headquarters in Paris on January 26, 2012. Some 450 people attended and participated in the different workshops, extending the exchanges and opening new paths for developing them further.

The speeches⁷⁴ presented below were given during the day that was open to the public. These speeches, together with the findings presented at the end of this document, make evident to all the constant challenge of breaking the silence on the violence of extreme poverty and building peace.

Paul Dumouchel

Professor at the Graduate School of Core Ethics, Ritsumeikan University, Japan

Extreme poverty is violence

What is violence? The answer to that question is both extremely easy and remarkably difficult. It is extremely easy to answer, because anyone can recognize violence when he or she “sees it” so to speak, especially when one is at the receiving end. It is a question that is remarkably hard to answer, because nobody really knows *how to say what violence is* in a way that will convince everyone, especially in a way that will convince the unsympathetic listener. That what one is taking about actually, really is violence, for example that extreme poverty is violence, is often easy to see, but it is hard to demonstrate. Why is that? Even if in some cases it proves relatively easy to affirm that something, that some action or situation is a form of violence, in other cases it turns out to be highly difficult, nearly impossible. That is why it is remarkably difficult to say *what violence is* because it is only in some cases that we can say, clearly and with others agreeing that this event or circumstance is violence. While in other cases, there is little agreement and even those who seem to us to be the victims of that violence hesitate, avoid, refuse, or more simply, themselves will not say “this is violence.” Why?

It seems to me that the difficulty of saying what violence is, is part of the violence itself. In this case the difficulty of saying, in the sense of making evident to all, that extreme poverty is violence is part of the violence of extreme poverty. Only part of course, but a part that is unlikely to go away until extreme poverty itself disappears. Alternatively, successfully getting across the message that extreme poverty is violence is an important step in the direction of overcoming extreme poverty. But how do we do that? And why is it so difficult to say?

It is characteristic of most violence that is immediately recognized as such by most people—for example rape, or willfully physically wounding someone—that it tends to provoke a violent response. This, I believe, is not directly related to the type of violence, for example physical violence as opposed to economic oppression. Massive economic inequality is not always perceived as unfair or violent; and physical abuse itself when

72. Marie-Odile Sandoz-Maire. Head of Studies, National center for resources on educational and social practices in “difficult circumstances,” Ecole Normale Supérieure de Lyon. France.

Evaluation, international colloquium “Extreme poverty is violence – Breaking the silence – Searching for peace.”

73. Beatrice Epaye, Member of Parliament and President of the Foundation “Voix du Cœur” (The heart’s voice). Central African Republic. Evaluation, international colloquium “Extreme poverty is violence – Breaking the silence – Searching for peace.”

74. All the speeches can be found at www.atd-fourthworld.org

it does not evoke a violent response is often not perceived as violence by third parties (those who are not its immediate victims), and sometimes also by the target of the action themselves. Instead we, and often they, tend to see it as a punishment, as something they deserved, or as just “the way things are.” We tend to recognize as violent actions that evoke a violent reaction in response (of course this raises the question: how do we recognize that response as violent?), while we tend to overlook, dismiss as unimportant or remain indifferent to actions of the same type which do not call forth such a violent reaction. Why?

The fact is that when people suffer violence that they do not recognize as such we, the external observers, tend to believe that the violence exerted against them is larger, more extreme than what we can directly perceive because it has made them, and often makes us, unable to recognize it as violence. Something similar applies, I think, to extreme poverty. The difficulty of saying that it is violence suggests that it is in many ways extreme violence, because the consequence of extreme violence in the most usual sense of the term is always to silence definitively those who are its victims.

Moustapha Diop

Activist, ATD Fourth World, Senegal

Good morning everyone, ladies, gentlemen, dear guests, researchers, academics and activists of the ATD Fourth World.

I would like to thank you all for the efforts you have made during the past three years of research and work aimed at finding solutions based on the theme “Extreme poverty is violence- Breaking the Silence- Searching for Peace.” After three years of research, carried out by the poorest people in the world, living in different countries across four continents, and speaking different languages, we have managed to agree on many of the things we suffer.

Through all these meetings, I finally understood the violence that takes place around the world. I thought it happened only in my country, in the Third World, but I saw that in the biggest capitals of the world, in the most developed countries in the world, unimaginable acts of injustice were taking place. Let’s take for example what happened in United States prisons, during Hurricane Katrina, when inmates were locked in their cells while the water level rose and they given nothing to eat nor drink. They had to drink polluted flood water to survive. There are also all the people who died in the streets in Spain, hundreds of thousands of homeless people in a country where there are about six million empty houses. In Senegal, as poor as we are, no one ever took away our children to put them into foster care with a social worker. Our wealth is our children.

