

CHRONICLE OF A MEDITERRANEAN SEMINAR

*A gathering of those who in various Mediterranean countries work in
closest proximity with the poorest.*

From 26- 29 September 2005

Aix en Provence – France

International Movement ATD Fourth World
Permanent Forum on extreme poverty in the world

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The drawings are by Hélène Perdereau who has been donating her work to the International Movement ATD Fourth World for many years. They were previously published in Letter to Friends n° 61 and n°s 63-64.

Sketches page 25: Annelies Wullemin.

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Foreword

This Chronicle has been developed and built up step by step, in silence and meditation. Many people have contributed to it through their writings, their utterances and their silence too. Our overriding concern was to respectfully convey their experiences, efforts and questions. We hope they will find it useful, whether personally, within their association or in their everyday life.

It is also important to make a wider audience aware of these people who by agreeing to participate in the Mediterranean Seminar which is the subject of this Chronicle took up the challenge consisting in meeting and talking. Their commitment shoulder to shoulder with deprived and even excluded people and families is a source of encouragement for others, in particular for members of the Permanent Forum on extreme poverty in the world. We hope they will draw inspiration from it and find in it sources of innovation.

More broadly this document is for everybody; representatives of public authorities, civil society, academia, the arts, etc. It constitutes a tool for dialogue, for those men and women who wish to use it. It is our fervent hope that it will serve as a foundation to prolong and deepen discussion of the themes tackled in the Seminar, and to propose other relevant issues where we can learn from each other.

“Nobody should face extreme poverty alone”. This is what Joseph Wresinski the founder of the ATD Fourth World Movement’s Permanent Forum network dreaded above all. Whether we are living in a situation of extreme poverty or have never experienced it directly, let us be among those who seek out and meet men and women who are waiting to be known, recognised and encouraged in their commitment. Let’s bring together our creative capacities and our human and intellectual resources. Let's talk.

Huguette Redegeld
Vice President
Head of the Permanent Forum on extreme poverty in the world

Introduction

The ambition of the chronicle you are holding in your hands is to give an account of encounters, discovery and friendship between members of the Fourth World Movement², in particular the team running the *Permanent Forum on Extreme Poverty in the World*³, and people working in associations close to the poorest in Mediterranean basin countries.

These associations - which are very different in terms of size, resources and background - are all working in proximity and in joint action with their most impoverished fellow citizens. They operate in Algeria, Egypt, Spain, France, Israel, Italy, Palestine, Turkey, Lebanon and Morocco.

Between 2002 and 2005, with the support of longstanding friends, volunteers from the Permanent Forum team visited these countries in order to get to know these associations, to meet their members and share their concerns. As a result of these mutual discoveries, the idea emerged of preparing a "Mediterranean Seminar" based on the contributions of around forty people working in the field. Chapter I "**2002-2005: A network of links weaving its way around the Mediterranean**" describes the meetings in the countries, the correspondence exchanged and the months of preparation.

At the same time, between 2003 and 2005 members of the Fourth World Movement in Marseilles, the Provence Alpes Côte d'Azur region (PACA) and at the movement's international centre in Méry sur Oise (near Paris) held regular meetings to talk about the links binding them to the Mediterranean. They kept in regular contact with the Permanent Forum team, they supported the volunteers travelling to meet the associations in the various countries, and on their return they talked to them about their discoveries and their thoughts, gradually bringing into focus the contours of what was to become the Mediterranean Seminar. They contributed to discussions about the seminar's proposed theme: new technologies and their use by people and families living in great hardship in a multicultural context. During the last months of preparation, the support group in Marseilles split up into more specialised working groups to prepare the different practical aspects of the seminar (reception, accommodation, finance, interpreting and translation, creative workshops, meetings with Marseilles associations).

This mobilisation of the movement's members in France is described in Chapter II "**2003-2005: Preparation for the Seminar in the Marseilles region and at the International Centre in Méry-sur-Oise**".

As the culmination of this lengthy, painstaking preparation, the Mediterranean Seminar took place over five days in September 2005 at the La Baume training and education centre just outside Aix-en-Provence.

The content of the discussions and the quality of the atmosphere during these five days were the result of the work carried out during the previous months.

The seminar was also an important step for each participant in their efforts to get acquainted, listen to and discover their fellow participants from every shore of the Mediterranean Sea, the most excluded people and families from their region and the ATD Fourth World Movement.

This encounter is described in detail in Chapter III: "**The Mediterranean Seminar in La Baume lès Aix (Marseilles), from 26-29 September 2005, on the theme: "The Contribution of Very Poor Individuals and Families to Cross Cultural Dialogue in the Information Society"**".

After the Mediterranean Seminar, and on the basis of the desires expressed in particular on the last day, other opportunities have been seized and other means have been explored to maintain and reinforce the links created. In parallel, the Permanent Forum team is seeking to strengthen exchanges and sharing of knowledge and experiences between the correspondents engaged in the Mediterranean region and correspondents in other regions.

² See page 65. The International Movement ATD Fourth World in brief

³ See page 66. The Permanent Forum in brief

"If someone educated comes along, I'll tell him to organise a conference with the poor, to raise their awareness, to awaken their mind and also to listen to them. Let him listen to the problems. Perhaps he can do something about them. Or else he'll tell other people about these problems. If there are big international meetings, they must try to find solutions ... and there are countries like Senegal where life is even more difficult ..."

(Families from the Nabaa district in Beirut)

"I hear the people working for my association talking about how they suffer when they see young people who are really closed in and find it difficult to respond to their project. They realise that these young people stay closed in, they don't leave their homes (...). When you understand the life of young people or poor people better or differently, your point of view changes.

When you understand the life of young people or poor people better or differently, you're capable of changing the project to make it close to them".

(Si M'hamed)

The chapter entitled "**Beyond 2006: Nobody should Face extreme poverty alone**" describes this in detail.

At the end of this chronicle you will find a presentation of the International Movement ATD Fourth World and the Permanent Forum on Extreme Poverty in the World, as well as the Appendices.

We have chosen this written form of a chronicle because we feel it is the most appropriate way to reflect the density and value of the links that have been fostered between men and women engaged in this adventure of the Seminar, at its beginnings and in its repercussions. It is an adventure full of risks, surprises and teachings, an undertaking conducted step by step but above all person by person thanks to relationships that are being built with great care because we know how fragile and precious they are. They led to this wish expressed by a participant on the last day of the Seminar: *"May the Orient one day resemble our meeting ..."*

This Chronicle was written between January and August 2006. Each volunteer from the team wrote a part of it, drawing on his or her personal writings about the journeys made, and agreeing to express their point of view, to say quite simply in what way they were touched by some of the people they met, in particular during the preparatory journeys. These extracts from their travel diaries give an idea of each writer's strength of commitment and original style.

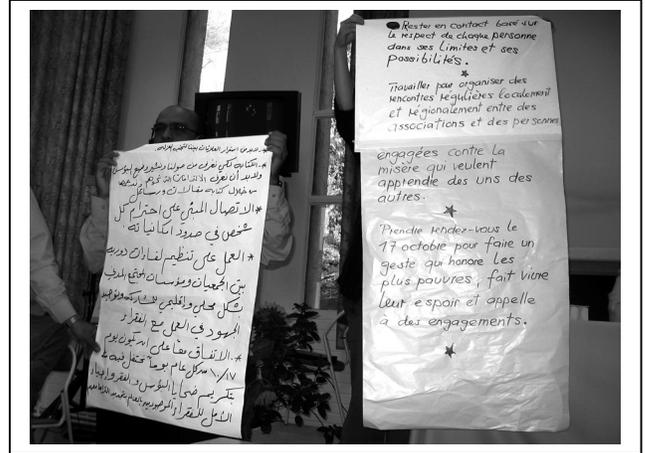
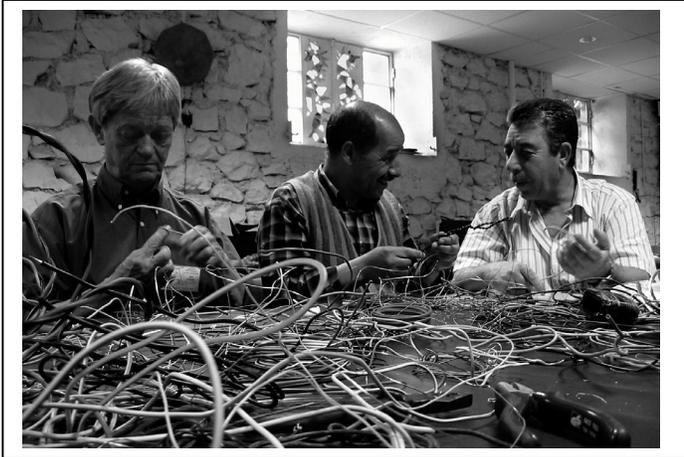
For the part concerning the repercussions of the Seminar, we have remained in regular contact with a number of participants. We asked them to participate by means of individual letters and a collective letter in February 2006. Anne de Maissin, Monique Mathey, as well as several other members of the Movement in Marseilles re-read these letters and identified the main preoccupations they express.

With the support of Eugen Brand, Susie Devins and Bruno Couder from the General Delegation, all of us together in the Permanent Forum team found the courage to launch into this writing project and the necessary impetus to successfully complete it. From the very beginning, Jean-Pierre Beyeler encouraged us with his experience. Our thanks also go to the people who agreed to proof-read the document and share their comments with us, in particular Marie-Hélène Boureau, Mathé Devoyon and Daniel Fayard. A special thanks to Ayliffe Rose and Andrew Tooms for having supervised the English translation. Throughout the project Martine Hosselet made sure that it continued to progress and it is thanks to her that the end result is a coherent piece of work.

We hope you enjoy reading it!

Pascale Anglade, Graciane Berriex, Martine Hosselet, Hani Khalil, Huguette Redegeld, Annelies Wuillemin, Olivier Wuillemin.

The Team in charge of the Permanent Forum on Extreme Poverty in the World, at Méry sur Oise, Paris and Marseilles.



I / 2002- 2005: A network of links weaving its way around the Mediterranean

In every country, regardless of how developed the country may be, there are people and families confronted by the great hardships of life. Yet also in every country there are public and private programmes in place, people and associations who are committed to responding to these situations...

Within the framework of the Permanent Forum on extreme poverty, ATD Fourth World is looking for those people who have hands-on experience of what life is really like for the poorest people on every continent.

The Permanent Forum team wants to hear from these people about the efforts made by people and associations to get close to those who have been mistreated by life. Entering into dialogue means taking the time to get to know each other, to talk about action undertaken, about experiences of involvement and issues to be shared, in order to grow and to offer each other support.

By way of example, how do people and families living in situations of extreme poverty build relationships in their daily lives, with their neighbours, in the area where they live, at school...? What ways do they find? Who can they count on? What can we learn from their efforts, from their refusal to accept poverty for themselves and for others? What is their vision for the world so that it can be founded on justice and peace?

Let us take another example. The people and associations who are involved with these people and their families are privileged to witness their efforts every day; they know what obstacles these people encounter. They often act as relays, expressing their hopes and expectations, to build a bridge with action undertaken at local and national level. Eradicating poverty requires long-term commitment. To keep going, those people who are committed to this need to talk with others. How can we learn from these privileged witnesses? How should we listen to their experiences? What support and training do they need and how best can we accompany them?

These are only a few examples of the questions tackled by the Permanent Forum in the course of discussions by correspondence or while away on trips or face to face meetings, when this is possible.

In recent years, links have been established and strengthened with people who are involved around the Mediterranean Basin (in Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Palestine, Israel, Lebanon, Turkey, Italy, Spain and France).

Taking place between 2002 and 2005, these trips represent a stage in the dialogue which is developing at everyone's own pace, over the long-term, in a spirit of friendship and respect. This dialogue puts the team in contact with dozens of people and associations. Each of them leads to discovering others. Some people express their desire for a meeting on a wider scale. Little by little, the idea of organising a Seminar comes to light; energy and ideas come from everyone, supporting each other, responding to each other, overcoming obstacles one after another, strengthening knowledge and mutual respect. Here are a few echoes of the steps taken towards developing a common project.

Beirut, 17 October 2003: World Day for the Eradication of Poverty⁴, in the Nabaa area.

Article by Martine Hosselet (published in 'L'Eglise à Marseille Aujourd'hui' or The Church in Marseilles Today, in October 2003)

⁴ 17 October, World Day to Overcome Poverty, started by Joseph Wresinski and ATD Fourth World in 1987, to express the need to make human rights recognised for all, and officially recognised by the United Nations in 1992. In 1987, a commemorative stone in honour of the victims of poverty was engraved at the Plaza of Human Rights and Liberties at the Trocadero in Paris. Copies have been made in many countries around the world.

Nabaa, in the north-east of Beirut, is an old market gardener neighbourhood.

The buildings were erected on land belonging to the Shia Muslims who were persecuted during the war (from 1975 to 1990) and who fled to South Lebanon. Refugees have

taken shelter in buildings that are in a terrible state of repair. Everything is in grey concrete. Blocks that are 4 or 5 storeys high. You can see the impact of bullets and shells on every wall, vestiges of the war. Dozens of electric wires hang from one side of the streets to the other and along façades. In certain places the streets are gutted, and there are streams of water, coming from who

knows where. The ground floors are occupied by small grocer shops selling fruit and vegetables, and craftsmen, and small garage owners... People often open a store for a month or two and then have to close or find something else to sell. The families in the neighbourhood often move because they frequently fall into debt and are no longer able to pay the rent.

You hear a lot about prostitution and drugs in this area.

On the ground floor of one of these buildings is the small office of 'Beïtouna' (Our house), a residence that is always open, founded by Franciscan nuns who for five years now have been taking in tired families who are fighting a daily battle to survive. The sisters wanted "to be with the people who are so poor that nobody else helps them... because they are in situations so unbelievable that nobody wants to see..."

There is a faded panel by the entrance of the residence, which states the aims of the association in Arabic. Sister Thérèse wants to replace it on 17 October by the text of the stone laid in 1987 at the Trocadero in Paris, in honour of the victims of poverty.

Who is Sister Thérèse?

Our first meeting with her was in September 2002, when she got in contact with the Movement, in particular with the Permanent Forum team, when she was staying in France. She wanted to discuss with us questions related to her activities at Nabaa and training people working with her at 'Beïtouna'.

We stayed in contact during 2002-2003. Sister Thérèse sent us a report every three months about the families that she had met in the neighbourhood. She invited us to come and meet them in person. And so it was that in September 2003 two permanent members of our team went to 'Beïtouna' to experience the first celebration of 17 October there with the families and volunteers.

In the days leading up to 17 October, we visited families with Sister Thérèse and invited them to 'Beïtouna' for the ceremony. Those who knew how to read and write translated the text into Arabic that would be unveiled on the panel in honour of the victims of poverty.

In the afternoon of the 17th, a group of mothers met to discuss their greatest concerns today, but also what gives them the courage to keep going. Their children created a lovely picture in the form

of a long line, in which each person is holding was a balloon with a word of hope written on it.

At the beginning of the evening, about forty adults and children stood together in the entrance to 'Beïtouna', all very dignified, for the unveiling of the panel in honour of the victims of poverty. The Arabic text was read out loud by several people, so that everyone could take it in. Then, each of the mothers paid tribute, with great respect, to all the people who have a life even harder than their own. A volunteer translated the piece given to us by a Lebanese lady who has been living in Marseilles for several years (see below), and that of a Rwandan mother who is a refugee with her children in Kenya. We sang. We ate cakes that everyone had brought and we looked at each other and smiled at each other a lot, since there is a language barrier. One by one, the people left, each comforted a little and with new strength to tackle the daily hardships. We made new friends, from one coast to the other of the Mediterranean, and that is the most important thing!

Marseilles, October 2003.

Message from Rose for the families at Nabaa.

I am originally from Lebanon. I left fifteen years ago and I went to the Ivory Coast with my uncles and aunts before coming to France.

I hoped for a better life for my children, and now I am still fighting to obtain papers for myself and for my children too.

I know what it is to lead a difficult life, particularly when there is no money to pay the hospital bills and there is no work to be found.

I would like to have my family with me.

I wish with all my heart that the families in Lebanon could stick together (...).

Cairo, November 2003. Extract from notes by Martine Hosselet.

Huguette Redegeld and I have been in Egypt for a week now, staying with Annaïg Abjean, a French lady who works in Cairo, who has been an ally of the Movement for many years now.

She has arranged for us to meet Father Mounir during one of his rare visits to Cairo. He has founded an association, which works in three villages situated right next to each other.

Fifteen years ago his idea was to live with the people in the village.

In general, the families in the villages have between four and seven children. Many are orphans or there is not enough money for the household.

Father Mounir is passionate about educating and training children and young people. Very often they leave school barely knowing how to read, which he finds appalling.

He tells us the story of several families who he has been supporting for many years now and says: "A family is really poor when, even with the money you give them, they cannot break free. They want to get out, but it turns against them..." and "If I can save one member of the family, then I hope that person will save the rest of the family"

He also says: "For the area to change there needs to be a good school".

In one of these villages a small primary school has

opened, taking in children up to the age of fourteen years old.

Another one of his challenges: "Finding some young locals to prepare for the future". He tells us about several young people that he knows with whom he is both very caring and very demanding. He comes accompanied by one of these young fathers.

When we mention the idea of a Seminar to give us support, he tells us that when he becomes discouraged, it is these young people who give him the strength to carry on.

He has already taken part in meetings between people who do social work in Egypt among the poorest in society and thinks that a Seminar would be a good thing, but that there would be a need to be careful in terms of the cost of such a meeting and in choosing its location.

Following a first trip to Lebanon and then another to Egypt at the end of 2003, the Permanent Forum volunteers, in groups of two or three, continued with these face to face meetings in different Mediterranean countries in 2004 and 2005.

In September 2004, Olivier Wuillemin, Huguette Redegeld and Martine Hosselet, accompanied Claude Lasnel, a friend of ATD Fourth World with a great deal of experience in North African countries and in Marseilles, and met members of associations in Algiers, Tizi-Ouzou, Hammam Melouane, Oran, Bordj Menaiel, Blida, about fifteen different places in all. During their trip they were touched in particular by the welcome they received, the resistance, and the warmth and humanity of those whom they met - sometimes in very difficult conditions – as well as their commitment to the poor.

Extract from notes by Olivier Wuillemin:

This is not the first time that the Movement has set foot on Algerian soil. Joseph Wresinski came here in 1962 and then there have been one or two "journeys of discovery" with young people from Fourth World in France.

The principal aim of our current trip was to enter into dialogue with people and associations who are working with families living in situations of extreme poverty. Entering into dialogue meant taking the time to get to know each other, talking about action undertaken, experiences of commitment, issues to share... It has to be said

that until now the 'Letter to Friends of the World'⁵ had only been sent to about twenty addresses in this country and we were only in regular correspondence with three or four people.

A large number of these contacts were established thanks to Claude Lasnel who also organised our trip and our accommodation with some of his friends. This did not only make our stay much easier, but also lent atmosphere to our trip. We were able to discover certain realities of life in the

⁵ Letter to the Friends of the World (Lettre aux Amis du Monde), a publication by the Permanent Forum on extreme poverty in the world. It is published three times a year, in French, English, Spanish and Portuguese and is sent to 3500 correspondents all over the world.

north and north west of this very big country: Algiers and its environs, Hammam Melouane at the foot of Mount Atlas by crossing the Mitidja plain, Tizi Ouzou, Bordj Menaiel, Oran and its surroundings...

As for me, I became aware of the different civilisations which have shaped Algeria over the course of history:

The renovation of the old hospital in Oran adjoining the Med el Kébir Mosque in the Sidi El Houari area reveals an interesting part of this history. A symbol of the Turkish, Spanish and French periods, this hospital is made up of a collection of buildings that have fallen into disrepair, a victim of insalubrity and pillaging. The degradation of this place was the result of the marginalisation of the historic neighbourhoods in the west of the current city, areas which have become very unstable with their antiquated infrastructure: fragility and over-occupation of apartment blocks, promiscuity, etc.

It is in this context that the Santé Sidi El Houari Association – which has met us several times before – has developed activities through which young people can learn how to become stone

sculptors, masons, joiners, iron craftsmen and carpenters. Taking a serious approach to becoming an apprentice to a profession, this is also a school for developing the relation of young people to public welfare, teaching national and universal heritage, which is a vital aspect for the youth of today and for what they may become. In other words, it is a school that teaches citizenship.

In Algiers we were able to see the Kasbah and the citadel before going to the National Museum of Popular Arts and Traditions which is at the end of this old Turkish town. We went there to meet Tewfik who has launched heritage classes for children in the area, adapting a teaching pack from UNESCO about discovering art and civilisations to Algeria.

The fact that the young people in the disadvantaged area of Sidi El Houari and unstable areas on the edges of the Bois des Planters in Oran, and the children of families living in fragile social conditions of the Kasbah of Algiers are able to become involved with a part of their history, with their ancestors' experiences, is a clear signal which will not fail to have an impact on these areas.

Having returned from these trips, contact and discussions continued with everybody in Marseilles and all those who had made this happen.

Marseilles, 12 October 2004.

Letter by H. Redegeld, M. Hosselet and O. Wuillemin to

Mohamed Khandriche

Secretary General of Touiza Solidarité (Touiza Solidarity)

Marseilles

Dear Sir

We would like to give you some news from our recent trip to Algeria and to thank you most sincerely for having supported us so that we could get to know the country and people who were so endearing and interesting, particularly in terms of their desire to get involved in the future of their country and the well-being of everyone.

Members of the Touiza of Algiers introduced us to the ACP of Hammam Melouane and we were able to meet several beneficiaries of the micro-credits awarded by the Touiza. Talking to these people and the people in charge of Touiza during the day gave us a sense of the strength of these people who want to live and move forward from a very dark period, whose mark is still clearly felt.

In all of the meetings, we were impressed to note that the particularly appalling living conditions of the families and communities represented a real concern and that a productive dialogue was possible on that subject. For our part, we would be very grateful if we could continue this dialogue.

At the moment, we are busy writing up the many contacts and visits we made in Algeria in order to clearly define the topics for discussion for everyone to prepare for our Seminar.

We would be delighted if you could give us your comments and suggestions.
With many thanks again for your collaboration and your support.

Yours sincerely.

Spain, September 2004. Pascale Anglade was being shown around by team members of the Movement who are based there.

Extract from the log book:

From my trip to Spain, I would like to pay tribute to Ana and Manuel to whom Carmen Martos, a permanent volunteer of the Movement in Spain, introduced me. Ana and Manuel are parents whose five children have been taken into care and who they are only allowed to see once a month. In the village they have been ostracised, to such an extent that they take the long way round to avoid having to go through the middle of the village. They say to Carmen: "You are our first friend". In their solitude, one of the means which enables them to be connected to others, to be connected to the world and the information society is the television. What would they wish for the world? "For there to be work for everybody. For everyone to be able earn money to live. For there to be peace. For the poor and the wealthy not to be mistreated but to be treated with humility. For the wealthy not to look at us as if we were odd people, strangers". What can we expect from those from whom society no longer expects anything? What can they bring to our societies?

I would also like to pay tribute to the battle which the poor and very poor are facing in the areas where they live in tackling the problem of drugs. Thanks to Carmen, I saw the daily struggle not to turn to drugs by the family of **Ema and José**, who have lived in the same neighbourhood for 27 years. According to José's father, only 40 % of the people in the neighbourhood do not use drugs. To protect themselves, they have to cut themselves off from those who are using drugs. This means that they have no friends and no faith in the other people who live in the neighbourhood.

I would like to pay tribute to the courageous presence of four nuns, **Hermanas de Jesús María (Sisters of Jesus Maria)**, who have been in a travellers' area in the south of the country for thirty four years. This area is separated from the rest of the village by a river and a bridge. The separation from the rest of the village is therefore very clear. For seventeen years, the sisters have lived with no drinking water in the area as the travellers did. The presence of drugs is growing by the day. They support these families by offering an education to the children in their pre-school. They are close to everyone without exception: drugs divide families between those who take drugs and those who refuse. Despite these divisions, this population has an acute sense of family and this solidarity is clear when there is illness or death.

Among the associations who were invited to the Mediterranean Seminar and who were not able to participate were:

The Reception Centre run by Father Damian which supports people living on the streets by helping them to look at their life objectively, separating the negative from the positive in their experiences. Almudena, who I met together with Alfonso, both of whom are teachers, told me what was most important for them in offering support was to respect the person, to listen to what the person had experienced and what they wanted.

The R.A.I.S. Association in Madrid: Support Network for Socio-Professional Integration, run by José Manuel. It works to reconstruct a social network for people who live or have lived on the streets. One of the points that I remember is the

importance of not defining the person by what they do not have, just to support them, but letting them set their own objectives.

The Semilla Association in Madrid which offers professional training to disadvantaged young people in trade, in the hotel business and in the catering industry. It also offers an “open school” for children and young people from seven to

sixteen years of age who have abandoned school. It looks at them as individuals, not as disadvantaged children. I recognised from my own experience the fact that this organisation’s experience is drawn from what it has lived through, of life together. The founder, Lourdes, uses a caring educational strategy. Her objective is to make what is invisible appear in each child, to allow the best of the child to emerge.

Israel and Palestine, December 2004. Martine Hosselet, Annelies Wuillemmin and Olivier Wuillemmin arranged this trip together with a group of long-standing friends of the Movement in Israel, as well as through various contacts in Palestine.

Extract from joint notes:

“We have met people and associations who work with disadvantaged Jewish families, people living on the streets and young people who have dropped out of school, in Jerusalem, Beer Sheva and Tel Aviv; and with others who are close to Arab Christian and Muslim families in Haifa.

We spent a day in the south of the country with social workers and Bedouin families who live in settlements built illegally,

... We met with people responsible for social policy in the region, and certain university students, some of whom have been friends of the Movement for several years...”

Extract from joint notes published in the ‘Letter to Friends of the World’ n°61, May 2005:

In Palestine, we met with several members of Palestinian community centres in Ramallah, in refugee camps at Jelazon and Dehaish, as well as Beit Lekhem.

Wafa is the co-founder of a small co-operative in a refugee camp in the West Bank We met her at Beit Lekhem. This is what she said:

“It is up to us to act, the second generation in the camp, now that we are adults. Some of us thought about what we could do. A cooperative was set up which is currently made up of about twenty women. After a while we drew up a project: making soap from olive oil.”

She went into more detail:

“What we wanted to achieve by making soap

was of course to get some work, to earn a little money. But it is also means living in a co-operative, that is to say doing something in the camp itself, and sharing our experiences (I know how to manage people, how to set projects up; others have a particular skill, are good with their hands, others have knowledge in particular areas). And the ambition is also to create opportunities for the women in the co-operative to leave the camp, to see something else, to meet other people. It is to give them an opening.”