I would also like to recall what the Haitian people have said. They suffered from the natural disasters there, but on top of that, the national authorities continue to displace them, and bring another sort of violence to them. And what about all the injustices taking place all over Latin America, or around the Indian Ocean? As far as we are concerned, in Africa, and more specifically in Senegal, institutional and political violence is used to seize our lands in order to give them to agribusiness multinationals who then hire the former owners of the land for their big-scale agricultural projects. All the harvests are always exported to the most developed countries, and in my country, hunger persists. In the Middle-East, in Lebanon, children were picked up and put in jail, to make room for the tourists, so that rich people could become richer; housekeepers were locked in the houses, and their passports were taken away.

If we manage to put an end to all this, everywhere in the world, peace will take over. To live in peace, we would need the world to think a little more about sharing. We are all the same, there’s no difference between us. All the rulers in the Third World come from the poorest families. It’s through their studies that they managed to obtain these positions.

So we have to help the children of the poorest, families, women, in order to eradicate extreme poverty in the world. And then peace will take over for ever.

The seriousness of all this frightens us. But this fear can be overcome, thanks to this Colloquium, which has helped us loosen our tongues. It is time for us, the poorest people on the planet, to break the silence, to speak loud and clear. What we were able to say together in this Colloquium, I had already been saying for a long time where I was. But people thought me a misfit. Speaking up about violence done to the poorest was something I had dreamed about being able to do, one day or another. But I got lost as to where to talk about it and when to talk about it.

During this Colloquium, I have been able to talk, together with people from all over the world, and with participants who, I believe, will be able to make our voices, full of despair and regret, be heard.

Because the people who inflict this violence upon us are fellow human beings.

I was able to say it, and I have the courage to say it, because I believe that in this world we are part of, no one can have the last word. It's together that we can speak loud and clear. That is why this Colloquium gathered poor people, intellectuals, researchers, and academics, and everyone spoke in the same voice. These people who were victims of violence had no partners to address themselves to or to represent them. I would like you, intellectuals, academics, researchers, who are here today, to be our partners and spokespeople around the world.

Myself, I will never give up. To the struggle that I have carried forward, I will bring other members of ATD Fourth World, along with the poorest families of my country, in the same spirit of commitment.

I thank you.

Itamar Silva

Researcher, Brazilian Institute for Social and Economic Analysis (IBASE), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

I come from Brazil, from Rio de Janeiro, and I am linked to the Rio Favela Movement. I was born in one of them, and I am still living there today. It's from there that I look at the world and do my job as an activist-researcher.

It is important to say that in Rio de Janeiro, there are more than 700 favelas, where at least 20% of the city's population live. These people have built their houses in the most difficult areas, where there were no public services or infrastructure.

Over the years, they obtained significant improvements in their living conditions, and today, they fight both for the rights enjoyed in the city and to be allowed to continue living where they have built their homes.

It's probably because of this experience that I was invited by ATD Fourth World to participate in this international colloquium that questions the theme of extreme poverty and its link to violence.

Creating the conditions for a dialogue between people

During these three days of meetings, I have experienced something very special that, I am sure, will have an impact on my personal life and on my work. The diversity of people, languages, and cultures gathered in this colloquium confirms what we have been saying: all you need, for people to understand each other, is to create the conditions for a meeting and to allow them to engage in dialogue.

Haitians, Guatemalans, French, Brazilians, Lebanese, Peruvians, Americans, British, Burkinabés, among others—each one spoke their own language, but all of them were open to dialogue and were ready to listen to one another’s experiences. It is obvious that differences exist, and will continue to exist, and during this colloquium, we had to take some time to make sure concepts such as “violence,” “extreme poverty” or “peace” were culturally understood by everyone, according to their world view and their practical experiences.

A path towards peace

It was interesting to hear the different opinions expressed during the debate, and to reach conclusions in which everyone felt recognized. Let’s take this one, for example: “Peace is a path, which begins from a person and reaches toward the community; and this community, we have to build it with people from other countries.”

This idea, built by ATD Fourth World activists, reveals the wisdom of a people who know that building peace is a task that requires a great number of people, but that it also must be born of personal motivation and be based on concrete facts, and that it is strengthened within the community. It is a process that is built through everyday practice. “We can’t fight for peace without knowing the poorest people.”

A meeting that strengthens our courage and our belief

After these meetings, which were very rewarding on a personal level, as well as for my work as a researcher and activist in the Rio Favela Movement, I keep in mind some learning experiences and commitments, based on the collective thinking of all the participants:

- Extreme poverty is a violence, and we have to ensure it is recognized as such. We must put an end to indifference and not accept the invisibility of poverty by framing it in terms of rights. Doing this is also a way of fighting for justice.
- The peace we are looking for requires an acknowledgment of the other, and of their humanity, as opposed to the process of violence, wherein the other is ignored.
- Peace is not a passive state, but a process of building and fighting that demands active participation.
- It was important to meet once again, within the methodology used—the *Merging of Knowledge*—the principles of the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which was set up by Brazilian teacher Paulo Freire and which was of great importance for the Popular Education movement in Brazil.
- Cultural and linguistic diversity, which is sometimes used as a pretext not to bring peoples together, made all the difference in this meeting. The human wealth gathered here in this Colloquium strengthens our courage, and our belief that the world can become better. It is necessary to learn what this people, scattered and discriminated against all over this planet, do to resist, survive and keep on conveying hope.

Thank you.

Marta Santos Pais

Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on Violence against children

Dear friends,

It is really a privilege to be with you at today’s excellent colloquium. I feel honored to be part of your reflections and to be learning so much from the experiences, frustrations, and dreams that you have been sharing with all of us, with the sense of determination that you are conveying to each and every one of us here present. I have been privileged and honored to collaborate with ATD Fourth World for many years, but I think that

each time I come a new wave of energy, belief and hope invades me, a sense of revolt in a way, rebellion as we heard, but at the same time a belief that together we can really be contagious with our sense of urgency and lack of acceptance of what we see in front of us. Each and every member of the human family should be able to enjoy the right to respect of his or her human dignity, as we all have committed to working toward around the world.

I know that today's meeting is the culmination of a wonderful, inspiring and creative process of research and of a search for a process of lasting change in the world. But I feel very encouraged by the fact that today marks also the launch of a new platform—one where we are going to bring the news of your wonderful process so that everybody feels committed to join hands with all of us in the sense of solidarity of mutual respect, of building peace, of breaking the invisibility of the inequity that resides in the world, so that together we can celebrate a universe where there is no longer room for violence and poverty.

In my mandate of course I work very closely with children and young people, including those who live in very poor communities. Each time I meet and learn from them, I experience the message they convey that living in extreme poverty is in fact an expression of violence. Perhaps it is not categorized as such by the forms we have in documents in the United Nations; but really of the violence of extreme poverty is that of daily living where hopes are limited by lack of attention, lack of access to basic social services, and a lack of solidarity by so many other people. For me, it has been very important to promote my work together in partnership with children and young people from poor communities. Only by joining hands with young people, I think, is it possible for us to understand things that sometimes we take for granted or don't seem to discover, and to understand how positive and significant experiences can give us ideas for solutions that we can help bring to governments, who have the lead responsibility, of course, in undertaking laws, policies and institutions that can make a difference in neglect, deprivation and marginalization.

The fact that violence and poverty are so closely interconnected we, I think, hear over and over again. And I was very pleased to be part of another meeting a year ago in New York where a young person from the United States was telling us that extreme poverty is a form of violence itself as it creates an environment in which children and their families need to defend their rights on a daily basis. Of course poverty and marginalization compromise the rights of young people. They compromise their safety and their sense of dignity, and they compromise in a cumulative manner their emotional and physical well-being. Additionally, they are associated with humiliation, with bullying, with ill-treatment, with stigmatization and exploitation. And as children tell us, so often because extreme poverty is so closely linked to the human dignity of poor people, violence comes with it and affects the future, and torments the spirit of these young people.

I'm just returning from a mission in Asia, and there again, I could confirm this sense. I was very fortunate to be able to join hands and to sit in meetings with young people and to learn about their experience, their dreams, and their frustrations about how they see the world around them, and how they see themselves as being part of the solution in overcoming poverty and violence. Many of these children live in the streets, work in the streets, and in very unsafe and neglected urban areas. And they told me again about how much social indifference surrounds their daily lives, how they feel that they are there, but invisible, how they feel they are voiceless. They have no ability to influence change. And at the same time, they are so easily the targets of situations of abuse and exploitation, including child labor and trafficking, sexual exploitation. And when the authorities intervene so often, these children—rather than being given an opportunity to be listened to in a very dignified manner—are arrested by police or welfare services simply because they are begging in the street, because they are vagrants or because they are trying to survive. They are over and over again placed in overcrowded care institutions, detention centers where they are further victimized. They are beaten, they

are humiliated, they are ill-treated. And they were telling me how they so often had their hair shaved off so that the authorities would be able to prevent them from running away from the centers and would easily be in a position to recapture them and bring them back to these centers where violence and abuse are so present.