The group is still in the early stages of the project. The women have researched on the internet how to create beautiful products, how to make soap, how to mould the bars of soap and how to perfume them. Some of them have already been to Galilee to visit a factory that manufactures plant essences; they had to go through a lot of red tape to obtain the necessary authorisation for leaving their territory and to cross the border. They found the address by doing research on the computer.

Wafa said that the Internet has been used for about five years in Palestine. “It enables us to educate ourselves. And also open up to other people, other realities, to not remain fixated on our own suffering”. She highlighted that children learn fast

and that she sometimes asks her own children for help in understanding how to use certain functions of the computer.



Extract from travel diary written by Olivier Wuillemin.

It was the last visit of a very busy day in Tel Aviv/Jaffa, organised by Nir. We were welcomed by the director of the reception centre of the ELEM association in Alenby street. We had to cross part of the premises before arriving in a office where the meeting would take place; about fifteen young people and young girls more or less physically scarred by the harsh conditions of their existence were talking in groups of two or three while modern music played moderately loudly in the background. These offices are painted in various bright colours, open and yet giving people the chance to sit together in small groups.

The director spoke to us about this place where they welcome young people who have been abandoned marginalised, and who are often victims of alcohol and drug abuse. The aim is to guide them along a different path by supporting their rehabilitation. These young people are immigrants; they have tried to tackle alone the problems with which they have been confronted since they have arrived in Israel. The problems encountered most often are a lack or complete absence of money, being constantly on the move, hunger, illness, isolation due to lack of knowledge, a lack of anything to do, and the absence of family.

ELEM is developing several projects in Tel Aviv which enable them to reach out to young people in turmoil: a night van giving information to young people and children who find themselves on the streets or who have not had anywhere to live for some time. The reception centre where we were is a day centre open four days a week where young people between the ages of 18 and 25 come, they do not only find a welcome there, but also someone to listen to them, somewhere to do their washing, have a hot meal, be given some clothes to help keep out the cold. They can also count on someone following up their desire to integrate or reintegrate into society (if someone is hospitalised, a person from the ELEM team will regularly visit which is vital for those who are alone). Some arrive the first time through their own initiative, but others are told to come here by the local authority youth department or are met through one of ELEM's projects. After the initial

period, when a person allows themselves to be cared for, although no formal change in terms of lifestyle is asked for, a contract is made between the person and the association for a rehabilitation programme which promotes a healthier life (for example, a detox programme), stable accommodation, searching for work, sorting out papers so that they are in the country legally, etc. About thirty young men and women are supported in this way by social worker volunteers, the majority of the young people who come to the centre are from ex Soviet Union, Ethiopia and Israel etc.

Answering our questions, the director said that the phenomenon of people on the street is a recent one. He explained that among the young people taken care of by the association, in terms of basic knowledge, the Ethiopians are the worst off; illiteracy is very widespread and therefore the means for learning another language other than their own – like Hebrew – and doing some kind of training are very limited. Most of the young people are quite familiar with different forms of communication; they use them for writing to their family, to produce curriculum vitae and to look for work.

He said that he was surprised in our questioning that we could see a link between poverty and what these young people are going through, at least some of them, because of their isolation and accumulation of hardships. He said that that is not the way in which he sees the people who go to the centre. He said that he has never seen them as poor, but rather as people in trouble who need to be reintegrated with society. He asks his colleague: “When you’re with people, do they make you think of the poor and of poverty?” After pulling an enquiring grimace, she replied that to be honest, they don’t make her think of poverty, people in turmoil, going through a difficult time, yes; but not poverty. Thirty seconds later, during which time she remained standing next to the chair of the director, while he took up the thread of the discussion again, she added: “No. That’s not how I’ve seen things up to now. But maybe from now on...I will think about it.”

Lebanon, December 2004. A second trip to this country enabled us to consolidate the links established during the trip in October 2003, and to create new links as well.

Egypt, March 2005. Huguette Redegeld and Hani Khalil on a second visit.

Notes by Huguette Redegeld.

After a first visit to Egypt in 2004 with Martine Hosselet, in March 2005 I went on a second visit with Hani Khalil. We were lucky enough to see some of the people again who we had met before, such as, the people who run an association for community development based in a very large neighbourhood on the edge of Cairo. For this association, being as present as possible in the neighbourhood is essential, because without that, according to them, how is it possible to develop actions in real co-operation with the inhabitants and other associations or groups already there? A global approach is another key element of their strategy. Their actions also reach out to children, young people and adults, in different domains at the same time: health, education, cultural and community development, micro-credits, etc.

We were delighted to see members of an association involved with disabled children again. By visiting them at their premises, we were able to appreciate their professionalism and the sensitivity of the staff who are always looking how best to meet the needs of disabled children (mobility, language, etc.) and, just as important, how to support their families. We were also able to get in contact again with another big association in Alexandria which, among other things, undertakes action for children living on the streets and for people affected by leprosy.

This second trip was an opportunity to expand our knowledge by going to meet new people and associations. In Cairo, for example, the reality for refugees, with no legally recognised status and no possibilities for working or sending their children to school were shown to us by a member of an association, together with a great deal of suffering. We also went to the neighbourhood where the people are called 'the rag and bone men', to meet the people who run a very small association for recycling rubbish. Walking for a while through the neighbourhood shows what the reality of life is like for the people living there and the differences

existing between the areas. Some parts reflect the life of the neighbourhood; there are signs of community organisation with schools, meeting places. Others seem to be extremely poor and dilapidated.

Thanks to research on the internet, two other meetings also opened up new perspectives. The first was with two members of a small association, recently created and based on young people volunteering, offering them the chance to get involved in developing and running activities in disadvantaged areas. The second was with a surgeon who, for a number of years, has been responsible for co-ordinating NGOs in the El Minia region and as a result has developed a network putting various organisations and associations in contact with each other.

In Alexandria, the range of meetings was extended thanks to the support of General Consul of France through which we had the privilege of meeting the Director of Alexandria Library. The director is very much responsible for developing civil society in his country and in the region. A few days before, a seminar had been organised by and for the NGOs of the region in the library buildings.

We also discovered an association set up and run by young artists in a fishing village close to Alexandria. For these young artists, all highly motivated, access to beauty, to creativity, to different artistic expressions is a right everyone should have, to be put in place for those who are most deprived of it.

We also had the honour of learning about actions undertaken on a large scale by a public body, the Governing Body of Alexandria, building housing accessible for the poorest in society, developing a system of mains water supply, drainage, etc.

These two trips to Egypt gave us the opportunity to discover and appreciate a great diversity of commitments.

Italy, April-May 2005. Hani Khalil, Annelies Wullemin, Chantal Proca and Olivier Wullemin.

Extract from notes by Annelies Wullemin. Rome, April 2005:

Chantal Proca, is an ally of the Movement, and together we went to Rome. Chantal lived in Rome for more than thirty years. The roads and streets, neighbourhoods, public transport lines, are familiar to her, as well as gardens, museums and monuments.

Chantal couldn't wait to see the people and families again who live in the city or on its edges in working-class neighbourhoods, in huge tower blocks, in disused buildings or who are on the streets, and she couldn't wait for me to meet them either... These are very poor people and families. They were part of her world, of her daily life when she lived in Rome. They still write to her, sometimes they call her on the telephone to give her their news or to hear about her. We were welcomed with great dignity and much warmth into this unstable world, but a world filled with acts and clear symbols of love and life.

Tenderness, encouraging looks and words passed between Signora M. and her disabled son. This complicity between them was heart-warming, with so many concerns about the family weighing heavily on the shoulders of this woman, mother and grandmother. We looked at photos of her family with her. Her grand-daughter had put them together in a pretty frame on which she had written in multi-coloured letters: "Nonna, ti vogliamo bene" ("Grandma, we love you so much"). It was like a kiss, and sometimes, a life-belt...

Signora R. lives in a tiny room in a building which has never functioned. The room is a kitchen, dining room, bedroom, bathroom etc, all in one, but yet this does not stop her from inviting her neighbour on the landing in so that she can do her washing in the small washing machine. With three of us the table had to be folded up and put against the wall which was decorated with many ends of wood arranged in the form of a heart, a boat, a tree ... and on which a friend of the family has engraved loving messages in poker work. And there were many other little memories. It was lovely. Signora R. shares this small space with her son Alfredo when he comes back at the weekend from the institution where he is in care. We looked at photos with her too, particularly those with Alfredo. Photos done by professional photographers at important occasions such as First

Communion. She was so proud of them! I could understand that. Alfredo was one of the child delegates at 'the Children's Forum' which took place at Wilson Palace for a meeting with Mary Robinson, High Commissioner of the UN for Human Rights and Children's Rights in Geneva in 1999. I talked about this with Signora R.

These moments shared in this way with families, whether they are easy or difficult, pass by in trust and friendship.

Having come to Rome to establish links with groups or associations who work alongside the very poor, it was good to start by meeting those who are affected in the flesh by hardships and are the first to refuse humiliation and human wastage for themselves and for others. These people know what is important to them. "Above all, that the children get on well at school, that they like to go there and that they are looked after so that they become good people", said Signora M, when talking about her grandchildren. They know who is important to them, who supports them in gaining access to their rights, in realising their deepest aspirations.

Chantal and I came for the very reason that we wanted to meet some of the people involved in groups or associations. We fixed a time; the meetings enabled us to talk about the knowledge that everyone has about life in extreme poverty, to talk about approach methods, to talk about action. In Rome, this high place in terms of spirituality, history, and art, overcoming poverty is very much the domain of the religious orders, very active communities such as Sant'Egidio. It is also the domain of large-scale organisations such as Caritas or the 'Italian Centre of Solidarity' or the 'Casa dei diritti sociali'. Signora T. and Signor C., members of CILAP (Collegamento Italiano di Lotta alla Poverta) and members of EAPN (European Anti Poverty Network), took time to meet with us, and as a result Mr L. agreed to take part in the Mediterranean Seminar.

Chantal also helped me to get to know mutual support groups between people living in neighbourhoods, initiatives about which little is known, but which are very real. In life situations which are very complex and unstable, initiatives in the form of cultural projects where people can open up are undertaken in a spirit of 'nothing can be done without others', 'we are all neighbours,

we are all responsible' and 'we are all friends when it come to learning" ...

Hani Khalil and Olivier Wuillemain also discovered initiatives like this in Naples:

The informal group 'Chi rom ... e chi no', is a group of young people working in Secondigliano/Scampia, a large area at the edge of the city where the inhabitants are Italians who have become Neapolitans, and Romanys, either settled or not; who have all come from somewhere else and have found themselves living there, together. Two young photographers from Turin had just joined the group to produce a report with the children, titled 'Viaggio nella memoria' (Translation: A trip down memory lane): to discover buildings and activities in the neighbourhood, discover the history of the area, meet the inhabitants; the children are invited to imagine the future, what they dream of having and dream of doing for a happy life together. Thanks to the help with homework that the head of the group, Mrs Barbara P., has been doing for some time now with some children from a Romany camp, which has settled without authorisation on the edges of the neighbourhood, contacts have been made with their families. A mutual trust has been born of this, as well as a project: building a very simple maisonette to enable a greater variety of activities there, and even meetings...

We went to San Giovanni in Teduccio, in the eastern suburb of the town, which was once where industrial activities (canned food factories, glassmakers, etc.) flourished, but all of that suddenly came to an end and gave way to life in turmoil.

We were welcomed by Carmela M. who is the key figure in Figli in Famiglia, an association that she set up in 1983 with a young priest; it uses certain parish premises while remaining independent. Surrounded by two dozen permanent members of staff and with the participation of volunteers in a large part of the neighbourhood, it devotes its great dynamism and most of its time to listening

to families in difficulty as well as often co-ordinating various regular activities and setting up special events. Clearly these activities exercise and expand the minds, hands and the hearts of those who take part in them.

In the relations with families, it is often a question of helping to recreate relationships which have deteriorated between parents and children, particularly adolescents; and also to rebuild relations with school and society as a whole. It is also a matter of ensuring that young people can find a connection to the world of honest, legal work [...]

On this matter, we met (out of their field of action) the people who set up and run the 'Chance' project: Cesare M. at San Giovanni Barra (near San Giovanni in Teduccio) and Marco R. D. in the Spanish neighbourhoods of Naples city centre.

'Chance', is a project for adolescents who have difficulties at school, so that they can redevelop relationships, and educational and social links. The aim is to give tools to these young people so that they can develop their abilities and talents that have been buried for one reason or another. 'Chance' has developed action in three areas of Naples; others have done something similar in other Italian towns. The fundamental idea is not to abandon those who cannot find their place at school such as it is or who quit school for other reasons such as family difficulties, tense relations in the area, etc. 'Chance' is a school for second chances. All of this requires the active participation of the parents, who themselves are often poorly-educated and who have very little money.

Cesare M. insisted that this experience gained with the young people here should be written down: a methodology is needed because that acts as an impetus for putting new forces into action. If it is not written down, it is a bit like starting the action again, with no memory of doing it before [...]

Morocco, April 2005. Visit by Pascale Anglade and Yolanda Jaslet, accompanied by Claude Lasnel.

Extract from travel notes by Pascale Anglade:

The Ait Iktel Association, the village where Ali grew up, was the first stop on our trip. Before our trip we had already met Ali, a friend of Claude, in

Paris. He understood that we were preferably looking to meet small associations who worked closely with people.

Yolanda and I were very touched by the welcome we were given by Mohamed, the mother of Khalid, Latifa, Hassan, Mohamed, Abdelaziz, Brahim, Mustapha, the director of the college and everyone else. I liked the primary school, built with the financial participation of all the members of the association, both those who lived in the village and people originally from the village who now live in towns in Morocco or in France. This school is the same colour as the houses in the village, so it fully adapts to tradition. I was pleased to find out that the teaching was not only given in Arabic and French, but also in the Amazighe language so that the children learn about and experience their roots, in this Berber region of Morocco.

I admired Hassan, the teacher, when I found that he did the seven kilometre journey to his school in the mountains on foot. He goes down once a week on the day of the market, the souk, a day off. I was struck to learn that the whole village agreed to set up a villagers' association when a village institution which brings together the Elders, the djamaa, already existed. This association has enabled everyone to be involved in drawing up projects to improve the village including women concerned about the availability of drinking water in homes, and young people concerned by the future of the village.

In Ennaciria, at the **Ennaciria Association for development and cooperation**, the whole village welcomed us and was waiting for us eagerly. We were filled with enthusiasm when we learnt that the planned library will open its doors to the library on one side and to the village on the other, to enable parents to come in and women to learn to read and write or use an electronic machine to make jumpers.

In Marrakesh, we approached the neighbourhood of the **El Ouaha Association** very gradually. We left the road, and took a stony earth track to slowly cross the palm grove. Having come to a hamlet, a douar, we thought we had arrived, but we had to continue on for several kilometres before arriving at the meeting house in the process of being built, which seemed to us to be at the end of the world. Despite the distance from the town and the isolation, people were already meeting in the small grocery run by Hassan where young people who have nothing to do meet in the evening, on the carpet. The grocery becomes a café and Hassan and Hamid talk to the young

people, over mint tea, about subjects which affect young people and projects that need to be undertaken to improve the life of the douar: to provide water fit for human consumption, electricity, a telephone box, etc. They want everyone to benefit from water. The water tap, installed in the grounds of the 'Meeting House' is open to everyone in the hamlet and the neighbouring hamlet, two or three kilometres away, for free. This will and generosity attracted our attention.

At Boumalne-Dadès, we met the **Dadès M'Gouna Association for Development**. We were very surprised by how serious its approach was: detailed minutes are produced after every meeting. It also bases its development action on training its members and regularly organises seminars and training meetings for which everything is discussed and written down. This effort to keep this written or photographic record, displayed on the walls with explanatory notes moved us because Joseph Wresinski, founder of ATD Fourth World, wanted, from the very beginning of the Movement, to gradually build a record of the poor, who seem not to exist in the world. This simplicity and this insight made an impression on us. It was explained that at the start, the association did not have a clear idea of the action to be undertaken and that they decided instead of the people. But, learning from experience, they discussed it, thought about it, learnt the lessons and they said: "We have begun to understand. And therefore we have integrated the social dimension into our action to target that which is human".

Latifa, you set up the **Al Massar Association for citizenship education** with several teachers. You told us about everything that you do with your secondary school pupils at a club for education on citizenship, human rights and protection of the environment. You explained to us how you were looking for a way of establishing trust with minors in a penitentiary centre, how to get close to them so you could get to know them better. You were convinced of the positive effects on them from learning drama, your support and the exceptional encounter between them and the secondary school pupils. I wondered who you were, you, a history and geography teacher, and if you would find your way in a Mediterranean meeting, beyond borders and the past, a meeting on a human scale where the smallest and the weakest would be the focus.

Following these meetings and trips exchanges developed, always warm, sometimes very useful to dispel certain misunderstandings, sometimes painful when dealing with administrative complications, meetings between the people preparing to take part in the Mediterranean Seminar.

Extracts from Internet correspondence with Hassan and Hamid, of the El Ouaha association close to Marrakech.

May 2005: *" Good morning Pascale and Yolanda. Your card has arrived, has been read and re-read, touched and touched again by many hands. A link has been set up between El Ouaha and ATD. It existed already, invisible, added a worker. It is clear that the current is flowing. We feel close to you. We have many difficulties to overcome but we are moving forward like a camel towards an oasis, tirelessly. The administration is the highest peak of Atlas, still hidden in the fog, but it is there, and we will get to it sooner or later. We are debating whether or not we will be able to accept your invitation. Hassan has been dealing with a lot of red tape. Russian dolls do not only exist in Russia: the tape keeps getting thicker, when we think we are coming to the end, we are missing yet another document. There is also the problem of obtaining a visa for Hassan. I am hoping that the Consulate will make every effort. No visa problem for me: I have French nationality and a French first name and separate Arab surname and first name. There is still the problem of financing: bus rather than plane perhaps? We will let you know as soon as possible how we are advancing. We would welcome any suggestions from you, we do not want to weigh down your association but to talk with you, although we are "at the end of the world"; we want to communicate in respect and friendship.*

Two pieces of good news: we are going to have date palms (to try), and a former headmistress is going to start in September in exchange for arithmetic classes in Arabic; she is going to teach in French and above all she is going to teach the workers how to measure. The request came from the workers of El Ouaha. With our best wishes, dear friends of the world, an abbreviation which you will forgive us for, but it is our way of feeling you here with us and to be at ease with you.

From the whole team at El Ouaha, Hassan, Hamid."

August 2005: *"Dear friends, I can now tell you that we are going to submit the file to the Consulate on Monday. The file is complete, but our experience means we have some reservations. Hassan wishes you a very warm hello and best wishes. He doesn't understand why there is so much red tape, so much information that is given a little at a time, and only a little at a time!... We must not flood El Ouaha! Hassan is beginning to be nervous about the trip. He is asking questions: Who does what in France? Will you be at the same table? Will we have the same room? He is afraid that he will not know how to eat in the European way. I say to him: too bad if you can't manage well or if you can't manage at all, I will eat like you, there will be two of us together and perhaps more in our corner of the table. I think the thank you he has asked me to pass on to you is the trust he has in you. You have a bit of El Ouaha there on the other side of the distant sea. Good luck preparing for the Seminar. We will let you know when we have the visas, which we hope very much will happen. With best wishes, Hassan and Hamid. "*

8 September 2005: *"Dear friends, friends of ATD Fourth World, Hassan has just received his visa. No need to say he is overjoyed! The deputy chief called to say that the file had just been approved. The chief said our association was the best in his territory, bless the administration. We didn't ask for that much. I said to Hassan "Don't get a big head about this..." And he said: "No, no question of getting a big head. I am hoping that my family, the people, live better, and that they all have something to eat. No need to be wealthy, just a need to be respected. Dignity is the first of all riches." His old father has started all the blessings and prayers. The members of the association, the bikes, the asses, everything is in turmoil: a son of the douar, Hassan, is going to a meeting in France! We are all brothers and we are going to get to know each other better and work together against extreme poverty wherever it is. With best wishes, Hassan, Hamid. "*

Turkey, June 2005. Pascale Anglade and Huguette Redegeld meet correspondents in Ankara and in Istanbul.

Extract from notes by Huguette Redegeld.

Unlike most other trips, the basis for going to meet people and associations in Turkey was particularly fragile. In actual fact we had very few contacts, which meant we carried out research on the Internet. Luckily, we came across people at the right time. They opened doors for us, which opened others! For example, the cousin of a permanent volunteer of the Movement, a French lady married to a Turkish doctor, who lived in Istanbul for more than twenty years offered to drive us around and introduce us to certain groups of her acquaintances. The General Consul of France in Alexandria recommended us to his colleague at Istanbul. Having arranged a meeting, this was the opportunity to discover information (economic, social, political, and cultural) about the country. As was the case with the Ambassador of France in Ankara who already knows ATD Fourth World from when he was the permanent representative of France to the United Nations in New York. There was also Brother Aloyius, a Capuchin monk, with a great deal of humility, sensitivity, humanity. Thanks to him, a man well-versed in Turkish culture and more generally Oriental culture, and very fond of his country, we learnt a great deal about its history and culture. These people guided, supported, accompanied our first steps into a country – or rather in two cities of the country we should say, Istanbul and Ankara – about which we had so much to discover, to learn. If our point of departure was in the French-speaking zone, once there, contacts expanded and led us to people and associations in the country. One of these contacts was two university students involved in the ‘Social Policy Forum’ of the University Bogazici, in Istanbul. They are driven by a will to contribute so that legislation to combat poverty develops and takes into account more and more the needs of the most fragile populations of the country. Thus, through two grass-roots associations, studies are being carried out to grasp the reality of what is being lived and to propose changes, in particular in laws and social policy. We were lucky enough to meet members of such an association, in an area on the edge of Istanbul. The members of the association are all from this area originally and are all volunteers. Their welcome was so touching in a small but lively bar! Over a meal we talked in

depth, with warmth and with commitment. The situation of children and young people concerns them in particular. There are too few activities, too few possibilities of meeting people, too few opportunities offered to them. This type of imprisonment can unfortunately lead to violence, they told us. These words are still running through our heads: ‘solidarity’, ‘learning to take into care’, ‘not giving up’. This association may seem small and simple, but what energy, conviction and courage there is! It made us think of all those correspondents of the Permanent Forum who, basically, are the impetus of possible change. Still meeting committed people, a meeting with members of staff of a hospital which cares for people with leprosy moved us greatly. We have experienced at first hand what these people live through, how they can be excluded from their community and the rest of society but also how they can be supported to break through that exclusion, for example by creating jobs that match their skills.

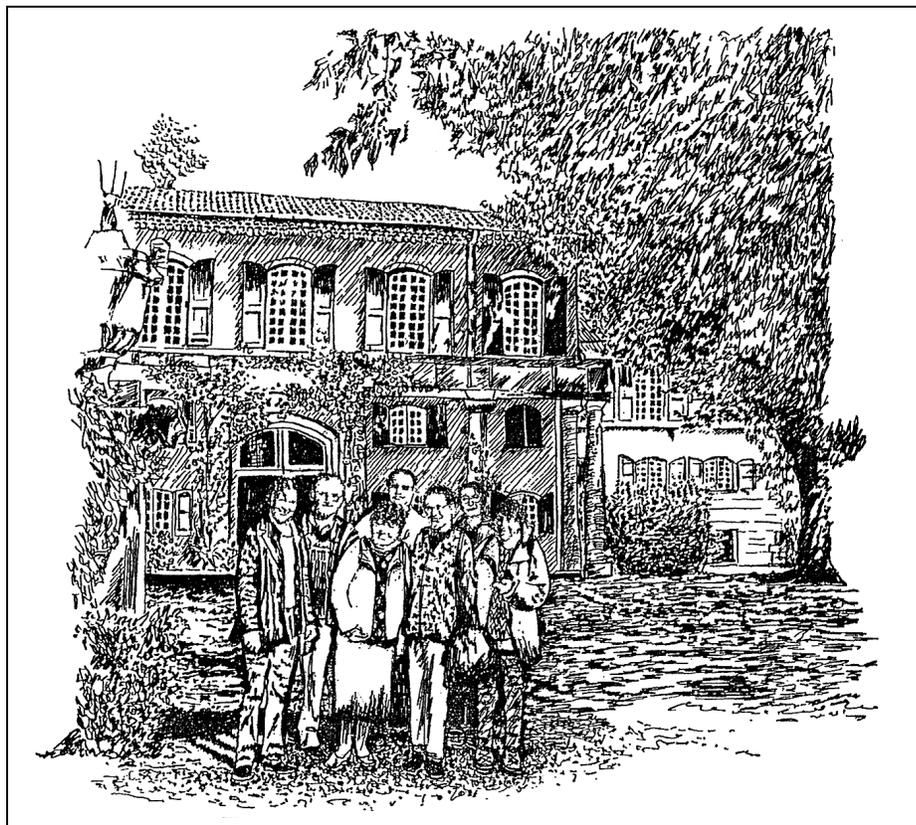
We met small children in an orphanage run by the State, and we are not ready to give up their place in our hearts and heads. The entire orphanage is designed to take in children in the best possible conditions – not all of whom are really orphans since, for a certain number, it is the parents who ask that they be taken into care, when family difficulties become too much. There aren’t enough members of staff to respond to the emotional and psychological needs of each child, although the staff who are there are very close to the children. In Istanbul, we also met people responsible for running a big charitable association which is present across the country. This association was born from a television programme in which people who have been in situations of poverty come to talk about their problems – and the viewers are encouraged to give their support. The action that that has been whipped up in the country by this programme has led to it being broadcast regularly and an association being set up whose scale and very professional organisation are impressive. This highlights moreover the importance of reaching the public at large (through the media, in this case) and the generosity of ‘donors’.

In Ankara, we continued finding out about new associations: we met with an association that defends the rights of women, with an association set up to help disabled people, for example. But we also met committed people, in universities, in positions of responsibility as heads of a businesses.

Thus, in Istanbul as in Ankara, we had the opportunity to find out about very diverse people and associations. Acting in equally diverse

domains - young children, developing villages (supplying water, education support), health, neighbourhood life, etc. – all of these people have largely contributed to ensure that our first steps in a country, that we knew so little about before, were abundant in humanity, in friendship, in surprises, in learning, in discovering engagements at the sides of the poorest in society. Thanks to these people, a small step forward has been taken. It can only continue.

During this period of trips to the Mediterranean Basin, the Permanent Forum team also visited different places in the Marseilles region, thinking about possibilities of where the Seminar could be held. In April 2005, Huguette, Pascale, Hani, Annelies, Olivier, Martine, Graciane, were standing in front of the entrance of a huge lovely country house, the training centre at La Baume lès Aix. They were filled with enthusiasm because they had just reserved this very beautiful house in the Aix countryside for the end of September.