Of course for these children, information about their rights, about the way of protecting their existence and their safety, and about fighting the violence surrounding them are not available, either non-existent, or not accessible. And authorities unfortunately missed the opportunity of using those tools and mechanisms. So this all generates a sense of very deep exclusion that you have expressed in such a wonderful manner. It causes low self-esteem. It causes a sense of revolt, and very often leads to aggressive behavior. As children grow older, poverty and violence keep having a cumulative effect on their development, their future health, education and skills gained, and on their situations of dependency on welfare institutions. Of course these are a denial of the human dignity to which each and every of us is entitled. This is a denial of our ability to participate generally in decisions that affect our lives and the lives of those we care for.

But as we know and as you have said, this reality remains dramatically invisible and leads to social indifference and social inaction. So I feel always very challenged when I recall that the international community has identified ending extreme poverty as a priority, and the international community has identified the fight against violence against children and young people as a human rights imperative; but between words and reality there is a huge gap. That's what you are helping us to bridge. With your work, your research, your discussions, and your experience, you are helping us to break this silence and the invisibility of violence that surrounds the lives of those living in extreme poverty and deprivation. You are helping us to consolidate the knowledge about living conditions, aspirations, and the significant initiatives that you are promoting in your communities in a process of partnership and mutual learning, a process of constant searching for a worldwide commitment to reverse the pattern of exclusion and violence that has shaped the lives of so many people around the world. I think today's process of dialogue and discussion has been truly ground-breaking and inspiring. And I think it has strengthened our sense of a very deep impatience and a call for urgent action. Urgency is very present in this room.

As we leave the room and the UNESCO building, each and every one of us can make a difference in our individual roles and by joining hands together. We cannot postpone this urgency. So in my mandate, I also want to commit myself to continue to join hands with children, young people and families in extreme poverty so that your voice can be heard and can influence lasting change in each and every country of the world. And I remain truly determined to work together with all of you in enhancing the accountability of governments who have the responsibility of changing the reality we have today so that we can eliminate violence and extreme poverty around the world. We are contributing to a paradigm shift in the way the human dignity of all members of the human family is perceived and can effectively materialize in each person's daily life. So I look forward to joining hands with you and want to congratulate you for this excellent and inspiring work.

Many thanks.

Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona

United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights

I would like to begin by emphasizing how important this ATD Fourth World project is in understanding and highlighting the violence experienced by those who live in extreme poverty. Public policy aimed at overcoming poverty often fails to see the realities faced by those who live in poverty. Unfortunately, the violence experienced by those who live

in poverty is ignored by those who decide public policy and, often, by those in a better economic position.

We must acknowledge that no group of people experiences more violence, harm, segregation, control or disdain than those living in poverty, as has been made evident by the work carried out by ATD. People who live in poverty are treated as dangerous, dirty, a nuisance and a burden, and they are penalized and even criminalized because of their situation. These social prejudices and stereotypes are so firmly entrenched that they influence public policy. People living in poverty are often considered responsible for their own misfortune and it is believed that they can remedy their situation simply by making more of an effort.

Instead of empowering people living in poverty, public policy penalizes them. Programs aimed at combating poverty are planned without the real and effective participation of those living in poverty, and such programs can actually end up exacerbating the cycle of poverty, which is a sure way of passing poverty onto the next generation.

Ignoring the situation experienced by those that live in extreme poverty is, in itself, a form of violence and a violation of human rights. Human rights are not the prerogative of the upper or middle classes. Yet, for the simple reason that someone's appearance, speech or hardship identifies them as poor, they are denied equality in their entitlement to human rights and the right to live without violence.

So those who live in poverty are denied their dignity. It is our joint responsibility to challenge such practices that violate human rights. The time has come to change social attitudes towards the poorest, so as to eradicate stereotypes and discriminatory behavior. To achieve this, those who live in poverty must participate in planning, implementing and assessing the public policies that affect them. It is impossible to eradicate poverty without the active involvement of those who live in it. Often the policies aimed at combating poverty involve mechanisms whereby poor people merely participate on a pro forma basis, without really taking into account the conditions that make it possible to overcome the imbalance of power and allow for real participation with an influence on the outcome of the process.

The discussions today have shown how the deprivations faced by persons living in extreme poverty are often imperceptible and go far beyond lack of income. Violence, social exclusion and discrimination are major causes and consequences of poverty.

While persons living in extreme poverty do not constitute a homogeneous group, each having specific vulnerabilities and challenges, they commonly face obstacles in accessing government services and institutions, including physical, economic, administrative and other obstacles. Those who face discrimination on multiple grounds face even greater obstacles in overcoming extreme poverty.

Physical obstacles are common challenges for persons living in extreme poverty. They are geographically remote from jobs, markets, resources, etc. They often have to travel a long way to access public services such as health care, education and sanitation facilities, and inhabit areas that have extremely limited access to transportation and roads. To those experiencing extreme poverty, time spent traveling to access services and job opportunities can represent a considerable loss of income, when they already earn little.

Persons living in extreme poverty face multiple economic obstacles; the indirect costs of accessing essential services are often prohibitive for persons living in extreme poverty. Administrative obstacles are another relevant concern. We heard today how the lack of official documentation can prevent persons living in extreme poverty from accessing crucial social services and jeopardize the realization of their rights to work, education, health and social security, among others. Violence against those living in poverty is also

coming from civil servants (including public authorities, social workers, teachers and health-care providers) who often fail to recognize and support the efforts that persons living in extreme poverty are making to improve their lives. Those living in poverty often develop fear and hostility towards public authorities, and have little confidence in the institutions that should assist them. By generating a sense of shame, such stigmatization also actively discourages persons living in extreme poverty from approaching officials and accessing the support they need.

Many thanks for listening.



Jeannine Pierrat. House Dream. 2010

Part 4

Conclusion

The knowledge produced throughout this research reveals the need to:

1. Acknowledge and refuse violence against people in poverty and work toward peace with them.

- Renew the fight against poverty and commitments for peace. No longer talk about poverty or projects against poverty without considering the violence experienced by people facing extreme poverty. No longer talk of building peace without the voices of people facing the daily violence of extreme poverty.
- Undertake, in conjunction with people living in extreme poverty and organizations where they have freely chosen to express themselves, a broad analysis of the guarantees needed so that each individual, each population and the entire human community can live in dignity and build peace on a daily basis.
- Introduce the question of violence of extreme poverty into bodies such as the United Nations Security Council.

2. Organize gatherings and promote understanding between individuals and populations working on eradicating extreme poverty.

- Create spaces where those living extreme poverty can freely develop their thinking over the long term, and merge their knowledge with other community stakeholders.
- Intensify and make public the goal to eradicate extreme poverty, in order to encourage, strengthen and lend credence to all of the commitments and responsibilities taken in solidarity with people living in extreme poverty.

3. Re-evaluate our way of building and validating knowledge gained from the realities of life experienced by people living in extreme poverty.

- Join forces with academics and professionals to increase their involvement on a regular basis in the processes of the *Merging of Knowledge* with people living in poverty, and promote recognition of this process within universities and institutions.
- Support long-term commitments to reach those most oppressed by poverty and to create conditions to enable them to “break the silence.” Work towards the right of every human being to be able to count on others.

4. Restore the place of the most disadvantaged in their struggle against poverty and in their collective and family histories.

- Support the re-establishment of family ties and the process of handing down memory and values from generation to generation so that all children can learn from the daily efforts of their parents to resist violence.
- Collect, from those people and groups who are the least heard, their history of resistance to poverty's violence and courage to work toward peace.
- In the history of humanity, restore its rightful place to the history of families, groups, and populations who are today's victims of extreme poverty and shame.

5. Recognize the unique contribution of people in extreme poverty in striving towards peace between all human beings.

- In the framework of the appropriate structures within the United Nations, begin work on the *Merging of Knowledge* with the poorest, to elaborate a set of "Guidelines to Build a Culture of Peace Based on the Eradication of Extreme Poverty."
- Ensure that the call to action, central to the October 17th, World Day for Overcoming Extreme Poverty,
*"Wherever men and women are condemned to live in extreme poverty, human rights are violated.
To come together to ensure that that these rights be respected is our solemn duty."*⁷⁵
figures prominently, not only at significant commemorative sites in each country, but in their Constitutions.
- Make known the contribution of people and populations living in deep poverty to all those who commit themselves to building peace in the world, including the Nobel Peace Prize Committee.

75. These words of Joseph Wresinski were engraved in 1987 on the Commemorative Stone in Honor of the Victims of Extreme Poverty, located on the Plaza of Liberties and Human Rights in Trocadero, Paris. Replicas of this stone now exist in 37 places around the world: <http://overcomingpoverty.org/article/commemorative-stone>

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