II/ 2003-2005: Preparation for the Seminar in the Marseilles region and at the International Centre in Méry sur Oise

In September 2003 and in March 2004, two meetings took place at the International Centre in Méry sur Oise (near Paris), with full-time volunteers who have family connections in the Mediterranean or a specific knowledge of the region due to their personal background.

Extracts from notes taken during the meetings:

- Huguette Redegeld: ... *Since September, we have had contact with people and groups who work in the Lebanon, in Egypt and Israel. Through correspondence and through meetings for the Marseilles Seminar, we have been building stronger links with people who are from, or who live in North Africa. This has helped us to discern and appreciate fully the real aims of the Seminar. We'd like to take some time with you to share these people's stories, their commitments and their questions. And we'd like to think about how we can move forward with audacity and lucidity. We didn't talk about the Seminar with everybody we visited. For some people, it was just an initial contact, but the people with whom we spoke about it expressed interest and enthusiasm for the project. It answers a need for contact with like-minded people and to have time to be able to think and to take a step back from their commitments in order to be able to remain strong and advance in a commitment which is very demanding.*

- Maryvonne Caillaux: *I was born in Algeria, in a family which wasn't a 'pied noir' family, and I stayed there until I was ten. Then I went back to France and it was there that I discovered racism. A while ago, my brother used the internet to find people back in Algeria. He got into contact with a former class-mate. The dialogue is difficult... What do we have to say to each other? This summer he went to Algeria and he received an extraordinary welcome from that family. We have to make progress, but bear in mind that history weighs heavily.*

- Bernadette Cornuau: *For a long time, we've had very close links with families originally from North Africa, now living in France. Since the very beginning of ATD Fourth World, in the estates where we are present, we've known a lot of these families. Joseph Wresinski went to Algeria in 1962...⁶*

- Guendouz Bensidhoum: *We have to find ways to continue expanding our knowledge. My parents are originally from North-West Algeria, near the border with Morocco. I would like to continue to think about the situation of those living in poverty in my own country...*

⁶ " Ecrits et Paroles I ", Editions Saint Paul- Quart Monde, pages 114 - 118

At the same time, in Marseilles, a “Support Group” began to think about the preparation of the Mediterranean Seminar. This group consisted of about twenty people, friends of ATD Fourth World in the region, all with attachments to different places in the Mediterranean Basin. They were interested in supporting, in the long-term, the preparation of the Seminar, in close co-operation with the team of volunteers from the Permanent Forum.

In 2004 and 2005, the Support Group met about every two months at the Marseilles Fourth World House.

During the first meetings, the people who took part exchanged their knowledge about the different Mediterranean cultures and their interest in the lives of the most vulnerable and those who work alongside them in this region. They shared contacts, addresses of friends or people they knew in North Africa, in the Near East and in Southern Europe.

28 January 2004. Extract from transcript:

- Martine Hosselet: ... *We hope that by bringing together small pieces of knowledge that different people contribute, we'll manage to understand better what people from these countries experience...*
- Yassine Bouffedji: ... *My name is Yassine. I've known ATD since 1994. We've had quite a few work camps here in Marseilles and we've built games for the kids. Since then, I've been through some hard times and I haven't been coming as much as I used to... but what are you looking for in Algeria. Is what I'm saying all rubbish?*
- Huguette Redegeld: *No, not at all. It's a particularly moving time for us. We have the feeling that we've begun an adventure together, and we don't know yet where it's going to lead us. To answer your question, we're not trying to get to know the whole of Algeria because that's impossible. I would say that we want to get to know and love Algeria through people who take action to reduce poverty. That's the way I see it. We're not looking to get to know just anyone, or everyone...*
- Yassine Bouffedji: *In Algiers, I know an organisation called Touiza. They're in Algiers and also all over Algeria, even in France, maybe in Marseilles... I have a friend who knows Touiza and who worked for them.*
- Mouna Hasnaoui: *I often go to see my family Tunisia, in Béja and I'm interested by the conditions of people's lives there. During my parents' generation, many poor families were able to buy land in the region because the state was selling it quite cheaply. My family were among the first inhabitants in Béja.*
- Martine Hosselet: *I'd like you to say something about the testimony you wrote for the Letter to Friends around the World no. 59 in August 2004 about when you met a family with a disabled child in Tunisia, on the 17 October...*
- Mouna Hasnaoui: *On that day, another lady and myself went to meet a modest family made up of four people, the father, mother, son and daughter. The father is retired, living off a modest income after working for several years as a mechanic. He was seriously ill when he was two years old and lost one eye so only has sight in one eye. When he got married, they had a son who is now over 20 years old. Unfortunately, this young man is mentally disabled, and has never spoken since he was born. Often he gets angry and breaks everything he can get his hand on. Despite that, you can see that he is surrounded by a lot of love. His parents are too tired, they are too alone and feel isolated, and don't have enough resources to be able to afford a specialist education centre. So his father, since he retired, takes him walking all round the town of Béja, from the morning until lunchtime and then from 2pm to 6pm to tire him out, so that when he gets home, the young man doesn't get so angry and so he doesn't hurt his family or break the objects at home. The parents are very worried that they'll lose their son or that something will happen to him.*

April 2004. The first draft of a presentation of the Seminar is prepared together.

July 2004. The participants reflected on an extract from the proceedings of the first seminar organised by the Permanent Forum in 1981, with correspondents from Africa.⁷

November 2004. The full-time volunteers reported back from the first trips and meetings which took place in September 2004 in Algeria and in Spain.

The theme of the Seminar had at this point been fixed: *“The Contribution of Very Poor Individuals and Families to Cross-cultural Dialogue in the Information Society”* and the participants received two texts to prepare for the meeting:

1) Extract from the contribution of the International Movement ATD Fourth World to the World Summit on the Information Society (Geneva, 2003).

• **“Opportunity or risk?”**

... Many people are positive about the Information Society. One woman participating in a Fourth World People’s University said: *“The Internet is the future, because it helps us find jobs and will create new jobs because some employers are connected to the Internet. You can do your shopping. You can fill in forms (such as taxes). It will be easier for people who have to stay in hospital or who can’t get about. You can speak with people in other countries. It is good for teaching children and for doctors. The Internet is huge, there is a lot of stuff.”*

Others say: *“Computers are like books. There are educational games that help develop intelligence,”* and *“I think that it is needed in all classrooms because it helps children to learn.”*

Others hope to use cell-phones and e-mail to stay in touch with their children who are in the care of the authorities.”

However, not everyone is convinced. Many people whatever their background, are afraid of change while some living in extreme poverty are worried that new technologies will create further barriers. There has to be a guarantee that new technologies are used to benefit people living in extreme poverty rather than deepen their social exclusion

2) Extract from the Mediterranean Seminar presentation folder.

• **“Objective: *Contributing to the debates on the Information Society.*”**

Globalisation can give an image of a world which can be resumed as a single village where development and decisions taken at any one place in the globe will have effects at several levels and in different places. This vision only very partially reflects situations which are more nuanced and diverse than they might first appear.

The first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society, held in Geneva in December 2003, was focussed on the digital divides within countries as well as between countries and continents. It also highlighted the inequalities in access to, communication about and training on new technologies, in particular for young people and children living in very vulnerable situations.

The Seminar will be an opportunity to understand more fully how these challenges are experienced in situations which are particularly difficult; it will enable us to find out what people’s experiences are (why, how and with whom).

Finally, the aim is to highlight the efforts being made and Civil Society’s role in this respect.

⁷ See the entire text in the Appendix page 67

The participants went on to discuss initial elements of knowledge from their daily experiences.

A participant who works at Cimade⁸:

“Mobile phones are important for all people in exile, to exchange family news and for administrative documents. At Cimade, people can have a postal address. Through mobiles, we have a way of contacting them. There are also more and more ‘taxiphones’ in Marseilles (‘phone-home-shops’) where rates for international calls are very good. Chechen refugees manage to communicate with their families via the internet. The internet brings people closer together, but if they are on their own, they feel even more isolated.”

A full-time volunteer from ATD Fourth World confirms: *“Lots of the young people we know in Marseilles have mobile phones. But a mother told me that her daughter has no-one to call... She has the same look as the other young people but she lives in great solitude. Another thing: when the poorest families are part of an organisation, you can see how hard it is to contact them, either because they don’t have a phone line, or because it’s been cut off. We have to go to see them to let them know about what’s going on.”*

September 2004. The participants at the Support Group began looking in earnest for financial support for the Seminar, and at each meeting, they shared their progress in terms of requests and results. Dossiers were sent to Unesco France, to the Regional Council *Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur*, to the *Bouches du Rhône* Departmental Council, to the *Communauté du Pays d’Aix* etc, and to the European Association of the Friends of ATD Fourth World. They also sent appeals to daily and weekly publications, and to the Rotary Club.

August 2004. Article published in the French weekly ‘La Vie’.

“Bringing people closer together in the Mediterranean”:

Every day, the small team of the ‘Mediterranean Permanent Forum’, run by a full-time volunteer from ATD Fourth World, receives correspondence from Palestine, Egypt, Northern Africa, Italy, etc. Letters and e-mails, sent by individuals and small organisations who work on a daily basis with the most vulnerable people in their countries. They share their experiences, their difficulties and the hopes which keep them going, sometimes over several years. They now feel the need to share these experiences in a way which has more life than just paper. They will come to Marseilles in Autumn 2005 for a seminar in which the roles will be reversed: the voices of the prime experts in peoples’ experiences will be listened to by a few delegates from international organisations who have come to listen to them. In order to be able to prepare for this meeting adequately, the Mediterranean Permanent Forum is seeking computers and office equipment of an estimated cost of 2000 Euros.”

Right from the start, minutes from the Support Group’s meetings were sent to a few people as ‘privileged witnesses’ in Cairo, Beirut, Rabat and Jerusalem, who, in turn, supported the team by organising trips where they are based to meet the future participants at the Seminar.

2005: The members of the Support Group began preparing the Seminar in a more concrete sense.

⁸ Cimade: an ecumenical association founded in 1939 to assist displaced people. One of its essential missions currently is to welcome, guide and defend immigrants who find themselves faced with administrative difficulties.

January 2005. They undertook a brain-storming exercise based on the following question: “*People with very different cultures, languages and backgrounds are going to meet for several days. If every participant feels that his or her own individuality is respected, everyone will be able to meet in their diversity. What do we need to do to ensure respect and listening?*”

Starting with this exercise, working groups were set up to prepare for:

- *welcoming the participants and organising accommodation*
- *finding public and private finance*
- *creating a team of interpreters and translators, the working languages of the Seminar being French, Arabic and English*
- *creative workshops during the Seminar*
- *organising meetings between the Seminar participants, members of ATD Fourth World in Marseilles and other organisations*

Each working group met according to their own calendar and reported its progress and questions or issues to the whole Support Group.

March, May and June 2005. Members of the group continued evaluating the registrations to the Seminar. They looked at the ‘mini profiles’ written by the participants, which explained they work they undertook and their commitments, which were attached to their registration form.

The ‘mini profiles’ were a key concept in the preparation. Every future participant was asked to write a few lines about their commitment, the people whose future they were concerned about, their challenges and their hopes. This presentation enabled a deeper exchange to take place between everybody: the Permanent Forum team was careful to explain that they weren’t asking for a CV from every participant but to be able to understand what motivates their commitment, the convictions which drive them forward. They encouraged those who found writing difficult, ensuring that there was someone there to help them express themselves in a language they knew. The profiles were then translated into the three Seminar languages (English, Arabic and French) and sent to every participant as and when they were received, enabling them to get to know each other a little bit before actually meeting. The last presentations only arrived on the first day of the Seminar due to the fact that everybody took this request very seriously, making sure they responded to it despite all the trials and tribulations of daily life.

A few examples of the profiles:

From Alger: “*My name is M.B., I’m twenty-two years old and am a student in my fourth year of architecture. You are probably aware of the housing conditions of many Algerians, especially the most deprived. It would be pretentious of me to attempt to do something about such problems all on my own. What’s most important is first of all to know what the futures inhabitants want. My friend and I went to meet the inhabitants of the Casbah in Alger: we discovered they way in which they appropriated space, re-used existing elements of buildings and above all we realised through them the true force of solidarity.*

What lessons we learnt! After such meetings it will never be possible to envisage architecture in the same way as I used to.

Also, for the last ten years I have been playing the piano and I realised the joy in the children’s eyes when we organised concerts, from which the proceeds were given to them. For these reasons, alongside my studies, I make the most of any opportunity which allows me to understand the needs or the richness of the most deprived; through taking part in voluntary work-camps or groups of reflection on the town’s problems. One thing today is very clear: we won’t manage anything on our own, but together, by listening to and understanding each other, we will be able to improve everyone’s lives. So why don’t we adopt this motto: “Sharing for change?”

From Beirut: *"I, S.M., was born in 1965 in Beirut, in the Sin el Fil el Jdidé district. My grandfather had a house in this neighbourhood, and after my father's marriage, we spent our childhood in this very mixed working-class area where there were people of different religions and nationalities. We knew most people in the neighbourhood because my father had opened a cobbler's shop under my grand-father's house and my mother knew how to do injections, so people asked for her help and in that way she helped my father earn a living for the family. Later, my father also opened a small grocer's in addition to the cobbler's. Our situation improved and my mother continued giving injections but she didn't ask for any money when it was for poor people. At the beginning of the Lebanese war, the Armenian Church brotherhoods asked my older sister to help distribute the aid to the poor and when she came home she told us about what she had experienced... Later, someone in my family suffered a long illness and his children were young. His wife didn't know what to do to care*

for him, to give him the necessary care. I went to look for help from a Socio-Medical Service. When they came I went along too to see what they did. I got to know them and I asked to become a volunteer with them. They accepted and I found what I was looking for. I was a volunteer for a long time. Once, I came across a very difficult family situation and I asked the Service what I could do. They advised me to avoid those kind of situations. During the time I was a volunteer with the Service, I got to know other social centres, who I contacted, and everyone told me to leave the family alone. So I went to the Franciscan Sisters nearby and after telling them about the situation, the sister in charge told me she thought we could do something in the neighbourhood. We made contacts and opened a small space called 'Beitouna' (our house) in February 1999. And I've been there ever since.

... In what I do, I think that listening to teenagers and young people is the most important thing to do because it's the way we can improve the situation for tomorrow's young people."



From Jerusalem:

"I'm fifty-two years old, married and I have five children, of whom two are married. I was born in Morocco and I came to Israel in 1968. I got to know the health organisation a few years ago. They helped me when I was going through a tough patch, and during all my problems they helped to keep the feeling that there is always hope. I joined the Women's Club when I felt that I needed support.

During the first three years, I became active in the community. We organised a fancy-dress operation where we gave out costumes to children for the festival of Purim. I cannot put into words the strong feeling I had when I saw the faces of the little children and their parents when they left the party. I was most struck by the impression that the activity made on new immigrants from Ethiopia; it was a new experience for them. We try to share information at the Club on different

sources of help that are available. I remember a situation when one woman complained that she didn't have enough basic food. I was able to share with her a bit of the food I had received as a contribution and I felt as though it was the best thing in the world, something that I clearly could not have imagined myself just a few years earlier. The last project I'm involved in is a mixed committee of social workers and people. We went on a training programme together to learn how to work together and how to develop projects. It's a new experience for me and I am looking forward to November when we will begin working on a project which hasn't been decided on yet. I feel very proud too of belonging to two groups which are very active in the community. I feel that my commitment to the community in which I live is important and I would like to belong to a group which will lead to changes in the future...

From Lyon:

My name is S.H., I'm fifty-four years old and I'm from Algeria, from the Kabyl region. I'm married and I've got six children.

I worked as a founder for several years in France in a company which built lorries. Then I went back to Algeria to continue working in my profession. In 1998, I had to flee my country when problems of violence arrived in my region.

My asylum request was turned down. For several years I was without any rights, I was unable to work and I had no resources. I couldn't do otherwise. My wife was not able to stay with me.

Finally, my status was regularised in 2003, and I was able to get back to a normal life, work again, have somewhere to live... but I still haven't been

able to live with my wife again. While I was in a very unstable situation, I came into contact with ATD Fourth World. I found out it was founded by a priest, Father Joseph Wresinski, a man who loved the poor. With the Movement, I discovered my family.

As a child, I grew up in poverty and I identify fully with the aims of the movement.

I am committed in Lyon with poor people, excluded people, to defend them, so that they can access their rights like everybody else and live in dignity. I like the Fourth World People's University that we run, because it's the only way to learn how to talk, to get training. I'm learning to become an activist, to defend the poor."

On 8 May 2005, the Marseilles Fourth World People's University worked on the theme of "New Technology".

The Permanent Forum team took part in this day based around one of the themes of the Seminar; "*Modern Means of Communication and Information*". The volunteers and the team presented the seminar in a lively way, the aim being to enable all the members of ATD Fourth World in Marseilles to feel they had an active role to play in the Seminar and in the preparation for it.

During the exchanges, the participants spoke a lot about television, about what you see on it, about mobile telephones and how useful they are compared to landlines, about the internet, etc. The guest speaker, who worked in Communications, explained in detail how the internet worked.

In the morning, the participants had taken part in two writing workshops, a theatre workshop and a painting and manual creation workshop.

The work produced in these workshops on the theme of the day was presented in the afternoon.

Justin Vincent, a Haitian full-time volunteer, presented his creation made from cardboard, glue and paint:

"I've made a small radio because I'm addicted to news. Radio is the most used form of media by those who do not have much money. It's really accessible. At one point when things were really bad in Haiti, it wasn't easy to listen to the news. You had to hide somewhere to listen. At one stage, we could tune into a station which broadcast from Russia (it was a station run by Haitian exiles who were in Russia at that time). It was Radio Progress which gave us news in Creole on what was happening at home in Haiti and in Port au Prince..."

June 2005. A special edition of the Letter to Friends Around the World was published with a translation into Arabic, in addition to English, French, Spanish and Portuguese. In the editorial, the initiative of the Seminar was explained. This edition reported on the exchanges with correspondents from the Mediterranean, contributions from the participants to the Seminar, and asked for thoughts from friends from other regions of the world.

Extract from the editorial “Intercultural Dialogue and Communication”:

“ Throughout history, turning points have marked progress and setbacks in the development of humanity. Events and people have symbolised them (...) Throughout these eras, history has virtually never remembered the contributions of very poor people towards the advancement of humanity. Nevertheless, they have often been the ones who revealed the necessity of integrating our lives together, of recognising the equal dignity of each human being in order to advance towards more justice and brotherhood. As Joseph Wresinski continually emphasised, people living in extreme poverty have often been at the forefront of education, legislative and scientific innovations. He summed up this conviction by saying: “The ideals of humanity originate with the poor”.

Are we now at a major turning point with the onset of the newest forms of communication? As radios and televisions are joined by computers and mobile phones and the internet... It is our responsibility to ensure that the most disadvantaged populations have their place at the heart of today’s debates about our society’s knowledge and information, and about intercultural dialogue... Those people living in extreme poverty... what have we to learn from them? Are we eager to learn whether and how the poorest people would like to use modern means of communication, mobile phones, internet...?”

Some of our friends reacted to this letter, by sending in a contribution to the thought process on the theme of the seminar.

Aliou Sall, Association Sawadi, Senegal.

“... I would say that the poor have always been communicators because it’s through communication that they manage to get together to form small groups to engage in a social dialogue in community actions in order to survive. In other words, communication has always been the strength of the poor. In terms of new information technologies, computers and the internet are still a luxury unknown in some places. On the other hand, radio, television and the telephone are beginning to integrate into the daily lives of populations quite distant from large urban centres... My own experience has led me to run a literacy programme in a rural area in my home region. Using the calculator as a teaching tool was the greatest innovation of this programme of functional literacy training. The participants, generally from poor families, used a calculator for the first time which was an event and which

completely changed their way of seeing things. Each learner, having acquired his or her own calculator, continued to practice using it to get familiar with it and ended up using it in daily activities. But in addition, it opened up to them an even more ‘prized’ tool today: digital and mobile telephones. Through learning and writing the numbers, and using the calculator as an accessory, reading and dialling telephone numbers was no longer a secret for these people, thanks to the fact that they had learnt their numbers. In the same way, turning on the television with a remote-control, switching from one channel to another, became possible for those who had managed to obtain a TV. All this goes to show that the poorest also want to know how to enjoy life; yet access to modern means is difficult for them in this heartless world where the rich continue to get richer and the poor sink deeper and deeper into poverty.”

Martine Berge, from the REPPER network:

“Hello everyone. The editorial in the June 2005 Letter to Friends Around the World made me want to tell you all how much the internet has helped and simplified our lives at REPPER: this network has nearly three hundred contacts in the whole world and looks to help street children. Seven years ago, only 10% had the internet, now, there are only 20% who don't have it..

Information exchanges are more and more frequent, quicker and more efficient. People know about others' experiences and everyone can learn from the examples which interest them. One day, I received a message from Congolese people living in Japan, asking me to recommend an organisation which looked after street children in Kinshasa, their country of origin, because they wanted to help them. I don't know if that would be possible without the internet.

Association Koogl-Taaba, Ouagadougou, Burkina-Faso.

“Hello! ... We were waiting for your “Letter to Friends Around the World” before sending you this reply, and now it's here, we received it on 19 July 2005. ... We read it with great interest and we would like to thank you for renewing our confidence. At this opportunity, we'd like to send you our modest contribution towards the work of the Seminar that you are organising next September and we wish you all the best in your work... Our organisation currently is worried by the famine which is knocking at the doors of our courageous farmers and our families in the villages at the moment, where the harvests from the last season were not sufficient so they are having difficulty making ends meet. Our mortars have fewer and fewer grains of millet... In several regions, including those which have traditionally

Ester Cardellino, from Argentina.

Ester Cardellino from the NGO ‘MAM’ (Movimiento Abolición de la Miseria – Movement for the Eradication of Poverty) reminds us that the only means of communication within their group was speaking; therefore, she has a few preoccupations with regards to modern communication technology, which in her opinion, tends to forget the power of words. She wonders

There is a testimony that you can use if you want to...

Best wishes”



been spared from scarcity, there are fewer and fewer grains, and they are often out of reach of poor peasants' means. The equation is Cornelian... Today's communication revolution presupposes, more than a mere technological revolution, a complete re-organisation of the way in which humanity apprehends the world surrounding it, and then verifies and expresses this perception of the world. New media represent powerful means for education and cultural enrichment, for business activities and participation in political life, for intercultural dialogue and understanding. This technology can be a means of resolving human problems, of promoting people's holistic development, of creating a world governed by justice, peace and love.”

whether this globalisation of technology won't become another Tower of Babel. Aren't international meetings of the powerful just meetings of deaf people, for they don't 'hear' what we learn from the most marginalised? However, she adds: “technology should be welcomed in so far as it doesn't become a means of slavery through manipulation of media which

are in the hands of the powerful, because almost all of that comes by satellite”.

She does give, on the other hand, a precise example of a benefit of technology: “without a doubt, the arrival of mobile telephones has changed our lives. Distances and emergencies were reduced and that enabled us to integrate into the daily life of the small community. Praise God!

For, after the death of Osvaldo and Teresa’s baby, who are members of our group, our leader decided to buy a mobile telephone so that he wouldn’t have to go through another such difficult moment from afar. His attitude was an example to all of us, especially as he bought it with his salary, in monthly payments”.

III/ The Mediterranean Seminar in La Baume lès Aix (Marseilles), from 26 – 29 September 2005, on the theme: “*The Contribution of Very Poor Individuals and Families to Cross-Cultural Dialogue in the Information Society*”

Right from the very first page, the question of *meetings* has been very important in this report: meetings held with the correspondents of the Permanent Forum from all regions of the world, in some cases for over twenty years, and, as you have heard some which have been more recent and have enabled us to meet people who are very committed to very vulnerable people in the Mediterranean. These meetings are due to the preparation of the Mediterranean Seminar with members of the Movement in Marseilles and at the International Centre, of course there have been those daily and intense meetings between members of the team in the last few months of working together on this common project... This word *meeting*, used so often, is in fact only a glimpse through a half-open door on an experience with amazingly rich and unpredictable turns of events.

Things can begin in very different ways...

- Annaïg Abjean, a young woman who had been very involved with the Movement in Lyon, has for several years been posted in Cairo where she works as a project worker for the organisation created by Sister Emanuelle with the rag-men and their families. She decided to write regularly, every month, a long letter in which she shares with the Permanent Forum team her meetings with people living and working in very deprived areas across the whole of Egypt.

- Bernadette Brétière, a full-time volunteer in Méry sur Oise, who's a passionate rugby fan, sent an article about Abdel Benazzi, former captain of the French national rugby team, who had just written a book entitled '*Une vie à l'essai*', ('The Trials of Life') with a preface by Nelson Mandela. In it, he tells his story, a journey full of initiative, of a young Moroccan boy mad about rugby, who travels all over the world going from success to success, but also knowing rejection through racism and suffering physical and mental injuries, before founding an organisation which touches the lives and futures of thousands of deprived young people across the continent of Africa.

- After coming to find out about what the Movement did at Marseille's Fourth World House, Mouna Hasnaoui wrote to us shortly after 17 October, International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. She travelled to Tunisia and wanted to share with us how affected she had been by meeting a very modest family from her home region. She presented the daily efforts these people made simply to survive, and their infinite sensitivity as they live together as a family with a severely disabled adult. She has allowed us to publish her testimony in the next Letter to Friends Around the World.

- At the end of a journey from Jerusalem to Beer Sheva, two young social workers took some volunteers to meet Bedouin families in a town right on the edge of the Negev. A mother made dough which rose in the sun in front of their house, which was a very basic construction. While they were talking to her, her young boy was playing with a mobile telephone without a battery and pretended to ring his father who had gone off in a truck looking for work. His sister, about twelve years old said she had stopped school but dreamed about going back...

... Snatches of interlocking lives, strange echoes from another world, brief meetings beyond borders, moments which might remain without future if wasn't for this deep sense of need of other humans which is present in everyone and without which humanity itself would be incomplete.

Annaïg Abjean, Bernadette Brétière, Abdel Benazzi, Mouna Hasnaoui, the Bedouin lady, just like many other people we met through all the stages of the preparation, were in the end not able to participate in the Mediterranean Seminar. One gave birth a few days before, another had to leave to look after her very ill father. Lots of participants had to make choices; undertaking a journey to France was beyond the capabilities of several people at that particular moment and others found it impossible to obtain a visa. However, all these people gave us a small insight into their universe, inhabited by all the people they work with. It's now impossible to go back in time, to a point before we'd met them, as if we never had. All these people who couldn't be present, along with everyone who took part in the Seminar, have become members of the great network of support and friendship of the Permanent Forum. Their futures touches, interests and in turn commits the Forum's team.

Eugen Brand, Director General of the International Movement ATD Fourth World reminded us with strength in his address at the opening of the Seminar⁹:

“...Thanks to the Permanent Forum team, through the enthusiasm of this team who you already know, we have the impression that we already know you a bit, that we can guess about what's at the heart of your commitments and your actions and how we can advance together. We're sad for all those who couldn't attend. We're with them in thought and we commit ourselves to share our work with them. The world needs every one of you, your countries and your peoples to help to create a new way of thinking about humanity, a new collective intelligence, a new way of action, to free men and women from extreme poverty in every continent of the world. Everywhere in the world, every day, the poorest families have to face extreme insecurity which weakens people and families to their very heart and which breaks their links to the community. A mother from Ireland said this to you – I quote – “I have been on the streets for half of my life and before me, my father and mother were homeless too... You have to have lots of strength to look after your kids, to keep them clean and well behaved. You have to work day and night, you are no longer considered like a human being. Nobody wants to know you. We are families that are being swept under the carpet. Sometimes we are bent under the burden of poverty, but like reeds we force ourselves to straighten up again. All this suffering is hidden, as if it had never occurred. This must be said and it must be changed.”

“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.” That is our reference point for ATD Fourth World. The way ahead of us today is made of questions, of preoccupations that we need to share with you. It is your life experiences, experiences of action and your thoughts which will enable us to deepen these questions, to see them in a new light and to find new responses. Your contributions have already been opening new horizons to us.

You underline the importance of visiting people at home to create a greater closeness, the importance of creating places like 'Beïtouna', which means 'our house', 'the house where we all listen to each other'. And then what the organisation El Ouaha shares with us: “Things don't just happen like that, but everything is possible if you know that the other person is you, no higher, no lower. What you know doesn't belong to you, it belongs to the other, to others like you.” Lots of people emphasise the importance of relying on everyone's experience. Rachel says “young people are the best experts in their own background, on the situations they live.” You say how important it is to enable people to belong to a community, how important it is to not get lost in debates on ideas but to remain focussed on people. Linking your future with the most deprived families is a difficult project. But it is everyone's responsibility, the responsibility of all peoples and of the international community. It concerns everyone who's working towards a more peaceful world. It concerns all those who are committed to Human Rights

⁹ See the entire text in the Appendix page 71

and the indivisibility of those Human Rights. All those who are committed to the environment. It concerns all those who are thinking about the futures of our towns and countryside, all those who are thinking about the short-term and long-term future of our planet. Let's think for a moment of the space, the creativity and the hope which would be opened up to the international community, to every country, if we dared to and managed to deal with subjects which legitimately preoccupy us, by looking for the enlightenment on each of these subjects from those who, due to their economic and social conditions, live in great suffering...

Another issue that we would like to share with you and submit to your thoughts and experiences is this: as, all over the world, we are being constantly reminded of the importance of participation, do we really know what genuine participation of the poorest means? Jean, from Madrid, puts the questions in this way: how can we fulfil the right conditions so that neighbours can meet each other on common ground? And Jean quotes a man who says this to us: "often, when people see a tramp passing by, they say that the man could at least take five minutes to have a wash because water doesn't cost anything. I always want to reply to them that they could take five minutes to think: what do they know about this man's life?"

Still, our societies are not really used to trying to understand the thoughts that very poor people, who don't have degrees, gain from their experiences. Not just to improve the conditions of their lives but to contribute to the future of humanity. The poorest are not taken into account as stake-holders and partners in the field of thought. Today, it is true, we are all witnesses that lots of people try to join the poorest and to be affected by them. However, we still do not measure sufficiently the shock produced by this meeting... In your written contributions which bear witness to your long-term commitments, people among us today with 20, 30 years of commitment, you emphasise clearly that we should not kid ourselves into believing that this meeting is easy, and that trying it and wanting it is enough...

This brings me to another issue that I would like to share with you. Everywhere, this question comes up time and again: who are we? Who are we when we're faced with the vulnerability and the extreme poverty of these families? With this pressing question, each of us has the painful question of suffering: who am I faced with other people's suffering? This is where unbearable loneliness and isolation can start to build up within us and between us, which is destructive if it lasts too long. This is where we run the risk of hurting each other, of getting locked into misunderstandings with other people as well as ourselves... Daring to take the path which leads towards the heart of the despair of the poorest means accepting to go beyond our schemes of reference, whatever these may be; it means accepting that we won't always have the right words, it's accepting silence, accepting that we will get to know ourselves better too. On this path, we need to be surrounded by others, to be supported by and in contact with others.

And isn't it precisely in this way that we have to create links with the Information Society? On the one hand, men and women are inventing, creating and managing communication super-highways, capable of linking businesses, universities and the most diverse groups all around the world. At the other extreme, men and women are living in precarious housing along tracks made almost inaccessible in bad weather. They are confronted with the necessities of survival, with the absence of work and of hope for the future. For the first group, the Information Society is a fertile field where capacities of receiving and transmitting data are increasing indefinitely. For the second group, it is a field that is set aside, whose data is considered as being without importance.

In Bulando, a village in Burkina Faso in Africa, I met an old man who was sitting behind his loom. He sat there, repeating the sacred gestures of a skill passed on by his ancestors. Technological development will catch up with him and his family sooner or later. Will it cut this thread passed on from generation to generation? What will happen to his family, to his grand-children, whose thirst to discover

the world during the Street Library¹⁰ surpassed with so much dignity the hunger that was ravaging their bodies?

Last June, near Bari in Italy, Ana Maria was found at home, ten days after she had died. She was living in a shack. Her four children had been taken away from her. For all the Ana Marias all over the world, what is the meaning of the advances in technology, if she is alone in trying to keep her family alive? The poorest, just like all of us, need an Information Society which is not only able to link data but which really becomes capable of linking people...

Strengthened by the extraordinary history which the community of your countries and people share, the cultures and spiritualities of the Mediterranean Basin, strengthened by all this richness and diversity, who better than you can know what it means to be ignorant of your history, diversity, and infinite richness of humanity? ... As for us, our Movement is committing to continue this adventure that we have embarked on with you beyond this seminar, to continue with each of you and, from that starting point, with all those who are at the heart of your courage, your creativity and your conviction that a future will exist where we learn together how to live together, differently."

When the Permanent Forum team was putting together the programme for the Seminar, they made sure that these issues were built into the rhythm of the meeting. How could we imagine the days, evenings, formal and informal times that we would spend together at La Baume, so that everyone could feel that they were in an atmosphere of friendship, where they were listened to and respected? How best could we take into account the different languages, the different ages, the different strengths and weaknesses and the different dietary customs that everyone had, very much linked to their identity? How could we create times for members of the Movement from Marseilles, committed to the fight against poverty and social exclusion, to meet other organisations working in partnership with ATD Fourth World? How could we tackle the Seminar's themes, in such a way that everybody could make a contribution, based on their own experiences, but remaining focussed on what they learn from those who have the fewest opportunities to make themselves heard?

In the weeks leading up to the Seminar, there were several versions of the programme, just like an item of clothing being made by a tailor has several fittings, being adjusted several times before the final version is ready. In the finalised programme that everyone received when they arrived, plenary sessions, small reflection groups and work in creative workshops were well balanced and alternated. During the small reflection groups, exchanges on different themes took place through discussion and reflection; during the creative workshops, it was manual work and everybody's creative talents that were sought after. The facilitators of the groups and those leading the workshops enabled communication and expression, and there was a 'contact person' in each group, responsible for answering any participants' practical queries.

Three themes were dealt with during the exchanges:

- **Daily Intercultural Dialogue:** in the different neighbourhoods where the participants live, how do people from different backgrounds meet; which initiatives enable this? Are the most deprived, the most vulnerable and the poorest linked to other people?

¹⁰ Street Library: regular and long-term activity which introduces books, art and other tools (especially IT) for access to knowledge to children from deprived backgrounds and their families, where they live (e.g. on a pavement, at the foot of a stair-well, in isolated places in the countryside, etc.)

- ***Communication and New Technology***: Can the most isolated individuals and families make use of communication tools which are becoming more and more widespread in the world and in their environment? In which ways are these tools of use to them in order to be recognised in the world of others?

- ***Commitment to families in destitution, who are seeking to live in dignity***: fighting poverty requires long-term commitment. What support do those who carry out such a commitment in a voluntary or professional capacity need in order to continue?

On the last day, each discussion group came up with suggestions to support each other in our future commitments.

Every morning, in a short plenary session, the Permanent Forum team gave some feedback of what had been said the previous day, and gave a few pointers for the day ahead.

The second day of the Seminar was a special day. The participants spent the afternoon in Marseilles, where each small discussion group had the opportunity to meet an organisation whose members are committed to working closely with very poor individuals and families. The organisations were contacted by the Permanent Forum and accepted enthusiastically the suggestion of welcoming the participants and having an exchange with them.

At the end of the afternoon, in the 'Place du 26e Centenaire – Place de l'Espérance' (*Square of the 26th Centenary – Square of Hope*) we had a short ceremony at the Commemorative Stone in honour to victims of poverty, inaugurated by Marseille City Council and the organisation 'Marseille Espérance' (Marseilles Hope) in 2001.

In the evening, the Seminar participants met members of ATD Fourth World from the region, in the Mistral meeting room, for an evening of entertainment and music.

Programme

Sunday 25 September 2005.

The first participants arrived from Egypt at nine o'clock in the morning. Sameh and Mahmoud arrived at La Baume, feeling rather tired after their night flight and probably a little lost in a different country. The plan was that they would quickly get to know the welcoming team, then have a short rest before sightseeing in Marseilles with Guillemette Caulliez.

The rest of the participants arrived gradually throughout the day, with people coming from Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, Turkey, Spain, Italy, the United States. Several participants travelled from Paris or Marseilles as they had already arrived, a few days earlier. There was a lot of coming and going of cars in the Aix countryside: between the centre of La Baume and Marignane Airport, the Aix en Provence TGV station, and coach station.

There were many smiles and reunions of people who had already met during the preparatory journeys. Happy astonishment at finally seeing people in the flesh – people they had previously only known by their names. Everyone received a picture of the other participants. Painting and wire creation workshops took place with tables and easels inviting everyone to approach.

Conversations that started little by little over the telephone or the Internet many months ago were suddenly brought together in the same place. It became clear that each person was part of it and that they had overcome all obstacles to get here, and that as a part of this seminar each person would be contributing to the success of the next four days... and this was just the start.

There were forty-nine participants in total. Each person experienced astonishment, expectations, fear, surprise and happiness but also real regret when they realised that several people who were preparing to come were stuck in their countries because they were unable to get visas for the trip: Mohamed, Hadia, Azzeddine, Nassima, Tewfik et Tahar.

In the evening, everyone met at the "Acampado"¹¹, a large room with large bay windows opening onto a shady patio. The chairs were set out in a semi-circle. On the wall at the back of the room there was a sail from a sailing ship which was lit up from behind by a projector. Brushes and paint were set out nearby. Other materials were hung throughout the room creating a warm atmosphere. An improvised orchestra welcomed us, with Hani Khalil on the electric piano, and Dan Kenningham and Philippe Barbier on the drums. Immediately, Michel Vienot and Martine Hosselet invited each participant to take two minutes with someone they had not yet spoken with, to say what they enjoy most in their life. As soon as this happened the joyful sound of voices in different languages started and then following this without a transition everyone was invited to get up and to say their first name and one word which they had brought to the meeting. Without any awkwardness or shyness, the participants got up and the words just came to them. Each one came up and chose a colour with which they painted their chosen word, in their own language, on to the sail of the ship. Words like: *Diversity, mixing of peoples, meeting, liberty, optimism, refugees, never abandon, mortar, accepting differences, comprehension, lets go, unite, trust, love...* which were written in Arabic, French, Hebrew, Turkish, Italian, English, and Armenian. Hani Khalil and Andy Tooms translated the words as they were painted.

It was a simple and moving activity which put into perspective the humanity of each person whilst the projector's light emphasised the concentration and the beauty of the faces, hands and bodies leaning towards the sail, writing these words which told of their expectations for the seminar.

¹¹ Acampado: word in the Provençal dialect for a meeting place. It comes from the verb 's'acampa: s'assembler: which means to return home after the day, and the noun 'camp': which signifies a meeting, coming together.

This was followed by the passing around of a basket filled with objects brought by the participants. This suggestion came from the team of the Permanent Forum and was explained in their last letter which was sent to each person just a few days before the seminar. It asked them to bring an object, a story, a fairy-tale, ... in fact, to bring an "intermediary" which would allow them to continue to get to know each other in a deeper way over the next few days. Each person welcomed the suggestion with an unexpected simplicity and enthusiasm and therefore on this evening, the basket was

overflowing with an odd assortment of objects, often of a very personal nature:

A wedding dress, a scarf given by their children, a line drawing, a crust of bread, a clown's hat, a slide show on a portable computer, a family photo, a series of Lebanese proverbs, a recently obtained passport...

The evening was rounded off with tea and cakes, the end of a long day of travelling and full of different emotions.

Monday 26 September 2005: " Living together, or daily intercultural dialogues "

Opening session.

In the morning, for the opening session, a delegation of members of ATD Fourth World Movement Marseilles joined in with the participants. They included friends of the Movement who have a professional commitment to a society which includes everyone, friends involved in running the Fourth World Peoples University, fathers and mothers of families living in difficult conditions who have decided to face it together with others, and volunteers from Haiti, Reunion Island, and Poland who are committed through the work of the Movement in France to discovering the difficulties and the courage of its poorest citizens. They were all very moved and proud to put on the interpretation earphones which allowed them to hear each person express themselves in their own language.

Habiba, whose children participate in one of the street libraries in Marseilles, spoke with Zohara during a coffee break. Zohara, who came from Jerusalem yesterday has been living there since she emigrated in 1968. She emigrated from Morocco which is also where Habiba comes from... At first they talked shyly, hesitating between using French and Arabic, searching for their words. However when they got onto the subject of family, and their children and grandchildren growing up surrounded with the fear and pride of their parents, it was with much happiness

The Seminar's opening session was chaired by Claude Lasnel. The guest speakers sat on the platform in front of a huge map of the Mediterranean Basin which shimmered from the North to the South and from the East to the West. There were no borders painted on this map. It was painted at the Fourth World House in Marseilles. It was a long, painstaking job, done by around ten people over a period of several weeks. Only the mountains, undulations, and expanses of water separate us. It was the expression of hopes which had made this meeting possible. This meeting, that was about to start .

Pierre Rastoin the President of La Baume Centre officially welcomed the participants. For many years, he held political responsibilities in Marseilles, he was Deputy Mayor and District Mayor. He has now retired but has known about ATD Fourth World for more than thirty years.

He first met ATD Volunteers in a housing estate in one of the northern suburbs of Marseilles "*in the middle of nowhere*". He admits that since then his ideas about life and people have changed a lot. He reminds us that La Baume, whose beauty is nothing like an emergency housing camp, is driven by the same spirit. It's a centre in which the central values are free access for all, training, listening, and free debate. "*Your presence here today is a seed of peace, a peace so fragile, which is priceless. The very poor - who are often the first*

victims of conflicts organised by the richest, most powerful countries – must have a voice in the dialogue between men and women of good will, because this dialogue is the only route to peace. Your Permanent Forum is where this dialogue takes place. It is a blessing to host your Seminar at our centre."¹²

Eugen Brand, General Director of the International Movement ATD Fourth World, as well as Huguette Redegeld, the Vice-President, reminded us that the Movement has felt the need to enter into contact with people and associations from the Mediterranean region for a long time, yet it is only now that this seminar is taking place because the Movement progresses step by step, according to human and financial possibilities. The Movement also takes its time, time for mutual discovery and meetings, and is concerned about people being free to be themselves with respect to each other. What unites these associations and people is the determination that the poorest will be liberated from the harsh conditions they live in.

The theme of the Seminar is perhaps surprising to some: "*The Contribution of very poor individuals and families to cross-cultural dialogue in the information society*". It's an unusual way of reflecting on actions that fight against poverty; but yet, it corresponds to what everyone is experiencing in this current day and age, the poorest along with everyone, and this is true for the entire international community.

The Information Society Summit was held in Geneva in 2003 and in Tunisia in 2005. The questions that were discussed in these meetings concern everyone, not just technicians, intellectuals and academics, but also the poorest and therefore the experience of the poorest on this subject should be made public.

The French National Commission for UNESCO¹³, as well as Dr Ismaïl Serageldine, director of the Biblioteca Alexandrina (in Egypt), who were unable to participating in this opening session, made known their strong support and their hopes for the success of the work to be done at the seminar.¹⁴

The Creative Workshops.

Before starting to reflect on the different themes of the Seminar, five different workshops were proposed to the participants: painting, run by Dan Kenningham; wire creations, with Philippe Barbier; new technologies, with Emmanuel Consolini; theatre, with Michel Vienot; and calligraphy (in Latin, Arabic and Hebrew characters) with Nouredine Boudier.

Imagine for an instant a forest of multicoloured wires in a heap on a long table, just nearby on another there are reed pens, inks and sheets of untouched poster paper; also painting pallets, brushes, and easels which invade the patio under an outside corridor leading to the meeting rooms. In one of the rooms, the carpet on the floor waits for those who are going to take risks in the theatre workshop with Michel Vienot, who asked those interested to join the group for the whole of the Seminar. And elsewhere, in the big hall where the plenary sessions were held, six computers linked up to Internet will allow some exchanges with others far away, or to write a 'blog'...

... Few words were exchanged, rather there was an atmosphere of deep concentration, and even mystery behind the conspicuously closed door of the theatre workshop... Each person allowed their hands and bodies to create and started to become closer to each other as their minds were emptied of clichés and little by little their tension relaxed. Sometimes there were difficulties and insecurities, but it was in kindly surroundings, and under the direction of competent people.

"On a human level, people are getting to know each other better. (...) At first, I tried to avoid getting directly involved, but the work was very interesting. I can see clearly now that I had some prejudices; others were not so prejudices. I think finally that there was more of a capacity for dialogue between people who were very different rather than between people who were similar." (A participant in the theatre workshop)

"I saw that people were very concentrated on what they were doing and that many things were created. The meaning of one of these was "Together, walk towards the future". Someone else made a sheep, as there are many in

¹² See the entire text in the Appendix page 70

¹³ UNESCO: United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organisation

¹⁴ See the entire text in the Appendix page 68

their country. It was extremely well made: a big ball of hair with little feet. He wanted to explain everything that you can do with a sheep: use the wool, make leather, and meat. It is a very important source of wealth and security." (Philippe Barbier, leader of the wire workshop).

Small discussion groups.

The afternoon's work was an invitation to each person to explain very simply who the people are that they meet through their work or their commitment. Where do these people come from, what are their strengths, their weaknesses? In what places do they meet? What projects are they putting in place? ... It's about very simple things which affect every day life. The goal of the exchanges is to give a face to the poorest people. They are living breathing people and not social categories or statistics.

In sharing each person's testimony some very powerful moments were experienced. We saw this clearly through the transcription of the tapes which recorded the precious content of these sessions. We discovered what the inhabitants of certain isolated 'douars' were going through. They have to organise their life without water or electricity. We also heard what refugees were experiencing in the confined life of camps blocking their horizons, what those suffering with leprosy must endure because of fear despite the progress made in medical treatment.

"I think that the hamlets surrounding my home are the poorest because the people don't have work. Most children leave school at seven years old. There are many children who die because of toxic materials and this is because the hospital is more than ten kilometres away. At the moment, we are offering literacy courses and now the situation of some women is starting to improve. They are starting to know how to read names of places on the buses and so can take the bus to the hospital. People are suffering a lot because they have to walk several kilometres to get water. I started a little coffee shop and when we have the time, we get together with the young people and we speak about what we want to create together." (Hassan)

"At home, I think that the very poorest are the refugees. In terms of health, those who live in the

camps are not regarded very positively by the rest of society. They only receive very basic medical services there. In the biggest camp, which is at least one square kilometre in size, there are eleven thousand inhabitants. There is one chemist and one doctor. There is only one school for boys and one for girls." (Wafa)

"95% of the lepers are the poorest of the poor. They are always very isolated because of the traditions and customs of society which come from the era when leprosy could not be cured. It was also considered as a sickness caused by a "curse". This isolation is the result of several factors: family, psychological, economic, and cultural." (Nader)

There are worse things than rejection. In order to live together with others, is it not first important to just exist? To exist 'officially' because a lack of civil recognition of the parents will also be handed down to the next generation. It is also just as essential in the creation of our personal and collective identity to exist in the eyes of those around us.

"There are people too poor to register their marriage with the state because that costs too much (for the medical examination, for the documents that it is necessary to provide)." (Hala)

"A woman who is married to a man without being registered with the state cannot give birth to her child in the public services because she is still seen as being officially single. These children don't have any rights, unless it is the "right to go to prison"." (Thérèse)

"These children are not considered in any statistics. In our program we can say that approximately 3% of poor children we meet have no identity. This number is increasing from one generation to the next." (Hala)

"During a meeting fifteen years later, young gypsies that had previously told me they hated school told me that in reality they loved it because they were recognised in an essential element of their cultural identity: music." (Claude)

"It is important to exist for someone and to express this to others: to be able to say who I am, where I come from and what I would like. For me, moments where we can share have always been very important. The sharing should be two way: from one human being to another. When people are there holding out their hands (begging) , I think of an African proverb: 'The hand that gives is always above the hand that receives'. When we are able to shake hands, its different: there is no hand above or below. " (Jean-Pierre)



"What strikes me in what you are saying is the desire of these families to stay together. Let me give one example, of a young couple. The man is in prison. The prison is very far from where the family lives. The young woman has to take an overnight bus trip that lasts eight to ten hours with the same on the return journey in order to visit her husband. Sometimes she takes their young child with her. You can imagine what that is costing her and the effects on her young child. But it is important that this child has contact with his father... People don't see what these families are trying to build together. They only see the fact that the man is in prison. " (Vincent)

This closeness with destitute people and families touches those who are deeply involved with them. It places them in the middle of intense dilemmas and leaves them wondering if they have the capacity to invent paths of possibility between their role as witness, and their responsibility to act when faced with such injustices.

Extracts from a discussion:

"- It is important to see the problems that bureaucracy can cause. This is with general administrative questions as well as laws. (Vincent)

- What Vincent said raised the question of knowing to what limits we will accept situations when the rules are unjust. In our work with the families, how much should we get involved in trying to change the rules? When we get involved in changing the rules, sometimes it's impossible. But sometimes, we manage to make some changes.

As a social worker, I ask myself these questions when I am working with laws which have not been adapted to people who are living in poverty. When someone has not got the necessary income or if I must work with institutions that are no good, there are problems. (Adi)

- It's completely obvious that it's no use voting in a new law if it is not suitable. The laws have to be worked on at the same time as working with people. There is a need for both. (Thérèse)

- I think also that we need both: working on laws whilst being close to people who are going to be affected by them. At the same time the means and necessary tools need to be used so that the most destitute people can bring their vision of things to the table. I would add that after this it would be necessary to surround oneself with people who are qualified to translate these propositions into legislation. " (Martine)

" I am often confronted with this dilemma in my work. I look after a family and the water had been cut off from them by the State. I work for the State! It's as if part of my body that cut this family's water off! " (Rachel)

" All the basic services reveal the poor population. When we installed electricity, brought drinking water, and created a school, we brought problems because we made a difference between the poor and the poorest. Before we all lit our houses in the same way, we drank the same water. Now it is necessary to pay for electricity and water at the end of the month. Children go to school but the children of the poorest are obliged to work with their parents. These services have made poverty even more visible." (Ali)

However, this desire to deepen our mutual acquaintance with the poorest opens onto a new understanding of their energy and their own capacity to act. They get together on occasions for certain initiatives, and they enable us discover another way of living together. We realise that their little known strength and courage has influenced the seminar's participants' way of seeing, thinking and acting.

"It is often during dramatic events or a catastrophe that we meet each other: for example, when water is cut off for several days because of a strike or a demonstration. In this case, people help each other a lot." (Wafa)

"With the fishermen as well, it's the dramatic events, the shipwrecks, the loss of work tools that bring about meetings between people. There is a lot of solidarity amongst them." (Sameh El)

"The village where I was born is a poor village like most of the rural villages in developing countries where there are no real differences between rich and poor. The village is isolated, there is no road, no school, no drinking water. In this community, like the majority of rural communities, people are used to looking after their own affairs. These are organised communities which run well, they have institutions, know-how, and shared values. They share irrigation water, they run the mosque, the community affairs, and village relations. There is a way of doing things. A project to bring water was started after the drought in the 80s. There was a terrible lack of water. The villagers had to go ten to fifteen kilometres to get water. They called on everyone's solidarity. They contacted people who came from the village but who worked elsewhere, like me. Coming back to the village to examine the problem made me think about how other people through their own intuition had started drinking water projects. In a much more modern way, we created an association, but an association made up of all the villagers: that meant that even the children who lived elsewhere were included. What they could bring was money and technological knowledge. Also, these are the people who can help resolve conflicts in the community because they have a bit of perspective being further away. It's a way to bring back the competencies of villagers who have gone to the towns. A way they can help the village. That is why it is so important. The villagers wanted to resolve the problem. We the villagers who live elsewhere, we said to our families: here today these are the modern ways of being organised, and the ways of modernising your institutions, and ways to invest your values in modernity. That allowed us to let the young people to participate in the running of the community, but also let the women have their say in the projects. Drinking water should be connected to the houses, not to

the spring. For us, it is important to be there, to support the community, to work with them and not to do it for them." (Ali)

"In the neighbourhood where I live, people live in very small houses. They meet each other a lot in the street. Often you can see a table and two upturned garbage bins used as chairs. People drink coffee or else they play a game. The street is really the place for games and meetings for children and young people... Even if the houses are little, people meet a fair bit in the houses because they visit each other... A woman that we know very well, and who used to be a prostitute, often brings people who are living on the street home. That causes her problems. She was told not to have visitors at her house but she said: "I've slept on the street and I know how hard it is. I cannot leave someone else to experience this without opening my door to them..." (Thérèse)

In one of the working groups, the exchanges addressed the question of the future for young people and the importance of listening to them, to go and meet them to better understand them and to change projects to include them.

Some extracts:

" - What I hear from the staff of our association is how much they suffer to see young people who are really closed off from others and who have a hard time to respond to their project. After a while they realise that this is because these young people stay in their houses, they never leave their house. (Pierre)

-When we understand the person better, our spirit has another vision of things, our point of view changes. (Susie)

- Because we know the young people better or have seen another side of their life, of young people or of poor people, we are capable of changing our project so that it corresponds better to them. (...)

- A young person can share with me when they are learning. That is the moment when I can learn things with them, from them. Every day, we learn from the young people. A young person should be taught discipline because there is no discipline on the street. There is a master, a teacher, who is there to give something to them, for them. There

are two breaks in the day, that's when we talk about what the young person did: 'What did you do yesterday? – I saw a film. – What was the film?' . We enter into a discussion. For example, during Ramadan, a young person was away for three days. I knew that he came from a very poor family and that they had a problem with housing in his family. They lived in a slum. He had the flu but it was badly looked after and degenerated into pneumonia. He invited me to have some tea with him. The furniture of the housing and the environment made an impression on me. I discovered his reality at that moment. It really affected me. It really affected me. This young person who was sick and who kept smiling. When he saw me, he wanted to get up out of a kind of respect for me: my teacher, he's here. And I think that this young boy could never have imagined that one day I would be there, at his house. You had to see his environment, the deteriorated state of everything... but with the smile and still keeping up the tradition of welcome." (Si M'hamed)

" Every Wednesday afternoon I do a Street Library in a neighbourhood with the children who are there. There are three hundred apartments. One third of the families come from Maghreb, one third come from Turkey and the other families are very poor French families. In the last week of July, right in the middle of the summer holidays, we offer a great week of workshops where people who know how to do something can share what they know with those who don't. This has been happening for six years now. I find two things really excellent: the first is that there are young people who we don't know beforehand who come to help us. They come from middle class backgrounds. About forty of them come here, just to share and meet others. The second thing is that, for the first time in the year, all the communities, everybody, comes together to experience this great event. And cultural differences disappear. We have three hundred children and their parents. We don't know where they come from and there is no exchange of money. Its totally free. Money disappears, and that's a rare thing in our society. This year, the final party was really appreciated because a group of young people did folk dances. The whole neighbourhood was dancing! It was amazing because people had been saying that the youth from this neighbourhood were beyond saving... " (François)

Yves told us about his work in a voluntary association. It's a drop-in centre which accepts, especially in recent months, young refugees who are minors, that is to say, they are fifteen, sixteen or seventeen years old, who arrive without family and who don't know anyone. They make contact with them on the street, and they are sent to hostels who house, feed and look after them. In the afternoon, they go to the association that is in charge of teaching them a language they don't speak and that they have difficulties learning. There are also other workshops, where projects to meet with young people who are high school students are developed. These young immigrants also get legal and psychological aid here. When they arrive, they go through several countries in unimaginable conditions. Some continue on to the Northern countries, but most decide to stay. They all talk about war in their country, and some have tragic pasts. Yves told us about a young person who is sixteen years of age:

" I asked him if what he eats in the hostel where he lives is good. He looked at me, and said: 'I eat what people give me, because whenever I eat something, I think of my mother.' Leading on from that, he told me that he escaped when he was eleven, he left his mother and his two brothers and sister, because he saw his father killed in front of him. He was alone for four years, travelling through different countries. You can imagine the type of risks facing a boy of fourteen, and fifteen years old... But he is always very curious to get to know things, to learn. He wanted to read, and he wanted to read poetry. I took him to a museum where he discovered the remains of an old temple from the town he comes from. He was very proud and happy... Young people are sent by the hostels to a school where they are taught the language of the country and several subjects. Certain young people are completely unable to write their name. They do not know how to read or write. They tell you (they hide it at first, but then they are able to tell you) that they never went to school... And they are sixteen or seventeen years old. There, there are really lots of things to do... "

At the end of the discussions on the theme of the poorest communities in an intercultural

dialogue, each group shared important points from their discussion with the rest of the group.

Here are some of them:

" We want to make the transition from 'doing for' to 'doing with' ". (Jona)

" For me, the question of 'complete integration into society starts with myself. Its about mixing with others, but that starts with me. And, to work together, I really have to change my way of seeing things, my way of thinking, in order to enter into a dialogue with others. " (Tahany)

" First we have to agree to work with the poor and we have to agree to be completely available. Then we need to work in partnership with the poor and integrate them into society. Finally, and this is the most important in my opinion: to work to support the poor so that they can be proud of themselves and find self confidence. Poverty is not shameful. " (Nouraldin)

" During the mask making workshops for the Mardi Gras carnival, lots of people came from everywhere, I think that helped to integrate people. We learnt that each person is capable of showing and sharing their experiences. All of us can be creative. It isn't necessary to be an artist. Little by little, children show us their talents, what they are capable of doing. At first it is difficult because everyone is not confident in themselves. What is essential is to work as a group and to share responsibilities. " (Emma)

The conclusion of the discussion was that *" The strength that a group has cannot be ignored. It seems so obvious, but it is important to remember this. " Also highlighted was the importance of training a team: " Teams form little by little, with people from the grass-roots, with those responsible for different organisations, but not in an isolated way. " (Claude)*

" I met an engineer who had left his job and became homeless. He said to other homeless people: I will teach you about computers because you have accepted me. He started to give them lessons. They wanted to learn from him, but not from a teacher. That is also true for street children who have problems. Its better to have one of their own to help them. They want someone who has been through the same experiences. It is important to help people in difficulty so that in the

future they can help others who are in difficulty. " (George)

The evening.

Surprise: The 'Acampado' room had been set up in a different way. A platform was backed by the wide bay windows which had been blocked out with material whose colours were warmed by the light of the projectors.

Michel and Jean were offering a 'getting to know you journey' for the participants. They were using the objects that everyone had brought with them and put in the large basket. These objects would be used over the next four days to help them to get to know each other bit by bit, with respect for what each person wanted to tell about themselves.

... Emma held up the photo of the children who are the reason for her commitment and gave a little presentation of each child. Wafa explained, with a crust of bread in his hand, that when there is bread in the house, the family feels safe because at least their daily life is guaranteed. Si M'hamed brought a CD Rom which presented his association – he suggested showing it the following day. Thérèse and Sarkis wrote Lebanese poems and proverbs whose translation made life difficult for the interpreters, bringing us close and showing the humour and wisdom that all cultures have...

Later on that night, conversations continued in little groups under the patio, with the help of the interpreters or by calling on the linguistic abilities of each person. Certain enthusiasts started painting again by the light of the projectors. Others started a percussion jam session. Those in charge of groups had a meeting to see how things were going with the Permanent Forum team.

The first day of exchange finished with happy amazement but also with a little self restraint, as if everyone saw how fragile these privileged moments were: being side by side with people who were so different.

Tuesday 27 September 2005: " Communication and New Technology "

Plenary Session.

During this plenary session, several speakers made reference to a concern raised on Monday in the little groups: a concern about listening to everybody and how to identify the people that we listen to least.

" I have known ATD Fourth World for forty years. It has changed my personal life and my attitude to my work. What I really learnt of importance was to listen to the voice of those who are not heard and to see those people that no-one sees. " (Jona)

" I heard that in Marseilles the town authorities were invited to come to a very poor housing estate (...) with the concern that it was important to build the town with all its components, and not to forget anyone. That made me think a lot (...) How can we do something like that in the town where I live? " (Thérèse)

" Regulations, laws, and rights have not put tools in place for listening to the poorest, for hearing those in extreme poverty. There are decision makers who know how to listen but most of the time the system suffocates any listening. They should highlight this failing, that there is no provision of tools and instruments for listening to the nearly invisible people, the poorest, the miserable ones. " (Ali)

" The dialogue that you have held here this morning is a kind of extraordinary gift for all these families, for all the families who suffer in all our countries. What you have created here between us is of fundamental importance for all the poorest. " (Eugen)

Small discussion groups.

How are the very poor part of the modern world?

According to the image Eugen Brand used in his opening speech: *" On the one hand, men and women are inventing, creating and managing communication super-highways, capable of linking businesses, universities and the most diverse groups all around the world. At the other extreme, men and women are living in precarious*

housing along tracks made almost inaccessible in bad weather... The first group has a fertile field where capacities for receiving and transmitting data are increasing all the time. The second group, has a field that is set aside, whose data is considered as being without importance "

The work in small groups allowed us to exchange about things which have been tried with the most destitute in different technological domains, and in different places. This work showed how modern technology can take the shame from families who are the furthest away from it. It can give them a new liberty by opening other doors to them rather than the street or begging. When research is done together, it is done with the full participation of the interested subjects. It was highlighted that learning the language of the country where the most destitute are living, as well as learning to read and write are indispensable and fundamental tools without which any other learning becomes extremely difficult.

It seemed useful to reaffirm that the most destitute have potential, knowledge and know-how and it is very important that this should be acknowledged and deemed valuable so they can dare to learn new things.

" Development through sharing and social interaction with the poor is a true step towards success and a better future. Accepting others is an important step towards the development of society, the society of the poor. It's important to recognise that the poor have abilities and energy that should be tapped into. " (Sameh)

Positive initiatives were referred to:

" In my country, an NGO working in the education sector organised a large scale campaign to encourage access for all to computers and the Internet. The project team went around the whole country in a truck that had computers set up in the back of it. They went to the towns and to the country areas. Everywhere they went, parents were very happy that their children could experiment with the computers and learn the necessary skills. " (Burçu)

" The street children have abandoned school. UNESCO sent computers which the children used

to learn Arabic, to learn to read and write. They accepted it well. It is called the "parallel school". It works very well. From the capital they communicate with other schools and with street children from other towns who are in cybercafes." (George)

" The basic technology for everyone, just as much for the Roms as for the rest of the population is the mobile phone. The computer is not yet considered by them as a means of communication with the outside world. They use computers mainly for playing games. We used the camera most of all. The children themselves used it to do a survey of people from the neighbourhood. A video was produced. The film was seen in the whole town. It was interesting because it showed very different contrasting experiences of life shown one after the other. It was an extraordinary moment of communication. When the children presented the film, they were very proud because they were speaking about things that they knew a lot about. " (Emma)

" I don't use the new technologies much but I preach for development. I am involved with people who have no fixed address and who were very entrenched in their excluded situation. Our association opened a coffee shop where these people could be heard, and find respect and the support of a group. This has meant that now, on an individual level, these people feel strengthened. They go outside their neighbourhood, and they are very open towards people in the rest of their neighbourhood. They take initiatives now: looking for work, participating in a newspaper where they give the neighbourhood news by doing interviews. For four years now, the association has been offering information technology courses (...) The course helps them to adapt to this digital revolution which will open many doors to everyone. Personal relationships help them a lot. There is strength that comes from being heard, and from meeting others – this helps people to make progress. This has helped some people to be able to try and use the computer. They would not have done it otherwise. " (Yves)

" Being able to use the space of liberty that the Internet offers is a long process. Where we come from there are very religious families. The women of these families are unknown. They are totally isolated because the men don't let them go out. But, they have started to work with computers. This gives their existence meaning. It has been a total upheaval. It has given an astonishing result: some of these women receive social aid. Now that they are experts in information technology, they have overtaken the social workers. We've noticed a big gap. I think that the computer and modern technologies open the horizon to unknown and unpredictable outcomes. We need to be aware that they exist and to do that can help this to happen because it can be very useful for these families. " (Jona)

Negative aspects of this technological evolution were also raised:

" When I went to visit the families, I saw that they had a television. Then they got a mobile phone. It did reduce their entrenched solitude a bit. However, it created difficulties also because it meant that there was more debt. " (Pierre)

" We have a big problem with cybercafes. Most people don't have computers at home and that's why the children of very poor families go to these cafes. They go to websites that are not very suitable or nice. At the moment young people like to discuss who succeeded in having relations with a girl over the Internet. I find that it is very attractive to them because it is as if they entered into an imaginary world. I think that should lead us to have programmes which educate these young people about using the computer in a desirable fashion which will help them benefit from it later in their education and their knowledge. It concerns us to see the Internet used as a site for prostitution. " (Nouraldin)

" Some kilometres from our place, there are cybercafes which are not negative in my opinion. Its about education. Young people cannot talk about sexuality at their own places. In their family, they have no one that they can tell their problems to. Internet is thus a means to talk about them a bit. But we recently we saw for ourselves what one of the dangers was. There was someone who dreamed of a European girl who had corresponded with him over a period of three or four months. But she didn't care about him. When

she said: *I'm going to come and visit your town he took her seriously and got everything ready to welcome her for a visit. But she then said: No, it was a game! When he learned that it was a game, he committed suicide. The work that we have to do with the young people is to inform them that the Internet is not real in this field and that the internet is a tool which should be used to discover the world.* " (Hamid)

We reflected about the future. How do these means of communication (using new technology) make information more widely known and circulated? How do they bring people a new network of relationships?

Adi told us about how much the telephone is a big part of life in the prisons of his country. However, there is one telephone for two hundred people and prisoners must divide the time up between themselves in hourly brackets, each cell having it's own time slot. Some time slots, like the evening, are very sought after. The time slots are allocated according to the differing status of prisoners. Telephone cards are an exchange currency just like cigarettes because money is forbidden. The cabins are always being used. After this, some people illegally introduced mobile phones and that has changed the life of the prisoners. The mobile phone allows them to meet new people; some proved a new creativity in extending their network of relationships. The prisoners, for example, found a number which corresponded to the same line in seven countries. Like this they were able to talk to other people and something different happened in their lives.



"I was in touch with groups of disabled people who were begging in the street. A woman, the leader of the group, said one day in public: "I want to stop begging, I want to do something else". She had been begging since she was seven years old and she was now in her forties. We took the time to understand what she wanted to do. She

ended up saying: "To get out of this I need to have a little business enterprise". And she knew that in another country there were people who stopped begging for a living. She needed to know how these people had done it. We looked for collective solutions together, what paths others had taken to get out of poverty. Knowing that others have been able to set up a little business enterprise gave courage to these people who begged and showed them some concrete solutions. Today the Internet allows each person to bring something of themselves and put it on a site – they can let their own experiences be known. There is a lot of knowledge that is expressed and we can have access to it. However, the knowledge of "how to get out of extreme poverty" is not on there. That would be a tool which would permit communities to exchange some very concrete knowledge between themselves. " (Jean-Pierre)

"I'm talking about young people, children, adults who have suffered from extreme poverty in their history. As soon as there is something to learn, they think they wont be able to because they have had so many failures in learning other skills that they say: 'I wont be able to do it'. When faced with failure after failure, its not enough to take the fear of humiliation away. My experience with ATD Fourth World is that it is always through sharing knowledge that we have been able to take shame away. When we have emphasised the value of the knowledge that someone who experiences this shame has, whilst still recognising that they have difficulties learning certain things, we recognise that they know how to do numerous things that they have been taught by life: they know how to manage against extreme poverty, they know how to help others, etc... If we can emphasise the value of this stock of knowledge that many don't consider as something that can be seen in a positive light, then when we do valorise these things, we are in a relationship where we "share knowledge" – and this emphasises the value of exchanges and we can introduce and dare to try new tools and skills. " (Bruno)

Most participants highlighted the difficulty of the relationships between on the one hand the destitute families themselves and the associations that are close to them, and on the other hand the media which too often gives stereotyped images of them. When the possibility is given to the most destitute to learn how to use

modern means of communication, they give themselves a very different image. They have the occasion to talk about their needs and their ambitions for the future, and to get rid of the clichés that are so often used when talking about them.

On this subject, Hala participated in an interesting project which targeted young people who had not been to school or who were failing at school. Over a period of six months, the objective was to let them speak. Supported by a film maker, a sociologist, a lawyer, a social worker and a project leader, the young people thought about what they would like to express and found ways to express it. Having started by photographing their neighbourhood with disposable cameras, they then made four films on diverse and important subjects for them. They were quite quickly comfortable with the cameras and the cutting table, ... After this some asked to do training as editors, sound engineers, and other professional technological training. They then participated in a forum with experts, members of the government, and decision makers to explain and show their films. There were many reactions to these films. Sometimes the young people were perceived as abandoning their neighbourhoods because they now have certain skills in high performance technological mediums. Fortunately, the presence of mediators facilitated the exchanges. After the forum, the young people wanted to show the films to their families, schools, and friends, and it was a source of great pride and each time an occasion for discussion.

Meetings with organisations.

At the start of Tuesday afternoon, the participants went to Marseille to meet other organisations concerned about the most destitute and who are involved in different neighbourhoods. The association 'Development and Arts' organise painting workshops in the street in the middle of housing estates that have a very bad reputation. 'Relay Children Parents' provides a continuity of links between prisoners in Baumettes Prison and their families. A Street Library is run by an ATD Fourth World team in the housing estate called Les Rosiers at Marseilles, in partnership with the neighbourhood centre of the neighbourhood.

Another Street Library has run by friends of ATD Fourth World for several years in Septèmes les Vallons. The book shop 'It's Voltaire's fault' works with people being integrated into society; the organisation 'Young Wanderers' goes to meet young immigrants (youth and children) who are surviving on the street and helps them in the necessary administrative steps.

Moved as much by what they discovered in the neighbourhoods as they were by the work of the organisations, some participants then expressed with a lot of simplicity what touched them.

" When I got out of the vehicle (in Septèmes les Vallons), I was called over by the youth of the housing estate, who saw that I had a face like theirs... 'Where do you come from? What are you doing here? Allah or Jesus?...' I cant remember everything that we said (...) but what shocked me was that these youth are lost, they have no one to speak with, they don't talk much to adults. They wanted to meet with me a second time but unfortunately I don't come from here. I explained what our association does, and also what the Movement ATD Fourth World does ... " (Ali)

"I appreciate these outings which were very beneficial. They helped us to reflect on our own activities. My group met with the association Arts and Development. A young person spoke to us. He seemed very committed, he didn't want to abandon things. He told us how the young people of the neighbourhood threw stones at them. We had the same thing in the neighbourhood where we are working. We were not welcome at the beginning. I find that in our struggle it is above all important not to abandon things and to encourage each other. I agree with what was said: above all it is important to have a dialogue, to take away the barriers that stop the people of the neighbourhood from participating in the group of the organisation. To enable the people of the neighbourhood to participate in the activities." (Si M'hamed)

" We are all very committed. But that can become a double edged sword... We can be so committed with those that we know that we forget that there are others with whom we should exchange and learn from. In reality, things will change if they change at a global level. Here I saw people who have the desire to exchange with others, and

unfortunately this it is relatively rare. But that is the only way to change the world. " (Vincent)

"I was with the group that went to the bookshop called "Its Voltaires Fault". Hassan asked to take pictures of the bookshop. I asked him: "Why are you taking photos?" He replied: "So they can serve as an example when I do a library at my place in the douar..." That touched me a lot. " (Lisette, evaluation meeting in Marseilles, 20 October 2005)

Commemoration in honour of the victims of extreme poverty.

After the meetings with the different organisations, the little groups all met up at the 26th Centenarian Square – Hope Square – where a Commemorative Stone was inaugurated in 2001. This is a replica of the Commemorative Stone in honour of the victims of extreme poverty that was inaugurated in Paris at the Trocadero Square, in 1987.¹⁵

Members of ATD Fourth World in Marseilles joined the participants for a time of commemoration during which Father Zadig Avedikian spoke on behalf of Marseille Espérance¹⁶, Mrs Joëlle Liardet spoke on behalf of the Fourth World families committed in Marseilles¹⁷ and Bruno Couder spoke on behalf of the General Delegation of the International Movement ATD Fourth World¹⁸.

Two young musicians played the accordion as background music during the different testimonies which were introduced by Noël Durand, Master of Ceremonies. It was a time of raw emotion, a very human time full of gravity. The Verses to the Glory of the Poor of all times¹⁹ read by the participants in English, Arabic, Armenian, Spanish, French, Hebrew, Italian, and Turkish reminded us that those who were present at Hope Square that Tuesday afternoon were

witness to the life, suffering and courage of all those who suffer extreme poverty and rejection all over the world. Everyone there was thinking about women, men and children they knew and their concern for these people was the driving force behind their participation in the Mediterranean Seminar. As a final simple gesture of remembrance everyone placed a rose on the Commemoration Stone.

The next day during the plenary session, several participants shared their feelings very emphatically:

"I live in a society where there are many ceremonies organised for people who have died for many different reasons. I was thinking about why the ceremony we took part in yesterday was so different. It was difficult to find the right words. There was something very different, and the fact that I come from another country would be part of this, but I think what was really different was that it was so centred on the men and women truly concerned by this ceremony. It wasn't an act, nor was it merely a symbol or a representation to be admired, but it was truly full of humanity, and humility. This is as it should be when it's about people. I was very moved. Thanks. " (Ruth)

"I was very moved by the people from Marseilles who themselves are part of these families in difficulty, I was really moved by their capacity to be at ease, to express themselves, to produce something for us even if they didn't know us as we come from elsewhere. It was something that really spoke to me. These people really have a huge place in our togetherness. That certainly would represent a long path of work together for them and for those who are part of ATD Fourth World with them. " (Thérèse)

¹⁵ Commemoration Stone in honour of the victims of extreme poverty

¹⁶ Marseille Esperance: Association whose goal is to promote dialogue between different faiths and different cultures.

¹⁷ See the entire text in the Appendix page 78

¹⁸ See the entire text in the Appendix page 80

¹⁹ See the entire text in the Appendix page 81

Festive evening of meetings with members of the Movement in Marseilles.

From Hope square back to the Mistral centre the bus took the participants on a big detour so that they could discover a little more of Marseilles guided by Marie-Hélène Boureau and Lisette Simon - experts in history and anecdotes.

After an aperitif in the courtyard of the Mistral centre, under the freshness of the plane trees and following a Mediterranean buffet

prepared by young people who are part of a reinsertion business, a colourful evening started. It was animated by Agnès Durand and the two young musicians from earlier in the day, but who had now changed their costumes and style.

The precious basket full of objects re-appeared, allowing several participants to present themselves.

The return in the bus to La Baume lès Aix signalled the end of the second day of the seminar.

Wednesday 28th of September 2005: “ Commitment and Collaboration ”

Plenary Meeting:

Mourad arrived in the morning, welcomed by applause. He had been delayed due to last minute work imposed by his University of Architecture in Algiers.

His presence directed the thoughts of the participants to the six friends who were forced to abandon their hopes of attending the seminar due to problems of obtaining visas. The participants decided to write letters of friendship which would be entrusted to those who could give these letters to the absent participants in person. In the same vein, Sameh proposed that those who wished could send around a piece of paper to collect the addresses of the participants. The Permanent Forum had chosen not to share the addresses of the participants up to this point as they did not have each persons authorisation.

“Each of us has in him a world of difficulties but yet they are still a good person. We all have that in ourselves. We have been able to share this through our different conversations, head to head. It is this which made us pass round the paper to write our addresses, and some people had already started to share theirs... ” (Extract from Sarkis’s evaluation, October 2005)

Small discussion groups.

During the day the aim was to speak about the commitment of the poorest because they are the ones who are the first to resist, well before they are joined by others. Indeed, whatever their

strength, they are fighting on a daily basis, already simply for survival. Are these efforts seen and recognised? Are they supported?

“In our countries this solidarity between poor families already exists, especially in the villages. It is a solidarity which is anchored in tradition. For example if an old man is alone and poor then his poor neighbours will bring him food. This exists in all the villages. ” (Najwa)

How can we make this solidarity that the poor share known? What can we do so that projects which are put in place support and compliment their efforts?

“ The majority of families have six children and more. It is very hard for the parents to send them to school, to buy books and everything that they need. Children have told me that some arrive in school without books, with a practically empty bag. Sometimes the teachers try to help them, by photocopying the books that are in the school. It is very hard for these families to go through this time at school and yet they try with all their strength to do it.” (Zohara)

“ In our organisation we arrange seminars which aim to raise awareness on questions of health linked to pregnant women and very young children. We always have a list of one hundred to one hundred and twenty women. Each group helps with a seminar once a month for six months. These families need to be committed to help with the seminars, however there are women who have other commitments and who cannot help, so it’s

up to those who are there to transmit the information from the seminars to their neighbours, to those who cannot attend. These women are committed to telling others about what they have learnt. And ourselves, as an organisation we commit ourselves to respecting the deadlines, the smooth functioning of the seminar and the presence of the doctors" (Mahmoud)

The second part of the reflection was about the commitment of each association, or group – which are not only an ‘institutions’, or a well-oiled machine, but are made up of people who are committed to this cause, who give up their time and their strength. What do these groups and associations need, at every level, so that their commitment can last?

" Most volunteers come from well off backgrounds and they are not usually exposed to these young people and the conditions they live in. Through meeting these young people, they participate in their lives and this changes the way they see things, it changes their way of thinking. It also gives them energy. It motivates and stimulates them to help still more underprivileged young people. They begin to understand that these young people are underprivileged not because they are incapable or incompetent, but because they quite simply have not been given a chance. " (Nir)

" The commitment of my organisation could be to encourage the most destitute groups to integrate, to participate in changes that improve the quality of life for the whole community. As a result the poorest are stronger, can contribute and participate like the true citizens that they are, citizens with the same rights and also the same responsibilities. (...) That is our responsibility as people, and as an organisation: to contribute to providing the poorest with the right working tools to improve their lives and the live of the whole community as true citizens. " (Latifa)

" My personal opinion about "how to help or be committed" puts me into a delicate position because I represent an association and I must accept its rules. Sometimes I have a problem with that. I am an individual but I also am part of the association. Also what I have done in my professional life is to find a position where I can express my personal point of view and not be lost

in the rules or in choices which would contradict my personal principles. The most important thing for me as a social worker is to never forget that I am a human being is working with people. " (Rachel)

"The organisation came to our housing estate to help us ‘germinate’, they listened to us. Poor people are always told to shut up and just listen for their whole life: to the city council, to the police, at the hospital... And then suddenly, when someone comes to listen to you, you can’t ‘get enough’, you can’t believe it! The people in my association have the art of bringing people out of their shell. Yes, from being heard comes being able to meet with people. But they need to have a regularly presence and be faithful, otherwise it amounts to nothing. Faithfulness, is to be trusted. Trust is also very important. After that you need an action. The person who is coming in needs to be patient, in faithfulness, there is patience. They came to see: we were adolescents. They had the patience to wait for us to grow up. You can’t imagine the happiness they brought to the housing estate! They completely transformed us!" (Abdallah)

The third part of the reflection was about the commitment of each person, their enthusiasm, doubts, strengths and fatigue. What can help someone to feel recognised in their commitment and to keep going in the long term? In what way can they be supported when they feel discouraged?

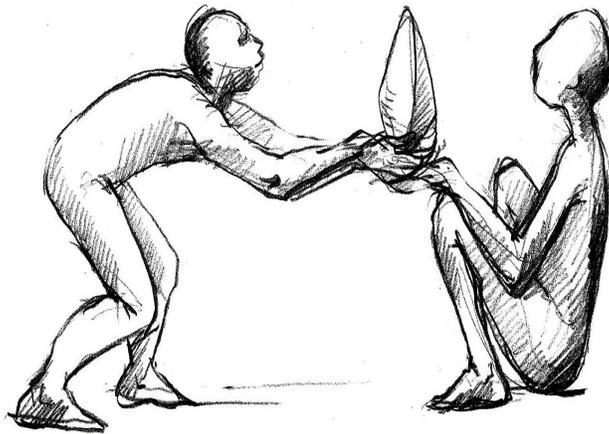
" Me too, I was in a terrible situation. The social department helped me and I think that got me out of it, now I can help others and tell them how I overcame my problems. I know several people who have five, six or seven children and who don’t speak the country’s language. They are very alone when it comes to filling in forms, all the administrative questions. They feel paralysed, unable to get out of their trouble, unable to ask simple questions. I am there to help them, to help them participate, to show them that they can participate. " (Berchiko)

" When parents are condemned to live in extreme poverty, when the head of the family is living in extreme poverty, the whole family is also condemned to live in extreme poverty. I often visit the families who are living in hostels in single

rooms. To see their children they have to go into another room where their children are living. They say to them that it is transition housing but they stay there for four or five years. They have a very difficult life there, in conditions that don't allow people to really live. What we want, is that they be given their fundamental rights. " (Saïd)

"When I speak about how necessary it is to support families, I want to say that it is important to have many children because children are our security in the future. We have lots of children because there is no social security and there is no life security. My husband and I both work. We have two bread earners in the family. At the end of each month, my father visits his parents who are not working. When our children see that he is helping his parents, giving them provisions, we know that this is our future that is being created. Our children will be the ones to help us in the future. I will do the same with my parents. There is always this feeling of commitment which in my mind is very good. " (Wafa)

" In the neighbourhood where I live, there are many different nationalities. I discovered young people living on the street who have strong leadership, a real presence in the street and in the neighbourhood. I approached two of them. One is on drugs, and the other is in a difficult situation because he is living with a family that is not his own. I started project between young university students and these young people. What keeps me involved is that I can see these young people have a treasure inside them, pearls, that we should not deny nor forget. To see this richness in them keeps me going, despite all the project attempts which have failed. We have a very strong relationship and a real trust between us and therefore we have become a group. Those who didn't work have now found work. Before leaving to come here for the Seminar, we studied the program, worked on the questions together and they are the ones who told



me to share this story with you. For me keeping going means to stay faithful to what we believe in, and not to let ourselves give in to disappointment or discouragement. " (Sarkis)

" I am here not because I am someone who works with or for the poor, but as someone who works for peace. We are meeting here and we say we want to find the tools and pay the price. But what do we do with my fears? I am speaking of peace, not only in terms of commitment but because of something that is true inside me. We are talking about communication but I feel that already words are blocking us; not only do they not help, but they disturb us. We all have a habit of thinking that we are talking about the same thing but it's so different and it doesn't help to pretend otherwise. We are blocked because we are using the same words but they don't have the same meaning." (Ruth)

" A word that we haven't used much is the word "availability". To be available, can change our personal life. To be available means to put yourself in conflict with the institutions, in conflict with your family, your wife, your children, or your husband. To be available, is to share the personal problems, is first a personal commitment. I believe that commitment isn't something we can explain, its something we can feel. When we are committed, others feel it, we share our commitment a lot. It is not a speech, it's something we communicate. It's our way of being present, our way of speaking, of being available, this way allows us to share our commitment with others. " (Ali)

" It's because people committed themselves that the people have been able to get out of poverty. I think of a woman I met ten years ago. Her social capital, her network of relationships, did not exist

as far as I could see, however, in reality she did relationships in the families that I could not see, not even the social services saw them. I did not realise either what part I played in this social capital. I think it's something that this woman could confirm now, but she didn't dare to show it to others before. I ask myself this question: who is going to meet the real person? This meeting will

have these things. There were networks of reveal the person, what they are in themselves, in their humanity. This meeting is not a goal in itself, but it's the only way that these people will be able to get to the stage where they can hold their head high. Yes, as Yves said, after this, something is triggered. It's a trigger. " (Pierre)

Thursday 29 September 2005: "How to continue these links we have made?"

Small discussion groups

The day began by working in small groups. The Permanent Forum team did not ask the participants to agree on a final declaration to be ratified by all; instead, the team proposed a more flexible method, taking into account the different realities of each association. Their common will was to freely build a solid history together for the long-term and they needed time to do this, as well as the possibility of readjusting after having consulted the members of their own associations, and also to weigh the human and material means and availability at their disposal.

"At the beginning of the week, Huguette said, 'Don't think that we will all be able to understand each other straight away. We will need time...' During this seminar, we didn't attempt to reach certain written conclusions, to come to a declaration or to come to a manifesto. This is important because, in this context, if we had been looking to succeed in writing something final, things would have been much more tense and strained. It was instead a case of us all speaking to each other without any objective other than to get to know each other and to encourage each other in working for the good of the poorest in our communities. What a luxury!..." (Extract from the retransmission of Jean to the members of the ATD Fourth World team in Spain, 10 October 2005)

"We had one hour to put down in writing the main points from the day before, and then shared them in front of everybody. The discussion took off again (...) on the words 'our poor' before we all finally agreed on 'they are the poor of the whole world'." (Extract from the evaluation of Graciane)

Some of the participants said how much they were worried about returning home to a

reality very different from that which had been created during the Seminar. In effect, during the four days of the Seminar, the tensions that could have existed were not hidden but faced together. These tensions were put into context by the commitment of each of the participants to fight against extreme poverty which hurts families everywhere. Even as they work at the heart of various associations, some of the participants feel isolated and alone in their commitment. One of their concerns was to find, on their return home, the right means and the right words to convey to their colleagues what they had experienced during the seminar; another was also able to do the same with the families with whom they are committed so that these families can also feel they are part of the progress made during the Seminar in France.

The final plenary session

The participants clearly expressed their wish to continue to build on the links they had created and to continue discussing the subjects raised during the Seminar. Their wish is to support each other through sharing their experiences, their ideas and their know-how in an atmosphere of respect for all those taking part in the discussion. They asked that the Permanent Forum should become a support and a unifying framework for these exchanges.

A certain number of concrete propositions were made with regard to how to stay in contact with each other: local and regional meetings in the Mediterranean Basin, exchange programmes where people could visit other associations, training programmes in different associations, the sharing and exchanging of documents and technologies, a discussion forum on the internet,

regular meetings such as 17 October, mutual visits...

Conscious of having taken part in a special meeting, the participants shared their hopes and convictions with each other one last time:

- *"We all have specific families in mind and will try to give voice to all that we have learned here..."*
- *"The East of the future should one day resemble our meeting here..."*
- *There has been an exceptional tenderness amongst us all, something which our world needs so much more of..."*
- *As Joseph Wresinski said, 'We are not more intelligent than others, but perhaps we can persevere more'..."*
- *Now I know that I have friends, and you are all very precious to me... We are going to find ways to strengthen the links between all our associations..."*

Feedback from the creative workshops.

The afternoon began with the participants free to visit the exhibitions of the works created in each workshop that were on display in different locations.

The painting workshop lent their colours to the Acampado room and the adjoining patio. At the entrance to the room, wire sculptures made in June at the Fourth World House in Marseilles and made during this week in La Baume were attached to a metal 'statue' created by Philippe Barbier to signify the traces that will remain of these meetings.

The workshop on new technologies invited everyone to the room which had held the plenary sessions for a presentation of the blog²⁰ produced over the five days of the seminar.

²⁰ Blog: a web site in which one person or a group of people express themselves freely on a regular basis.

In twos and threes, alone or in small groups, the participants circulated in this private viewing that was both sympathetic and somewhat improvised, guided by the explanations of those who had taken up the pliers, pens, computer or even their own bodies and emerged with creations evocative of the best of themselves...

Sameh: *"This is how society should be: the weak and the strong, the rich and the poor, all together. When we work together, we prosper and flourish; flowers represent this. In nature, flowers have a very important role: they are beautiful and they share their beauty through producing more life."*

Si M'hamed: *"The dark world, chained up, it's the past, the difficulties, my country's hard times; we have to see how borders are so present. In the sea, there are no borders. The water is free to reach any country it wants to. All people are different, but they are equal if they refuse to resort to weapons and open themselves to a vast future."*

Sarkis: *"The wire is there to add strength..."*

Michel Vienot relived his experience of searching for dialogue in his October 2005 evaluation of the Seminar:

"My experience of these four days was incredible. I genuinely appreciated all the preparation that went into the Seminar, as I know how much work this can entail and all the details that have to be taken into account. (...) The Seminar gave me the chance to plunge into the Arab world and into the Middle East, and I thought this was wonderful. The theatre workshop allowed me to see more clearly how difficult it can be to form relations with people, (...) the importance of listening to each other and how trust has been built up slowly... The three theatre sessions were at least as rich for me as they were for everybody else. The animation of the three workshop evenings could have been left to the evenings themselves and improvised as we went along, but I was glad to have met you beforehand so as to work through some ideas which, once in place, worked really well..."

Dan Kenningham, who was responsible for the painting workshop, wrote after the seminar:

"For me, even without having known all of the details in advance and not knowing any of the participants, I really think that what we shared at La Baume was something positive."

I think that everybody left their differences at the door, that we were searching for what we had in common with others, that our wish to be alongside the poorest families came through along with the question of how to work together to build a better world. We had to overcome our differences, and the fact that people were face to face with other people allowed us all to find those conditions that made it possible to have a real discussion and genuine interaction.

During one of the meals, someone said, 'In my country, there's no way we could all be sat around the same table like this.'

I think that the creative workshops played a role in creating the conditions that allowed us all to be together in this way. I can give you some of the feedback from the painting workshop. I didn't really know what to expect but the one thing I had in mind for the workshop was for the participants to create something together. The idea was for a collective approach.

Someone said to me during one of the workshops, 'It's incredible to be able to be together in silence.' For me, this gives a good idea of what the atmosphere was like in the workshop and how we all felt it."

At the new technologies workshop, George and Emmanuel explained that it was possible to keep in contact by telephoning each other through the computer²¹.

"Some of the participants had a hard time believing this:

- That works?

- We can try it if you'd like...

- You mean I can speak to my family in Algeria from here?

- And my family in Italy?

-What about my family in Turkey?

Wafa, who had spoken of his worries for his mother, was scared as he sat down in front of the screen. The joy in his voice and in his words caused the rest of the room to fall silent. From the other side, the voices of his three sons gave him news mixed with both the laughter and the cries of a refugee camp.

Then it was Berchiko's turn.

Silence filled the room as the telephone rang in another disadvantaged neighbourhood. It was a neighbour who answered and who gave an emotional Berchiko news of her family.

Despite the suffering, the inequalities and the conflicts between their respective countries which could easily keep these people apart, by the end of the Seminar the participants had decided to build relationships of reflection and action based on those who have to face the most extreme poverty."

The welcome from the families in Marseilles

After the Seminar, some of the participants were able, while waiting for their return flights, to spend one or two days with families who welcomed them in Marseilles. This had been prepared a long time in advance. The people willing to welcome the participants in their homes had already received a portrait of the person who would be coming to them. Accompanied by their hosts, Wafa visited a soap producer in Marseilles; others had a trip out on a boat; Sameh met the association Arts et Développement; Therese and Sarkis participated in a street library. Latifa, Burçu, Emma, Hassan, Abdelhamid, Nouraldine, Si M'hamed... all of them, through their exceptional ability to make contact with other people, left strong impressions on the families that had housed them.

"I welcomed a young Turkish woman into my home. She spoke English very well and I speak it very badly. But everything worked out very well and it all finished with gift after gift. When I was getting ready to take her to the airport, she begged me to give her forty-five minutes at the Old Port where she had agreed to meet some of the participants from the seminar. They had only known each other for a few days, but I was struck by how much affection there was between them. It was as if they had always known each other and were old friends. The goodbyes were incredibly heartfelt and it was painful to have to leave such a unique experience behind." (Louis, at the evaluation meeting, 20 October 2005)

²¹ An extract from a speech given by Eugen Brand on 17 October 2005. See the Appendix page 83

IV/ 2005-2006: The discussion continues

In the days immediately following the Seminar, several participants from the Mediterranean Basin and some members of the ATD Fourth World Movement in Marseilles spontaneously sent in their reactions, or an initial evaluation, to the Permanent Forum Team. Short, warm notes, sometimes just to say that they had got home safely, or as a token of friendship, or to reiterate how much they would have liked to have attended if only the visa they had so hoped to obtain, right up until the very last minute, had not been refused!

"We have arrived safely, full of the joy of the Seminar and the work in hand Hassan is back with his family, douars and animals. The inhabitants are delighted and bombard us with questions. Hassan did not change out of his jacket and trousers until he had been to the consulate. I have donned my taguia. He is learning to type and will soon be sending you e-mails. He says: "Hello, everyone. Warm regards to all, to Huguette, Pascale, the lady who gave me some basil, everyone. Tell them to say hello to everyone from us." We hope that communicating will help our world to make progress against poverty. We send you our warm regards and thanks." (Hassan, Hamid, 3 October 2005)

"Friendships were created and doors were opened wide for me (...) The important thing was remaining open to people from other countries. I'd never witnessed that before. That's a precious thing. Everything was so easy going... I didn't detect any individual who felt above the others... Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could sense that in our everyday lives? Some participants had already attended Seminars and said: "This Seminar is of a different quality altogether. Usually it's much more intellectual. We listen to speeches, to words, but the quality of communal life and sharing life are missing.' " (Sarkis, 5 October 2005)

"I will never forget your hospitality and your welcome. Each and every one of you made me feel the importance of love between human beings. As the Arab proverb says: even paradise is worthless without humans! I look forward to seeing you all, possibly in the Lebanon? Warm regards." (Najwa, 6 October 2005)

"I wanted to say how moving I found the five days we spent together at La Baume, and the time spent preparing. On the Friday, I felt lost without all of those people with their wealth of differences, their kindness and their generosity. They filled my dreams for many nights and will linger in my memory... the words and the faces of Sarkis, Hamid, Hala... " (Catherine Léon, 6 October 2005)

"Once upon a time, in many countries around the world, people wanted to meet in peace and the joy of loving their neighbour; others; my other self. Love of people, love of other countries and other individuals, other versions of myself, other versions of ourselves. For peace in the world, in my heart, the peace of others forever. Come, listen, look and you will understand. Life lies ahead, straight ahead of us." (Michèle Cousin, 7 October 2005)

"I'm really proud of you all, proud of your courage and determination to prompt, or rather to create, an encounter. It's like giving birth: there is pain, but the newborn brings joy and gives courage. That's the impression I got when I read your message. Sitting at my keyboard I hear the sound of footsteps, voices, the scraping of the participants' chairs, and am all the more content that the Seminar reached such a positive conclusion. I am full of hope for future programmes and will always be available to participate in full. " (Tewfik, who was not granted a visa for the journey, 10 October 2005)

On the occasion of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, the Permanent Forum team sent everyone a copy (in their own language) of the speech made by Eugen Brand, the movement's Delegate-General²². Reactions were soon to follow.

"Thank you for your very friendly e-mail. I can assure you that participating in the Seminar was a very deep experience for me. I'll never forget it. Thank you for forwarding the message from the Delegate-General; it's excellent. Here, where I live, in my association, we were not able to organise anything for 17 October, but the spirit of that date is always present in our work. You know, in a region where the issue of poverty is our daily bread, we are so caught up in the tidal wave of rising to the challenge, that dates often float by unnoticed..." (Latifa, 20 October 2005)

Today, 17 October, Thérèse and Sarkis shared their experience of the Seminar with the people who work alongside them:

"We described certain individuals who had marked us and explained why. We spoke of what we'd seen of the life of the Movement in Marseilles: the volunteers, the street library, the members of the People's University, their preparatory work and the evening they organised and presented, the families we met. We explained how, on the first day, everyone had written their important word on the sail of a boat – and we did the same thing on 17 October, on a house representing 'Beïtouna'(...) We shared our small souvenirs: soap from Beitlehem, lavender from Marseilles, little pots of honey, etc. And we realise that, above all, more than the words that were exchanged, we shared the people, their lives and actions."

Events that touch the populations of different countries, relayed by the international media, generate great interest among the participants. Anonymity is erased thanks to exchanges during the Seminar.

"You are in my thoughts as France's suburbs experience such violence. I was wondering what role the Forum plays. I hope everyone is keeping well. It's as if there's always something terrible happening in the world..." (Rachel, 10 November 2005)

"My world is in terrible pain right now: catastrophes, extremism, and urban violence in France (...) I said to myself that things would flare up quickly and that the situation would be exploited at the expense of the young. They will be more desperate and poorer than ever..." (Hamid, 7 November 2005)

Some share their concerns and those of their associations. Reading between the lines of these short messages, which can be difficult to translate, one catches a glimpse of the enormity of their struggle - as well as their fierce determination to construct a better future for all.

²² See speech in the Appendix page 84

"Today is the first day of the Muslim feast marking the end of Ramadan and I am delighted to be able to enjoy the meal publicly this year. The good news is that there is no curfew any more and the children can play and celebrate the feast day. The bad news is that all of the children, yes, all of them, are playing with toy weapons. And that drives me crazy. All we hear are shots and explosions; it's like a war inside the camp. I don't know when things will change, or who is responsible for selling the toys. I'm really worried about their future and dream of being able to change their life." (Wafa, 3 November 2005)

"As I was telling you, we all have a lot on our plate. February is a particularly busy month as we are getting ready for Carnival (one month of workshops and preparations with the children for the neighbourhood procession on 26 February). We are also working with a school on a project to explore the neighbourhood and produce video report, not to mention the workshops and our daily and often urgent activities on the street (...) There are some big changes taking place at the moment (...) with the forthcoming elections (...) and repercussions on policies concerning gypsies, immigrants and the suburbs." (Emma, 19 February 2006)

"Mid-March and we're very worried for some families we know who are under threat of being evicted from their homes. Evictions can start again from 15 March. Getting housing for the poorest people in our country has become a very difficult mission. We have joined with families housed in an emergency shelter to try to help them win the right to housing and a dignified existence. These families come from countries in Africa and around the Mediterranean Basin. They have come to France to give their children a better future. We prepared our most recent Fourth World People's University with them on the theme of child violence. We enclose herewith a sample of their work for the event.(...) (Saïd, François, 20 March 2006)

True to the promise he made at the end of the Seminar, Noureddine Boudier created a greetings card for 2006. It was sent to the participants and the members of the Permanent Forum, bearing a superb calligraphic message: 'May our battles be guided by our tenderness for Humanity', translated into English, Arabic, Spanish, Hebrew and Italian. The greetings card inspired many comments.

"The creative card you sent me warmed my heart. It arrived just before the Friday evening Shabbat meal to which I had invited guests. I read the card out to them. For me, this was the best way of describing who you are and the type of people I was lucky enough to meet, without speaking too much or wasting words. I explained what you do and the values that guide your work (...) I'd just like to add that the card is now on my office wall." (Rachel, 8 March 2006)

In February 2006, a collective letter was sent to all of the Seminar participants. Letters over the previous months, news, messages of friendship and New Year's wishes were all precious milestones for those keen to continue together. Direct contact between different participants was also maintained and strengthened. It was suggested that everyone should participate in writing this Chronicle, either by answering a few salient questions, or by sending a contribution in the form of their choice.

Here is just one example of a reply to our letter.

"The greatest lesson I learned is that language is not a barrier between people. Despite our different languages, we managed to share some very moving moments. I would also like to mention the theatre workshop. I took part and was particularly marked by it. Your unforgettable association is a standard bearer for the noble human principle of work for the poor and those on the fringes of society.

I work with the poor in my neighbourhood, with a group of fifteen children aged between fourteen and seventeen. We run courses on communication technologies and how to use them. We also work with a group of young women in the camp (...), training them to use computers and the Internet, and with yet another group that carries out charity work, handing out food.

In truth, our living conditions are very difficult (...) for political reasons. Over 65% of the population live below the poverty line. This motivated me to find a way for us – people and associations – to help the poor out of their dark tunnel. Most of them go hunting through dumps and tips, looking for scrap iron to sell. Such is the life of the poor today; yet they are united, working together.

The unique thing about our society is that most of the poor do not know about the new methods of communication, neither the children, nor the youngsters, nor the adults. There is a lack of communication centres in which to work with them. We try to do our best to give them the basics, to teach them, to include them in society and the use of communications technologies.

I was most deeply touched by the commemorative stone in Marseilles representing the victims of poverty and misery. I hope to have something similar in my country to honour the memory of those who died poor.

My suggestions: keep in contact with the Seminar participants, create an international seminar for the poor, organise one seminar per year, foster dialogue and visits between the participants, that your organisation defines a working programme with contributions from the participants. Yours respectfully,"
(Nouraldin)

Eugen Brand's thoughts on the occasion of 15 May, International Family Day²³, were sent to the Seminar participants and, here again, prompted reactions. Although stemming from very different contexts, they were all in a similar vein.

"Thank you for sending Eugen's message; its arrival was most timely. I forwarded it to several other people, including a social worker who has done magnificent work with people who have had to leave their region..." (Jona, 12 May 2006)

"You cannot imagine the effect your words had on me. It was like listening to an exact description of the situation in which my people and the families close to me find themselves. I have forwarded the letter to several families. May it give them strength in these difficult times..." (Wafa, 16 May 2006)

In June 2006, a double issue of the 'Letter to Friends', echoing the four-day Mediterranean Seminar, was sent to the Permanent Forum's 3,500 correspondents – henceforth including our friends from the Mediterranean Basin.

²³ See text in the Appendix page 85

V/ Beyond 2006: Nobody should face extreme poverty alone

The decision to organise this Seminar reflects the determination of the International Movement ATD Fourth World to deepen its contacts with correspondents in the Mediterranean Basin and to create new contacts to learn more about the countries in this region through the commitment of people and associations working in close proximity with the poorest.

Long-term commitments are required in order to contribute to building peace and fraternity through eradicating poverty. To keep going, those who make any kind of commitment at any level need to meet up, to broaden their horizons, to have opportunities to communicate with other partners, to have training opportunities. One of the Seminar's objectives was therefore to bring together people, associations and academics, each agreeing to try to see the situation from the point of view and experience of others.

Between 2002 and 2005, to prepare for this gathering, members of the Permanent Forum team visited various correspondents in various countries on several occasions. They were guided by people who shared their knowledge and contacts and agreed to serve as intermediaries. This was the case not only for preparation of the journeys, but also on the spot during the meetings.

The medium and long term courses of action mentioned during and after the Seminar are part and parcel of this spirit of sharing and meeting, characterised by mutual respect and reciprocity, for the benefit of people living in destitution.

These courses of action can be grouped under two headings:

- Strengthening and broadening of links
- Mutual support and co-operation.

Strengthening and broadening of links

The continuation of the discussions after the Seminar demonstrates that participants derive great benefit from sharing with others various aspects of their commitment, knowledge, questions and aspirations – and from discovering those of others. This process can act as a catalyst through which experiences that are too painful or too isolated can take on a meaning because they are known, understood, even shared by others, or because sometimes answers are found or at least encouragement is derived from the reactions of others. It can also help to build foundations of knowledge and know-how that amplify the experience of each individual and contribute to the efforts undertaken on a broader scale.

How can we make sure that this sharing in a spirit of reciprocity and mutual respect is possible for and of benefit to the families with whom the correspondents are committed? What are the foundations, the tools, the types of collaboration upon which these experiences of sharing will be built?

Although the International Movement ATD Fourth World and its Permanent Forum are willing to assume their share of responsibility in achieving this objective, the questions raised by its realisation concern all the Seminar participants, and other relevant parties in the region. This is because different aspects must be taken into account: language, working methods, availability, physical resources, the effort required in order to understand each other, etc.

The future development of these continued exchanges depends on the determination and choices made by the people involved. Courses of action were suggested during the Seminar and also afterwards, as stepping stones to progress.

a) Celebration of 17 October, International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, also known as World Day for Rejection of Extreme Poverty .

The web site www.oct17.org contains historical and up-to-date information about the celebrations that take place throughout the world. A few Seminar participants have started to celebrate this Day in their local areas.

One suggested course of action is to celebrate 17 October in a way that is appropriate to the local context, using the means available, and with the participation and testimonies of people living in poverty. For this day, people and/or associations from different places could work together: sending messages of support to each other, sharing testimonies prepared in advance, etc.

A new development has occurred since the Seminar. In paragraph 55 of resolution A/RES/60/209, the United Nations General Assembly asked the General Secretary to undertake an evaluation of the impact the 17 October celebrations throughout the world have on the eradication of poverty. The aim is to learn lessons from this celebration and to intensify its impact. The results of the evaluation will be made public at the United Nations General Assembly in autumn 2006.

A possible course of action is for each person at their own level and using the channels available to them to pass on these results, in particular on the occasion of the celebration of 17 October 2006.

b) Create an interactive dialogue on the themes of the Seminar

One of the desires expressed was to examine in greater detail the themes proposed at the Seminar: intercultural dialogue(s) or how to live together on a daily basis; communication in the information and knowledge society; long-term commitment. These themes aroused great interest among participants and opened up courses of action and areas of discussion that they wish to pursue further. Many participants underlined that these themes tackle issues where the point of view and experience of people living in poverty are needed but not sufficiently sought.

One adopted course of action is to set up interactive discussions on these themes between correspondents from the Mediterranean basin and all the members of the Permanent Forum. To make this possible, one page in several of the upcoming editions of the "Letter to Friends" will be devoted to one or other of these themes.

c) Dissemination of the 'Chronicle' describing the work of the Seminar

This Chronicle provides an exhaustive description of the entire project, including the preparatory meetings in the various countries, the Seminar's results and the planned follow-up work. It is published in French, English and Arabic and is first and foremost for the participants and all those who supported the Seminar.

This Chronicle is a reference document to both strengthen existing links and seek out new ones. With this aim in mind, participants will be able to use it if they wish to stimulate discussion on subjects tackled in the Seminar within their group or association, and more broadly with other associations in their country. .

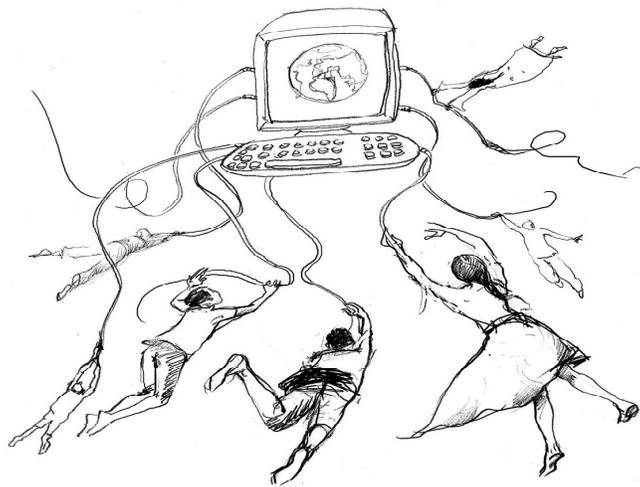
Mutual support and co-operation

Many participants highlighted the need to meet others, to stop to think together and take stock, to learn from each other, to support each other in different ways (in the area of training particularly). This reflects a desire to break down isolation and to share knowledge and know-how acquired through action and commitment.

The suggested courses of action are:

- *joint training courses on the subjects of action with underprivileged people and commitment,*
- *participation in worksites (renovation, heritage enhancement, etc.)*
- *exchanges (by post, e-mail, drawings, poems, etc.) between children, teenagers or adults during a particular activity.*
- *seminars, local, national or even international meetings with a similar approach to the Mediterranean Seminar,*
- *etc.*

An appeal has been made to the International Movement ATD Fourth World to support or even initiate such projects. The Movement certainly feels it has a responsibility to encourage such projects, and is prepared to contribute as far as its means allow. However it does not feel it should be an “organiser” nor a “coordinator”. Particular projects will come to fruition according to the proposals and commitments made by the parties involved, and also depending on the human and financial resources available and the means of communication (languages, access to computers or not), etc. The common denominator must remain a commitment to people living in destitution and a determination to open up, to meet up with other similarly committed people and associations.



The International Movement ATD Fourth World in a few lines ...

“I’ve been haunted by the idea that this people would never get out of poverty until they were welcomed, as a people, into the places where other human beings hold discussions and debates. They should have their place, on an equal footing, wherever people are talking and making decisions not only about the present but also about Man’s destiny, the future of humanity.”

(Joseph Wresinski, founder of the Fourth World Movement)

The Fourth World Movement is an international non-governmental organisation that invites people and institutions to join the poorest in their daily fight to free themselves from poverty.

In every continent where it is present the Fourth World Movement is characterised by a constant desire to meet the most poverty-stricken people and families.

By founding our action on their expectations and aspirations, taking into account their way of thinking and experience, and considering them as true partners, we can be certain that no-one will be left by the wayside.

The most excluded force each of us to follow through on our ideals of fraternity, liberty, democracy and peace. They are the foundation and the yardstick for all the Fourth World Movement’s attempts to create a society that truly respects the equal dignity of each citizen.

The Movement is present in thirty countries, in Europe, Africa, the Indian Ocean, the Americas, Asia and Australia. It carries out its activities in the fields of culture, education, training, health, civic and social participation in partnership with other non governmental organisations, and also with local, national, regional and international public bodies.

Its Institute for Research and Training in Human Relations, undertakes research and studies and publishes various documents.

It benefits from general consultative status with ECOSOC and consultative status with UNICEF, UNESCO, ILO, and the Council of Europe, and is also permanently represented at the European Union.

The International Movement ATD Fourth World has no political or religious affiliation. Its resources are essentially private in nature: donations, subscriptions, campaigns, etc. It receives public subsidies in certain countries or via intergovernmental bodies.

The Permanent Forum on extreme poverty in the world

"*Nobody should face extreme poverty alone*". This was one of the main concerns of Joseph Wresinski, the founder of the International Movement ATD Fourth World.

He had personal experience of the burden of solitude that weighed down in the 50s and 60s on those who were trying to meet up with the poorest.

From the late 1950s onwards, he began to foster links with people like him committed to working in areas of extreme poverty. In 1961, he established contacts in India and then in other countries. These personal relationships, maintained with whatever means were at hand, wove a veritable network of friends throughout the world.

In 1978 it was time to take another step forward. The friends of the Movement in Africa were invited to provide the elements for discussion about extreme poverty in Africa, and the way their countries and peoples faced up to it, for a Seminar that took place in May 1981²⁴.

The first Seminar of the 'Permanent Forum: extreme poverty in the world' gathered together about sixty friends, mainly from sub-Saharan Africa.

The *Letter to African Friends* was the method used to prepare for this first Seminar and to carry out follow-up action afterwards.

After the first eleven editions, its name changed to *Letter to Friends in the World*. It is published in English, Spanish, French, and also in Portuguese since 2005. It is compiled from the writings of correspondents, and is sent to some 3,500 recipients.

Other Seminars have brought together friends from South America in 1987, friends from Central and Eastern Europe in 1992, and people working with children in 2000 in Mauritius. The most recent seminar, held in Aix en Provence (France) in September, and which is the subject of this Chronicle, marks an important stage in the relations that are being built up with friends from the Mediterranean Basin.

The Permanent Forum on extreme poverty in the world has become a network bringing together mainly isolated individuals or very small associations committed to working with the poorest. They are often virtually unknown and very isolated. They work on a small scale and want to develop friendship and knowledge based on what they are learning from the poor and very poor, people who are underprivileged at several different levels - education, housing, employment, health and culture – and are rejected and criticised the most by society.

The Forum invites those who want to be part of a movement rejecting extreme poverty in the world to join it, to rebuild the community based on and with the poorest.

It enables those who do so to preserve their identity, without becoming a member of ATD Fourth World.

"... [*Being a full-time volunteer*] doesn't just mean being at the mercy of the poorest to learn from them, sometimes with great astonishment. It means they have become our brothers and sisters. Their children are our children."

(Joseph Wresinski, talking to the Fourth World Movement full-time volunteers)

²⁴ See text in the Appendix page 86

Appendix

1) **How should a Seminar on extreme poverty be organised?** (Extract from “*Extreme poverty in Africa: a seminar, a history ...*”, Book 1- Editions Science et Service – September 1982 (Notes on the first seminar organised by Joseph Wresinski and the Permanent Forum team in 1981, with friends from Africa.)

“Is it justified to organise a Seminar at a time when there are already countless meetings of experts, administrators and officials? Does the growing number of international conferences, work groups and administrative bodies, with all their attendant expenses, actually benefit the poor? How does it change things for families, communities and whole peoples, to have ever more trips by officials and experts, more documents circulating, higher building, maintenance, heating and lighting costs for more and more offices and conference halls? Hasn't all of this activity gone hand in hand with ever worsening conditions for the poor?”

No-one can deny that sooner or later the international community will have to ask itself this question. Ever more meetings and buildings to manage proportionally less and less resources; always more solemn statements about the scourge of poverty, without any effect on the real problem... Can there be a different way of doing things?

Paradoxically the friends of Africa and the West decided to use this debatable approach to seek other ways of taking action. The ambitious idea was to organise a Seminar which was fundamentally different from others. A seminar where the true experts, the first to speak, would be the poor, and those who had the most direct experience of their lives and hopes. But also a Seminar where they would not only discuss things between themselves (important as this is), but where they could speak directly with the major international authorities too. Are not the authorities often liable to debate the problems of the world without ever seeing the faces or hearing the voices of the real victims?

A Seminar where the roles would be reversed. The voice of the people – the true experts – would take precedence over the usual representatives from international public life. The voice of those on the ground would reach the big administrative organisations which deal with development around the world. The people would call for an end to technocracy and the dominance of university education which benefits only those who have received it.

A Seminar, then, where people start to talk and move towards a new way of doing things. The state of the poor means that there is no more time for rhetoric which is not grounded in genuine collaboration with the poor. But how could we do things better, how could we meet so that we could take action together?

We chose the simplest way:

- *We appealed to the men and women of Africa who were the most engaged on the ground*
- *We designed a programme based on their input*
- *We invited directors and international officials so that we could learn from them*
- *We let everyone know that for ATD Fourth World, the priority at all times was the very poor and those who support them in their everyday lives.*

2) Message from the French National Commission for UNESCO, Mediterranean Seminar in La Baume lès Aix (Marseilles), from 26 – 29 September 2005, on the theme: “*The Contribution of Very Poor Individuals and Families to Cross-Cultural Dialogue in the Information Society*”

The French National Commission for UNESCO wishes to join the International Movement ATD Fourth World and its vice president Huguette Redegeld, an active member of its culture Committee, in pointing out that the action of this Non-Governmental Organisation corresponds totally with the major objectives of UNESCO and the United Nations, in particular the eradication of poverty.

The focus of the Seminar beginning today is on giving the underprivileged access to culture. By remaining as close as possible to the daily realities experienced by people living in extreme poverty, the aim is not only to enable us to deepen our knowledge about these people, but also to give them access through culture to dialogue and communication, and in this way help to change the way they live.

ATD Fourth World has achieved many important things, particularly in France: the artothèque at Caen which lends works of art to the most deprived citizens, the song workshops in the Ile de France region, the cultural actions in rural areas, particularly in Brittany, and the street libraries.

Each of these actions benefits children, young adults and senior citizens, who are all living in underprivileged conditions.

By taking up these challenges and successfully completing these projects, the International Movement ATD Fourth World is making a major contribution to the struggle against poverty by means of culture, which is the objective and priority of UNESCO, in the framework of the First United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty.

The French National Commission for UNESCO therefore offers its unreserved support for your Seminar, held at a pivotal period for this UNESCO programme, since a ten-year period will come to an end this year. Via this message the Commission would like to join you in encouraging all the participants to continue the extremely fruitful discussions begun by ATD Fourth World, and in expressing the hope that your conclusions will reinforce the future work of UNESCO in this field.

3) Message from Dr Ismail Seralgeldine Director of the library of Alexandria

Ladies and Gentlemen

I would have liked to be with you today. Unfortunately the demands that go with my position have prevented me from doing so.

Nevertheless, on this occasion of the Seminar organised by the Permanent Forum on Extreme Poverty in the World, it is a great honour for me to send you a few words to express my unbounded support for your work discussing these vital matters which are so important to worldwide society in its entirety.

I am convinced the struggle you are engaged in against poverty and destitution has to be one of the most important causes for the international community.

The negative effects of these blights on society are perceptible in each crisis, each conflict and each violent situation that occurs in our world, often blind to the poverty of the human condition.

The development gap that exists in our societies, isolating certain countries, is a betrayal of our universal values of equality and morality. Obscurantism is challenging our civilisations, taunting our rationality. A light and a hope must shine.

We need an ambitious orientation for the future, based on better mutual knowledge of peoples and democratic access to knowledge.

We must reject the mounting marginalisation which is pushing people away from each other.

A common destiny must be the foundation for our present, to give it a meaning and enrich our prospects.

A common vision built through our cultural diversity and our commitment is necessary in order to foster a real dialogue between peoples, conveying tolerance and respect for human dignity.

Full co-operation bringing together the governmental or local players from North and South in a common vision of democratic progress will serve to unite them in a revolution.

This revolution will contribute to freeing the world from the terror of extreme poverty. It will aim to bring an end to extreme poverty and social exclusion. This revolution will bear the emblem of a true dialogue between peoples. Reciprocity will enable the most excluded citizens to make themselves heard, to start out on the path to progress, to receive from the world the tools giving them access to the most vital rights.

Access to knowledge and information are the most decisive means for bringing peoples together to promote understanding and awareness, in other words a common commitment.

The sharing and free circulation of knowledge and ideas have brought mankind new possibilities for choosing, thereby generating new opportunities and possibilities in their daily lives.

A positive force must take hold of our societies and give humankind the opportunity to exchange, receive, give, create.

A worldwide partnership must link up the most underprivileged with the world's networks, and the partners in this struggle must also penetrate into these deprived communities. By establishing a record of the local initiatives and consulting people about the questions that concern them, a platform would be constituted to develop a shared vision of the resources that need to be implemented.

The progressive values of our institution, based in a fluctuating Arab world, are anchored in this prospect of modernity, dialogue and initiatives emanating from civil society. It is our desire to unite with a common vision, because progress needs a light, and peoples do not move forwards unless they know where they are.

The international movement ATD Fourth World is absolutely vital. It is a symbol of this struggle; mobilising worldwide civil society and nourishing the growth of hope. It bears direct testimony to the interdependence between peoples and civilisations.

For this reason, through the Bibliotheca I will do my utmost to support the work of your association against the terror of poverty.

I wish you a successful and fruitful Seminar.

Thank you.

4) Speech by Pierre Rastoin, Director of the La Baume Centre, Aix en Provence, Opening session of the Mediterranean Seminar, 26 September 2005

It is already thirty years since I first encountered ATD!

It was in an emergency housing camp in north Marseilles called Bassens. It was a pitiful place – 250 squalid dwellings, each with a couple of small rooms and something that passed for a bathroom. They had been built twenty years earlier to last for four or five years, but now they were decrepit and black with grime... The camp was home to families, often large families, from all around the Mediterranean – the majority were Algerian immigrants and gypsies of Spanish origin. There was a cement works at the entrance, a bypass cutting the camp in two, and the Paris-Marseilles railway running along one side. And just on the other side of the tracks there was a wonderful piece of wasteland which the kids loved to explore. The result: over just a few years, six children were killed when they were hit by trains. Terrible!

Around 1973/4, Etienne de Ghelincq, a Jesuit priest, came to live in the camp. He was Belgian and from ATD. He began by tackling the most urgent problem. Using his contacts and persuasion skills, Etienne convinced the council to build a wall beside the railway track. They put a plaque on the wall in memory of the six children, and today visitors to the estate still go and see it. Next he had to make the people of the camp - who had been treated like rejects, like scrap, by everyone – realise that they were men and women who deserved to stand tall and have their dignity back. The decision was quickly taken to organise an “open door” programme, and to receive, for a Moroccan “mechoui” dinner, all of the city dignitaries. And they came – the councillors, the Prefect, the archbishop and a lot of people from neighbouring districts, all of whom were stunned to see that the people in the camp were just like them. The families, encouraged by Etienne and advised by an architect, took the initiative to clean up the estate and propose a regeneration project. Miraculously the decision soon followed to renovate the camp, including the demolition and rebuilding of the worst area. Etienne returned to Belgium and ATD no longer has a representative in Bassens, but somehow or other the estate is a living community which has shed its old reputation, and its inhabitants are no longer ashamed to give their address.

One man, driven by a profound faith and supported by the ATD Movement, was able to give hope and courage to these excluded families and give them back an enthusiasm for life. He achieved this through his courage, his willingness to live among them, his ability to listen and his understanding of their true needs. For many people, particularly myself, his actions served as a great lesson in the courage and faith of man. At that time I was in charge of housing at Marseilles Town Hall. I will never forget Etienne and his calm faith.

But neither can I forget the founder of ATD Father Joseph Wresinski, whom I met on several occasions. I liked this man of great intelligence who knew how to listen to the very poor and understand their requests, their needs and their desires. I particularly admired the fact that he didn't seek to make ATD a movement of the church, or even an explicitly Christian organisation. He felt that this type of label might have excluded some people, which was something he wanted to avoid at all costs.

I am therefore all the happier to welcome you to La Baume today, because this centre is run by both laymen and Jesuit priests. Of course, you will have noticed that the splendour of the surroundings has little to do with the squalor of Bassens. But we are working with the same spirit as Etienne and Father Joseph.

La Baume is a place for learning, for listening, for free debate, and it is open to everyone without exception. You will see, if you look through our programme, that our conferences cover a vast range of topics, including the study of religion in politics, Chinese philosophy, the issues faced by disabled people in our society, urban segregation, and even the cultural aspects of rap, graffiti and hip-hop! Although we

are also a theological college for the men and women of our region who wish to study the Bible and then spread the Gospel, dialogue between religions is of the highest importance for us.

The principal goal of your interregional seminar is to understand how the poorest families can contribute to the dialogue between different cultures. Hosting your seminar here is a great opportunity for ourselves, because this issue is at the heart of our work. Although the people who come to our sessions are not generally from the very poor – either intellectually, socially or economically – they are aware of their responsibility to change situations which are often unacceptable. Your presence here today is a seed of peace, a peace so fragile, which is priceless. The very poor - who are often the first victims of conflicts organised by the richest, most powerful countries – must have a voice in the dialogue between men and women of good will, because this dialogue is the only route to peace. Your Permanent Forum is where this dialogue takes place. It is a blessing to host your Seminar at our centre.

5) Message from Eugen Brand, General Director of ATD Fourth World, Opening session of the Mediterranean Seminar, 26 September 2005

On behalf of ATD Fourth World, I am extremely happy to be able to welcome you to this Seminar with my heartfelt thanks, and to be able to thank you for your confidence, your friendship and your time shared with us. For all the members of our movement, in all continents, this Seminar is an important event and a step forwards. This Seminar also has a particular significance for all the friends, allies, volunteers and families of Marseilles and it's region who have given so much of themselves along with the Permanent Forum Team, in preparing the Seminar here. Your lives, your countries, your historic cultural and spiritual origins have many things in common with each other. Thanks to the Permanent Forum team, through the enthusiasm of this team who you already know, we have the impression that we already know you a bit, that we can guess about what's at the heart of your commitments and your actions and how we can advance together.

We're sad for all those who couldn't attend. We're with them in thought and we commit ourselves to share our work with them.

The world needs every one of you, your countries and your peoples to help to create a new way of thinking about humanity, a new collective intelligence, a new way of action, to free men and women from extreme poverty in every continent of the world. Everywhere in the world, every day, the poorest families have to face extreme insecurity which weakens people and families to their very heart and which breaks their links to the community. A mother from Ireland said this to you – I quote – *“I have been on the streets for half of my life and before me, my father and mother were homeless too... You have to have lots of strength to look after your kids, to keep them clean and well behaved. You have to work day and night, you are no longer considered like a human being. Nobody wants to know you. We are families that are being swept under the carpet. Sometimes we are bent under the burden of poverty, but like reeds we force ourselves to straighten up again. All this suffering is hidden, as if it had never occurred. This must be said and it must be changed.”*

The history of ATD Fourth World began in the kind of solitude that this Irish mother speaks of. On 19 May 1981 the founder of our movement, Joseph Wresinski spoke to a group of participants from Africa, he said *“Our Movement was born in 1957 amidst misery, anguish, solitude and the incomprehension of those around us. In a word, it was born in the very same impotence and almost total disregard from which the poorest suffer... Do not forget that the West was at that time a victim of its own success, convinced as it was that its economic progress and social legislation were such that poverty could no longer exist. It was believed that to live in misery one must be the wreckage of humanity, feeble or weak-willed.”*

Having lived with my mother, brothers and sisters myself in extreme poverty, taught me that these men and brothers in the depths of themselves were not expecting public charity but rather the recognition of their dignity. This, in spite of their appearance and behaviour as men fashioned and used by dire poverty. ATD Fourth World is unique in this sense, that it's first founders and members were amongst the poorest and were themselves excluded.

Joseph Wresinski concludes: *It is thanks to the poorest families that we did not give up, that to the contrary, we have never stopped growing. Because we lived amongst them, they came and told us by night things that they could not tell the social services by day. They were as thirsty for dignity as for running water, if not more so. And they were thirsty for learning, for knowledge, for the ability to consider things together, and for the opportunity to take their turn at speaking instead of being from generation to generation regulated, directed, educated and treated as inferiors and worthless objects by all those who came into contact with them.*"

Since the beginning of the Movement in Noisy Le Grand ATD has developed thanks to the commitment of families living in extreme poverty, the volunteers and the friends active in all branches of society throughout Europe, Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, North America and the Indian Ocean. An important moment in this history is 17 October 1987 when 100,000 defenders of human rights from all origins, all classes, all beliefs, met in the square of Freedom and Human Rights at the Trocadero Paris (where the declaration of human rights was signed in Paris in 1948). Together they paid tribute to the victims of hunger, ignorance and violence and proclaimed the conviction that extreme poverty is inevitable. They inaugurated a memorial stone in honour of the victims of poverty, and on which these words are inscribed: "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." That is our reference point for ATD Fourth World.

The way ahead of us today is made of questions, of preoccupations that we need to share with you. It is your life experiences, experiences of action and your thoughts which will enable us to deepen these questions, to see them in a new light and to find new responses. Your contributions have already been opening new horizons to us.

You underline the importance of visiting people at home to create a greater closeness, the importance of creating places like 'Beïtouna', which means 'our house', 'the house where we all listen to each other'. And then what the organisation El Ouaha shares with us: *"Things don't just happen like that, but everything is possible if you know that the other person is you, no higher, no lower. What you know doesn't belong to you, it belongs to the other, to others like you."* Lots of people emphasise the importance of relying on everyone's experience. Rachel says: *"Young people are the best experts in their own background, on the situations they live."*

You say how important it is to enable people to belong to a community, how important it is too not to get lost in debates on ideas but to remain focussed on people.

Linking your future with the most deprived families is a difficult project. But it is everyone's responsibility, the responsibility of all peoples and of the international community. It concerns everyone who's working towards a more peaceful world. It concerns all those who are committed to Human Rights and the indivisibility of those Human Rights. All those who are committed to the environment. It concerns all those who are thinking about the futures of our towns and countryside, all those who are thinking about the short-term and long-term future of our planet.

Let's think for a moment of the space, the creativity and the hope which would be opened up to the international community, to every country, if we dared to and managed to deal with subjects which legitimately preoccupy us, by looking for the enlightenment on each of these subjects from those who, due to their economic and social conditions, live in great suffering. The poorest families are the first victims of the changes in climate and pollution damage. They suffer the daily insecurity of violence, conflict and wars. They endure the consequences of trafficking of blood and organs and are often part of a population of abandoned and adopted children. They often have no social protection, die before the age of

retirement, know failure at school and that of their own children. Standing alongside them we have everything to learn about the conditions of true peace, true security and schooling for all.

Another issue that we would like to share with you and submit to your thoughts and experiences is this: as, all over the world, we are being constantly reminded of the importance of participation, do we really know what genuine participation of the poorest means? Jean Venard, from Madrid, puts the questions in this way: how can we fulfil the right conditions so that neighbours can meet each other on common ground? And Jean quotes a man who says this to us: *“Often, when people see a tramp passing by, they say that the man could at least take five minutes to have a wash because water doesn’t cost anything. I always want to reply to them that they could take five minutes to think: what do they know about this man’s life?”*

Still, our societies are not really used to trying to understand the thoughts that very poor people, who don’t have degrees, gain from their experiences. Not just to improve the conditions of their lives but to contribute to the future of humanity. The poorest are not taken into account as stake-holders and partners in the field of thought.

Today, it is true, we are all witnesses that lots of people try to join the poorest and to be affected by them. However, we still do not measure sufficiently the shock produced by this meeting. To enable the poor to take up this struggle is one thing, but that others, all of us let our thoughts, our actions, our will and our spirituality be transformed by the poorest themselves, that remains a challenge.

In your written contributions which bear witness to your long-term commitments, people among us today with 20, 30 years of commitment emphasise clearly that we should not kid ourselves into believing that this meeting is easy, and that trying it and wanting it is enough. In reality we need to be able to lean on those who are committed and who are fighting for the participation of the poorest, so that we can guarantee the participation of everyone.

What can we do to make sure that this coming together between the poorest and the rest of society is something we commit to in the long-term and something which produces a change, a transformation. A change that is born from these meetings, bringing things between one another that have not yet been thought of or foreseen: something new that we need to welcome and seek to understand, individually and together.

This brings me to another issue that I would like to share with you. Everywhere, this question comes up time and again: who are we? Who are we when we’re faced with the vulnerability and the extreme poverty of these families? With this pressing question, each of us has the painful question of suffering: who am I faced with other people’s suffering? This is where unbearable loneliness and isolation can start to build up within us and between us, which is destructive if it lasts too long. This is where we run the risk of hurting each other, of getting locked into misunderstandings with other people as well as ourselves. It is here that there is a danger that we see ourselves as expert when faced with others, or else we surround ourselves with false protections.

Daring to take the path which leads towards the heart of the despair of the poorest means accepting to go beyond our schemes of reference, whatever these may be; it means accepting that we won’t always have the right words, it’s accepting silence, accepting that we will get to know ourselves better too. On this path, we need to be surrounded by others, to be supported by and in contact with others.

And isn’t it precisely in this way that we have to create links with the Information Society? On the one hand, men and women are inventing, creating and managing communication super-highways, capable of linking businesses, universities and the most diverse groups all around the world. At the other extreme, men and women are living in precarious housing along tracks made almost inaccessible in bad weather. They are confronted with the necessities of survival, with the absence of work and of hope for the future. For the first group, the Information Society is a fertile field where capacities of receiving and transmitting data are increasing indefinitely. For the second group, it is a field that is set aside, whose data is considered as being without importance.

In Bulando, a village in Burkina Faso in Africa, I met an old man who was sitting behind his loom. He sat there, repeating the sacred gestures of a skill passed on by his ancestors. Technological development will catch up with him and his family sooner or later. Will it cut this thread passed on from generation to generation? What will happen to his family, to his grand-children, whose thirst to discover the world during the Street Library ²⁵ surpassed with so much dignity the hunger that was ravaging their bodies?

Last June, near Bari in Italy, Ana Maria was found at home, ten days after she had died. She was living in a shack. Her four children had been taken away from her. For all the Ana Marias all over the world, what is the meaning of the advances in technology, if she is alone in trying to keep her family alive?

The poorest, just like all of us, need an Information Society which is not only able to link data but which really becomes capable of linking people. In the south as in the North, in the East as in the West, extreme poverty is not shared by others. It is ours. The men and women who have suffered expect that we alongside them should learn so that in the future this burden is shared equally amongst us all.

Strengthened by the extraordinary history which the community of your countries and people share, the cultures and spirituality of the Mediterranean Basin, strengthened by all this richness and diversity, who better than you can know what it means to be ignorant of your history, diversity, and infinite richness of humanity? They need to be heard, not because we wish to educate them but because we wish to be educated by them. Who better than you, the men and women that can become defenders of all the excluded populations on all continents.

As for us, our Movement is committed to continue this adventure that we have embarked on with you, beyond this seminar, to continue with each of you and, from that starting point, with all those who are at the heart of your courage, your creativity and your conviction that a future will exist where we learn together how to live together, differently.

Thank You.

²⁵ Street Library: regular and long-term activity which introduces books, art and other tools (especially IT) for access to knowledge to children from deprived backgrounds and their families, where they live (e.g. on a pavement, at the foot of a stair-well, in isolated places in the countryside, etc...)

6) Presentation by Huguette Redegeld, Vice President, in charge of the Permanent Forum on Extreme Poverty in the World, Monday 26 September 2005, Opening session

Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Friends,

You have perhaps asked yourselves, what prompted ATD Fourth World to organise this conference. What are they looking for? Why did they contact me, or why did they contact my organisation? Are they planning to establish a team in my country, in my region? What should we expect of them? What could we offer them? What do I know about them, what do they know about me, about us? What do they mean by 'the poorest' 'the most exhausted'?

These are questions that we also have to ask ourselves and I would like to explain to you how they have shaped the conference that brings us together today. I'm going to tell you a story that starts with you, even though we didn't then know one another.

For a long time, right from the time our founder passed away in 1988, we felt the desire and the need to get into contact with people and organisations in the Mediterranean region who were close to adults, young people and children living in very difficult circumstances, in extreme poverty. This seemed to be a crucial step in order for us to open our minds to other realities, to learn other ways of committing ourselves to working alongside the most vulnerable, and also to share our enthusiasm and uncertainties.

Which path?

We are however, just one organisation, moving forward within the constraints of the people and finances available, concerned not to abandon what has already been started. Therefore this initiative which we have been thinking about for a long time has only recently got underway. Immediately we were faced with questions: how do we go about it? What paths shall we take? Which people shall we involve so that we stay at a human level, without pretentiousness and without moving too fast?

If I underline 'without pretentiousness and without moving too fast', you will understand how great our concern was, and still is, to take time in getting to know people, and mutual discovery: getting to know one another, recognising each other as peers, to appreciate one another's characteristics, to become friends... That demands time and openness, on both sides. So the path that seemed the most appropriate was that of the "Permanent Forum on Extreme Poverty in the World". So what is this Forum? In brief, the Forum is a network created by our founder, to break down the isolation, the discouragement, and even the discredit which he had known and which many people committed long-term alongside very poor people or families are subject to. This network lets us enter freely into dialogue with one another, each holding onto their own identity and aims.

Taking the path of the Permanent Forum allows us to state clearly our identity, our aims, and the limits of those aims. We belong to an organisation called ATD Fourth World with a history, core principles, and precise goals. The 'Permanent Forum' is one of the branches of ATD Fourth World, it's aim is not to place correspondents or representatives of ATD in such and such a country or region, but rather to meet others and respect their ideas, background and aims. The people we meet have a precise identity: they are members of an organisation, a university, or work with young people and children in a neighbourhood, or even in a social service. What we have in common is our commitment to people and families who do not want to live in extreme poverty.

Have we been clear enough with you with regard to this Permanent Forum through which we chose to meet you in your country, in an attempt to build long-term relationships? Probably not, and in any event

one meeting, or even two or three, is not enough for us to understand one another. For our part, we have not totally understood what you really want to share with us. That's normal. What has made the biggest impression in these first meetings is the faith that you have put in us, without knowing us, and the hope you have placed in us of meeting others who, like you, are shoulder to shoulder with families experiencing extreme poverty.

With whom are we taking the Permanent Forum path?

Ok, so we're taking the path of the Permanent Forum. But how do we take the first steps, and with whom? In order to move step by step, person by person, we let ourselves be guided along routes by those who have agreed to help us create contacts, and even to travel the road with us.

At no stage did we decide that we wanted to cover all the countries of the Mediterranean region. That would have been artificial. What we have always wanted is to meet people who are committed.

We have been lucky because at the right moment people appeared who wanted to accompany us. Some of them are here today and we are very grateful to them. These first contacts led us to others.

It is in this way we discovered Sameh and his friends from the Gudrun Organisation who believe that art and culture should be accessible to everyone, and work with children living in a disadvantaged fishing village near Alexandria.

Wafa, co-founder of the Women's Co-operative in Aseela, who, with a dozen Palestinian women, threw herself single-mindedly into the manufacture of olive oil soap to generate money and to open up possible contacts.

Immigrants from several countries live in Berchikow's community at Neve Ja'akov, he really wants to break down the barriers and to create bridges between the different communities. With Mahmoud and another Sameh from the Egyptian Association for Global Development, we heard a presentation about the development of a very disadvantaged area based on the participation of everyone, and not only the most dynamic people.

Tewfik whom we are very sorry can't be with us due to visa difficulties, is passionate about responding to the thirst for discovery and culture displayed by the children from the Casbah and has created Culture Classes at the heart of the Museum of Arts and Traditions in Algiers. We are also very sorry about the absence of Azzedine from the Vasara Art and Culture Co-operative in Bordj Menaiel, who is so creative in her cultural activities with children and young people from poor backgrounds. Tahar and Nassima, from the national volunteer bureau in Algeria have also been prevented from joining us due to visa problems. The same is true for Mohammed and Hadia from the Middle East Association for Non-violence and Democracy. We are looking at how we can link with those who are absent during our seminar.

During the meetings we had in the run-up to this Seminar, we had the privilege of getting to know Hassan and Hamid from the El Ouaha Association. Deep in their oasis in Morocco, they have recreated a community life where the dignity of each person is respected.

Zohara and Rachel are actively engaged in a group bringing together social workers and people living in poverty in Israel.

Georges and Nadar from Caritas in Alexandria introduced us into the hard and generous world of the children who live in the street and children with disabilities. Just like Tahany did, from the SETI Centre.

Emma, an enthusiastic young woman from Naples, thinks that it is possible that people from a housing estate and Roma families can meet with one another over and above their differences.

The same spirit drives Srs Therese, Sako and Najwa. From the Beitouna centre in the middle of a poor area in Beirut, they find creative ways to promote the sort of intercultural dialogue we have been talking about. They have a lot to tell us in this regard.

Just like Yves in the Focus organisation who promotes meetings between young people from distant countries and young people from poor neighbourhoods in Rome, Italy.

Hala, from the social movement, is part of a huge movement of volunteers and social workers working with families in poverty across Lebanon.

Latifa, in the Moroccan El Massar Association for Education and Citizenship, passionately defends education in human rights and the respect of each person. She promotes meetings between young people in the prison system and young people in other walks of life.

Mohammed, from the Sidi El Houari Health Association in Oran, links community development, restitution of cultural heritage, and training, working especially with young people in difficulty.

Jean, with ATD Fourth World in Spain, works alongside families who despite being obliged to move from place to place, commit themselves to working for a better life for themselves and others.

Burcu along with her colleagues from the Social Politics Forum at the Bogazici University in Istanbul, is taking on research with a view to changing legislation in favour of people living in poverty.

And there's Said, an Algerian immigrant living in Lyon, France, who has made the choice to defend the poorest.

Jona, our big brother in this seminar, was a pioneer for social action in Israel and in the training for social interventions in which he is still very involved.

And Vincent from ATD Fourth World, working in Appalachia in the United States, has a lot to teach us about the creation and use of modern means of communication by and with those who have the least access.

Amongst us there are also Pierre, Abdallah, Graciane, Adi, Jean-Pierre, Ruth, Veronique, Francois, Nicole, Pascale, Mourad, Olivier, Hani, Annelies, Nouraldin, Martine, Claude, Ali, Ton, Eugen, Susie, Nir, Bruno...I cannot mention, even briefly, what each one represents, and you'll not hold it against me. So now it's down to us, down to you, to take the time to get to know each other a bit better during these four days together.

Using only your first names is not a lack of respect, rather you will understand! It proves to what degree everyone counts on a personal basis.

A long-term perspective needs visible and useful steps

So, we have gone a tiny bit of the journey together, and also with those who are not here. Thanks to the diversity of the people we have met, we have received much richness: richness of experience, richness of know-how, richness of making new friends, richness from questioning too. This is not something that only belongs to us and therefore we have been searching for how to share this and make it everyone's. So was born the idea of a relatively contained Seminar, to mark a visible step in the creation of long-term links. Bit by bit, the Seminar took shape, based on the experiences and commitment of those working with very poor people.

The choice of the principal theme 'The contribution of very poor people and families to intercultural dialogue in the information society' arose from our meetings and our exchanges. In listening to you, in looking at you, in discovering your actions, in meeting some of the families you are working with, questions arose, for example: Across the world people are talking about intercultural dialogue, but isn't that restricted to quite small circles? What can people teach us who, whilst living in destitution, are experiencing these 'intercultural' dialogues every day without knowing it? Do we think of them in this way? Have we thought about it seriously? And with them?

Moreover, the international community is organising in two stages the World Summit on the Information Society. The first stage took place in Geneva in December 2003; the second will take place in Tunis in November 2005. All sorts of questions about communication and new technologies are at the heart of the debates and the recommendations from this Summit. Have we not got a responsibility to make a contribution to this based on the point of view and questions of those living in poverty? There is no reason why they should be absent from this debate. Like everyone, they are part of our world.

A few days ago, we met a Permanent Forum correspondent who is originally from Rwanda, and in discussing the theme of this Seminar with her, she said: ‘Originally this theme astonished me because when you think of poverty, especially in my country, you think of water, food, education. And then I continued to think about it,’ she went on, ‘and I said to myself, here is a new way of thinking about people who are in extreme poverty. This pushes us to consider them in a different way.’

During the Seminar, we will therefore be discussing everything that needs to be discussed when talking about the fight against extreme poverty. We have chosen this angle for reflection because it seemed good to link the experience of people and families we know with what is being considered at international level.

Martine Hosselet will facilitate the second part of the morning and will give a presentation detailing the programme. To end, I would like to tell you how much we are hoping to spend these four days together in friendship, respect, confidence, and listening to one another.

7) Speech by Mme Joëlle Liardet, on behalf of the ATD Fourth World families of Marseilles, Place de l’Espérance, 27 September 2005

The commemorative stone in honour of victims of extreme poverty, this is to show that the Fourth World exists. It is a replica of the stone unveiled in Paris in 1987. These stones are dedicated to those who suffer now and those who have died of poverty. The verses on the stone let it be known that the people of the Fourth World who lived and who still live in poverty are not people who need help, but human beings with values and honour. There are families who survive on the minimum everywhere, and the fight against poverty must be universal.

Every year we gather together on 17 October. But last year it was demoralising to see that evictions carried on as usual, from the very next day. There are always people in the street. Those with the least are not taken into consideration, and it is always the same struggle. Our children are luckier than we were: they have TVs, computers and an education that we never had when we were small. When they grow up and become parents themselves, they will find it hard to find an apartment. Without a degree, it will be hard for them to find work. We are worried about our children’s future. We don’t want them to hang about on the street at the mercy of drugs.

We are spurred on by the desire to live as people with rights and responsibilities, and not simply as people who exist and need help. We invite you to read the verses on this stone and spread the word around the whole world.

8) Message from Father Zadik Avedikian, member of Marseille Espérance, 27 September 2005

Ladies, Gentlemen, and Dear Friends,

In the name of all of the members of Marseille Espérance, I am happy to have the honour of greeting you in this highly symbolic place, and to express to all the members of ATD Fourth World our appreciation and our deep gratitude for their commitment to working side by side families in difficulty, through cultural, training, and human rights activities.

These areas are all subjects of priority concern, reflection, and action by Marseille Espérance.

Under the protective shade of that Tree of Hope whose seven branches represent the seven communities of Marseille Espérance emerging from the same trunk which illustrates the growth and well-being of every citizen of Marseilles, I would like to testify to the unreserved support of Marseille Espérance for the work of ATD Fourth World, which contributes to the dialogue and mutual enrichment of people of good will.

Thank you for having chosen Marseilles for your seminar this year. Marseilles is a Mediterranean capital which is rich in its ethnic, cultural, and spiritual make-up - a richness developed over the 26 centuries of its history.

What is Marseille Espérance?

It is firstly a very simple idea: the bringing together of religious leaders and the Mayor or his Deputy as a guarantee of social harmony.

In this way, through its various actions over the last fifteen years Marseille Espérance has disseminated its message of tolerance and mutual respect with a generosity and humility of heart and mind.

Who does it include? Fifteen years ago, Marseille Espérance was founded in Marseille at the initiative of the city's Mayor, who was Robert-Paul Vigouroux. Today, Senator and Mayor Jean-Claude Gaudin has taken up the torch, and has requested Jean-François Mattei to work with this group.

In the beginning, because the relationships between the different communities in this city were difficult, the city administrators felt that it was urgent to bring together their leaders (Armenian, Buddhist, Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Orthodox, and Protestant). This was not in order to create a dialogue between religions, but instead to re-establish a dialogue between the different communities in order to work towards social harmony.

Marseille Espérance enabled such a dialogue to be created between the city's different religious communities and their delegates.

After 15 years of experience, there is one clear conclusion: our religions are bringing us together as they should always have done. The less we know each other, the more we distrust each other, and the more we distrust each other, the more likely we are to turn to violence.

This dialogue and this mutual understanding are the greatest foundations against the dangers to our society.

Today, the original basis of Marseille Espérance is growing in strength. It not only constitutes a model for a Europe in the search of hope, but also in other cities such as Lyon, Brussels, Antwerp, Sarajevo, and Sofia where people are following this example and forming networks which are beginning to show concrete results, transforming this Tree into a forest of hopes.

Marseilles, which welcomes you today, is a city with a vision for the future, a beacon for people in the 21st century, where, although still fragile the feeling reigns that 'Stranger, your differences enrich my life'.

I have the liberty to receive he or she who is different, while maintaining and cultivating my own identity as well as my own cultural and spiritual specificity, which are a source of enrichment for mankind.

9) Statement by Bruno Couder, Assistant General Director, International Movement ATD Fourth World, Marseilles, 27 September 2005

Each year in the streets of Brussels, the capital of Europe, dozens of men and women end their lives alone and nameless as no one knows their true identity. For years some of the city's residents have been struggling for these people to be given a dignified burial, so that their memory can be kept alive.

Recently in the USA, hurricane Katrina has caused over a thousand deaths. There is no doubt that the majority of these people came from amongst the hundreds of thousands of men, women, young people and children, black and white, who lived in Louisiana in conditions of extreme poverty and whose lives were unknown to the majority of American citizens. In the past months severe and deadly floods have taken thousands of lives in Dakar, Senegal, in Bangui, Central Africa, in Gonaives, Haiti and in the south of the Philippines, all without a word in the press...

Joseph Wresinski, the founder of ATD Fourth World, was driven by a determination to enable the poorest of the poor to emerge from the shadows and share their experiences and thoughts with the rest of mankind.

On 17 October 1987 at the Trocadero square in Paris he inaugurated a commemorative stone in honour of the victims of extreme poverty around the world. In this square which historically has been a symbol of human rights, their lives, courage, and dignity were recognised. A large international crowd gathered together for the inauguration, calling all those who refuse poverty to unite so that human rights are respected throughout the world.

Since then, this stone has served as a model for thousands and thousands of people who have started to celebrate 17 October as an important date in the history of the fight against extreme poverty. In 1992, the UN proclaimed this day as the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, and one by one other stones have been inaugurated throughout the world, with the same text as that which is engraved in the marble on the Trocadero square Paris.

The stone around which we are gathered this evening was inaugurated in the year 2000 by the city of Marseilles. It is a place to honour the suffering and the courage of the poorest people in this great city and somewhere that defenders of human rights can gather.

Over the next few days a Seminar is taking place in Aix en Provence, organised by the initiative of the Permanent Forum against Extreme Poverty in the World. The Seminar brings together people from different countries of the Mediterranean basin, all who are involved in the struggle against poverty. The objective of this Seminar is to provide the participants with an opportunity to get to know each other, share their knowledge, and to support each other.

Invited by the regional delegates of the ATD Fourth World Movement in the Provence Alps Côte d'Azur region, these participants are united here tonight in Marseilles for a moment of commemoration and mobilisation. We thank all of you who have been able to join them.

10) Verses to the Glory of the Poor of all times, Joseph Wresinski, Trocadero Square in Paris, 17 October, 1987

You the millions and millions
Of children, women and fathers
Who have died from misery and hunger
And whose legacy we hold.
It is not your death that I evoke,
Today on this Plaza of Human Rights and
Liberties.
I bear witness to your lives.

I bear witness to you, the mothers
Whose children are cast aside in this world,
Condemned as they are to sheer misery.

I bear witness to your children,
Twisted by the pains of hunger,
No longer able to smile,
Yet still yearning to love.

I bear witness to the millions of young people
Who have no reason to believe, or even to exist,
And who vainly search for a future
In this senseless world.

I bear witness to you, the poor of all times
Still poor today,
Forever on our roads,
Fleeing from place to place,
Despised and disgraced.

Labourers without a trade, ever crushed by their
toil,

Labourers whose hands, today are no longer
useful.

Millions of men, women and children
Whose hearts are still pounding strong
To the beat of the struggle,
Whose minds rise up in revolt
Against the unjust fate
Imposed upon them,
Whose courage demands
The right to priceless dignity.

I bear witness to you,
Children, men and women
Who do not want to condemn,
But to love, to pray, to work and unite,
So that a world of solidarity may be born.
A world, our world,
In which all people would have given
The best of themselves before dying.

I bear witness to you,
Men, women and children.
Your lives are henceforth engraved
By heart, hand and tool,
In the marble of this Plaza of human rights.
I bear witness to you, so that humanity
May at last fulfil its true destiny,
Refusing forever that misery prevail.

11) Note on the financial costs of the Mediterranean Seminar

The costs of organising the Mediterranean Seminar were more than ATD Fourth World could meet without seeking grants and other forms of financial support.

We knew from experience, and from our numerous trips to countries around the Mediterranean, that this Seminar could not take place with the right participants unless we were ready to cover some or all of the travel, accommodation and food costs for a large proportion of the delegates that we were going to invite. From the outset, therefore, we had open conversations with potential participants so that no-one declined the invitation for financial reasons, or because their organisation's budget would not cover a Seminar abroad. But we made it clear that the Permanent Forum, part of the ATD Fourth World Movement, also has a limited budget, and that it was necessary to seek other forms of financial support so that everyone could attend the Seminar.

Several participants needed to obtain a passport, and some of them required a visa. This was a significant expense for some participants, and was also time-consuming to arrange. There were also the costs of travelling to and from the airport.

The issue of money was therefore one of the things we discussed in our exchanges with the participants. It appears that no-one declined the invitation for financial reasons. And everyone paid their own Seminar registration fee.

Regarding the Seminar's costs, we note the following:

Many members and friends of the Movement provided transport without reclaiming expenses. Some of them provided accommodation for participants before and/or after the seminar. Several of them paid for a particular aspect of the preparation for the seminar out of their own money.

The workshop organisers reduced their requirements to a minimum.

The interpreters (recruited through International Conference Volunteers and through Mr Andy Tooms, who also worked as an interpreter throughout the Seminar) provided their services free of charge.

Thanks to an arrangement with GARD (Groupe d'aide aux réalisations pour le développement), we benefited from substantial savings on air tickets for the volunteers' trips to the Mediterranean regions, and for the participants and interpreters who travelled to the seminar from distant countries.

The La Baume Centre gave us very favourable prices for accommodation and did not charge for the use of the Seminar facilities. This vastly reduced the costs of the stay.

As mentioned above, all of the participants and/or their organisations did all they could to cover their costs by seeking their own financial support.

We did not advertise this meeting. We wanted to limit the Mediterranean Seminar to about sixty people drawn from those we met on our trips to these regions, and people from organisations that we already knew. The aim was to exchange thoughts on the lives of the very poor and their place in society, based on the experiences and work of the seminar's participants. The financial requirements of the event were therefore modest, especially since we invited neither the press nor public institutions to the opening session.

We were able to rely on substantial contributions from UNESCO and the European Fourth World Solidarity Association, as well as private donations. ATD Fourth World, however, covered the considerable costs incurred over the budget. We were always aware that organising this type of Seminar carried a financial risk. The fact that we were willing to take this risk demonstrates the will of the Movement and the Permanent Forum to facilitate exchanges between people and organisations in order to strengthen our efforts.

12) Message from Eugen Brand, General Director of the International Movement ATD Fourth World, for 17 October, the World Day to Overcome Extreme Poverty 2005

Dear Friends,

In 1956, a man decided to live in a shanty-town in Noisy le Grand, France, with families who were stuck in a muddy terrain, without indoor plumbing and electricity. In later years, this man, who had grown up in similar conditions of extreme poverty, would speak about the first years he spent in the camp at Noisy-le-Grand:

*“Our Movement was born in the pain, anguish, solitude, and lack of understanding from those who surrounded us. In short, it shared the same powerlessness and almost total lack of self-esteem endured by the poorest. If we have not gone away, and if, on the contrary, we have grown, we owe it to the poorest families. At night they came to tell us, who lived there with them, what they did not dare to say to public authorities during the day. They told us that they thirsted for dignity as much and more than they did for running water. And that they were hungry for instruction, knowledge, the capacity to think together and to speak up, rather than being, generation after generation, subjected to rules, controlled, told how to behave, treated as inferiors and as objects by all those who dealt with them. It is that which made us stay. We held on also because of the joy of seeing that each time we responded to their concern for dignity, they themselves became involved.”*²⁶

Through the impetus given by this man, people from all walks of life came together and dared to set up meetings for mutual discovery. Through these encounters, they realised that each one of them was source and actor of knowledge. It was the birth of a new culture: the ignorance between the worlds of people separated by lack of comprehension, fear, violence, and contempt was transformed into equal dignity for all.

Recently, in September 2005, a Seminar on the “Contribution Of Very Poor Families to Cross-Cultural Dialogue in the Information Society”²⁷ gathered people who live in very difficult circumstances and others who are committed with them. All the participants came from countries bordering the Mediterranean.

In our modern world, men and women create and use communication networks that link businesses, universities, and all sorts of groups, beyond country boundaries. Yet, at the seminar, people spoke of families living in precarious housing, in hard to reach areas with no access to jobs and no future prospect. They spoke of those who are the first affected by climatic disturbances, floods, droughts, and air pollution. They spoke of young people who are subject to constant insecurity, violence and war, and of children who are the victims of traffics that mutilate their bodies and souls. They bore witness to mothers and fathers whose children are forcefully separated from them, who have no social safety net, and often die too young.

Some people have access to a rich field of information where data is received and transmitted constantly and where they increase their own resources. For others their field is fallow and what they do possess is unfairly perceived as inaccessible and uninteresting. And the world is poorer for it.

²⁶ Joseph Wresinski, intervention for the Seminar " Extreme poverty and exclusion in Africa ", Pierrelaye 1981.

²⁷ Organised at Aix en Provence by the Permanent Forum " Extreme Poverty in the World " as part of ATD Fourth World.

At the conclusion of the Seminar, George from Egypt and Emmanuel from France explained that, in order to stay in contact, the participants could call each other through their computers. Some people couldn't believe it:

"You say it actually works?"

"Yes, we can try if you want to".

"From here, I can speak to my family in Algeria?"

"And me in Italy?"

"Even in Turkey?"

Wafa had just spoken of her worries as a mother. She shyly took her turn in front of the screen. Suddenly all in the room fell silent when she cried out with joy. Her three sons could be heard, laughing and shouting as they gave her news from a refugee camp. Then it was Bechikow's turn. Silence filled the room each time the telephone could be heard, ringing in a disadvantaged neighbourhood.. Berchikow's happiness was obvious as her neighbour gave her some news of her family.

The participants could have never come together; they could even have been prevented from crossing borders because of all the suffering, the inequalities, and the conflicts between their countries. Still, they decided to continue to communicate with each other in order to share their thoughts and the programs each one would undertake with people in extreme poverty when they returned home.

On 17 October, 2005 - the day inspired by Joseph Wresinski - the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan will meet with a delegation of people who are all actively involved in the struggle to overcome extreme poverty in their corner of the world. They will bear witness to the efforts of people to come together in response to unbearable situations. They will affirm that every person can choose to be on the side of the most discredited people. This concerns everyone without exception - those who are in the business world, those who work to promote human rights, those who are involved in the dialogue between different religions, and those who work for the environment or the future of the planet.

The meeting of these delegates with the UN Secretary General will show that everywhere in our world, even so humbly, women, men, young people, children, entire families and communities are building a society that will bring together not only information, but also people. They all contribute to building an international community where all people can finally live "free and equal in rights and dignity"²⁸.

²⁸ Extract from the first article on the universal declaration of human rights, United Nations, Paris, 10 December 1948.

**13) Message from Eugen Brand General Director of the International Movement ATD
Fourth World, for the International Day of the Families, 15 May, 2006**

- *What are you feeding your children?*
- *Why are they sick?*
- *Why didn't they go to school?*
- *Your teenagers are out of control; they're using drugs; they mess up the streets. You'll be the ones to blame if they end up in jail! You have to kick them out if you don't want the younger ones to be following their tracks!*
- *Your house is not up to code; it has to be torn down.*
- *You are homeless? Can you take care of your children? You are unemployed? You are setting a bad example for your kids! Who will provide for them?*

Such accusations and prying looks undermine the courage and wear down the hope of those who are left alone to carry the unjust burden of extreme poverty.

We have learned from the families in the homeless camp of Noisy le Grand that they wanted to live as families in spite of everything. Joseph Wresinski who joined them exactly 50 years ago used to say, "The family is their ultimate refuge to face up life." He knew what he was speaking about. His father left the family when he could not bear any more the humiliation of not finding a job, and his mother raised the four children by herself in a country where she was a foreigner.

In October 1987, a few months before his death, he inaugurated a Commemorative Stone in honour of "the victims of hunger, ignorance and violence", inviting "all defenders of Human Rights" to "get together" and put an end to "the fatality of extreme poverty".

Some twenty years later, in all our countries, cities and communities we are preparing to launch a world-wide campaign for the 20th anniversary of the Commemorative Stone in 2007. As for a concert, we are training our voices, tuning them, listening to one another, being astonished by others, being silent at times in order to grasp what comes from deep within, allowing each person to express where they come from, who they are, who they wish to become among others, and be heard.

Everywhere, what each person reveals is extremely precious to learn peace and justice while overcoming extreme poverty.

Our common responsibility is to re-establish the links that have been torn within the human family. Joseph Wresinski gave us a compass for this endeavour when the Movement celebrated the first International Year of the Families in 1976. He said then:

*"The poor are the creators and the source of all humanity's ideals.
For it is through injustice that humanity discovered justice,
Through hatred, love
And through tyranny, the equality of all human beings."*

On this day of 15 May 2006, we want to bring to light the courage of the families: the courage of so many adults, whether in France or in Haiti, mothers and fathers who stay up at night, who are helpless in front of the insecurity and despair of the youth, and who are trying to still believe in something. Their unlimited thirst for peace is that of parents all over the world who ask: "Why? Why aren't we invited to dialogue, to give our ideas, to be able to understand what other people think, and to think with them in order to find, not petty reforms, but a new way of looking at the realities we all worry about: the future of our children, of our young people, and the future we are offering to them?" We want to bring to light first of all the courage of the families whose members are separated by dramatic events: parents without their children, children and youth torn from their parents, all those who know how much bringing the family back together affects the human family as a whole.

Many among us are saying that having friends is what helps them stay on their feet and keep their pride. My wish is that May 15th be a day of friendship for each and every one of you, a day of joy with those around you, and a day of fraternity with your friends at the other end of the world!

