



ATD

FOURTH WORLD

SPRING 2018 NEWSLETTER

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POVERTY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE UNITED STATES

We are often made aware of high rates of violence in extremely under resourced communities. We can recognize that in our developed country all people should have a right to safe and healthy housing conditions. But, it's not often we hear poverty in the United States described as a Human Rights issue or a situation of violence that the people in poverty are living through. **The Human Rights perspective sees poverty for those who experience it in the US as an infringement on the fundamental human right to participate in our democracy, in the cultural life of our society, or to live peacefully within our families.** Addressing these Human Rights aspects of extreme poverty that deny individual's dignity and dehumanize an entire population is the direct concern of ATD Fourth World Movement.

Last December the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, Philip Alston, came to evaluate the United States as he does other countries. His findings* were not at all positive or reassuring for our country - one of the wealthiest in the world. We live the contradiction of being steeped in the "American Dream" while facing a history of inequality that our current leaders seem bent on continuing. Alston's final report will be given to the United Nations Human Rights Council in June 2018.

The "violence of looking away." In her interview with Alston, this is how Tiny Gray-Garcie, a woman living on the streets in San Francisco described the reality that homeless people grapple with daily. Her take on how the most vulnerable react to the treatment of passersby reminds us how dehumanizing extreme poverty is, to all of us. Residents in Lowndes County, Alabama showing the makeshift sewerage pipes running through their yards because the local government doesn't

provide all parts of the community sanitation services let us know that the disparities are systemic and affect entire communities.

"Americans can expect to live shorter and sicker lives, compared to people living in any other rich democracy, and the "health gap" between the U.S. and its peer countries continues to grow."

Statement on Visit to the USA, by Professor Philip Alston, Washington, DC, December 15, 2017

Some people will not be surprised or shocked by Alston's findings. For others his report will bring awareness to a new and unexpected view of how many people live. To all of us they should stir discontent, maybe anger, maybe empathy, and most importantly **a motivation to counter and overcome the divisiveness in our society and politics that allows this to continue.**

How do we overcome this divisiveness that makes so many suffer? ATD Fourth World's founder Joseph Wresinski's approach, embodied in the movement he created is to bring people together around the most vulnerable and excluded ones in our society. They can lead us in developing an accurate knowledge and understanding of what extreme poverty is and how we can address it. With them, we can meet, know one another, learn together, and work past the political and social rhetoric that otherwise divides us.

The invitation is open, please join us.

Maria Sandvik
National Director



MEMBER HIGHLIGHT #1 ANNE-MARIE

Allies of ATD Fourth World Movement are people of all walks of life acting in solidarity with people living in extreme poverty. They reach out to their neighbors and colleagues to engage them in building a more inclusive society.

In January as part of a worldwide effort to recognize and strengthen the personal commitments of ATD Fourth World Allies and their role in overcoming extreme poverty, Ally Anne-Marie Marais organized a meeting of Allies in New York City. The subject of the meeting was their experiences as allies, their personal journeys, the meaning of their commitment, and the expectations for working together in the future.

As a long-time Ally, Anne-Marie has been involved with ATD Fourth World in her home country, France, later in Spain, and for the past three years in New York as her family has lived in these different places. During her stay in the United States she reached out to other Allies in the US as a part of the international initiative to strengthen the alliance between ATD Fourth World members around the world. Below, she shares the meaning of her involvement with ATD Fourth World and of this meeting.

I got to know ATD Fourth World when I was 18 years old in France. I started by transcribing tape records of ATD Fourth World Volunteer Corps member meetings. It was a very important first step because I jumped into a world that I didn't know.

Years later when my family moved to Madrid, Spain, I met ATD Fourth World again and started my involvement as a French teacher for people living in poverty. This is when I really became an Ally. I understood that teaching French was not only about learning French but also about building relationships. It was a way of creating opportunities for people living in poverty to share what they always wanted to share with people who were not from their communities. **It was about creating links between people who did not know each other.**

There was one time we went to the museum together. It was the first time for many people to visit the museum. I was thinking, "Wow, as an Ally we really can open doors." But more than that, inside the museum, I felt the security guards and other visitors looking at us suspiciously. **It was this moment that I fully understood the meaning of being on the side of people living in poverty**, because I felt this different way of looking at us, this discrimination. It opened my mind and I felt really connected.

"The meaning of my commitment has been to open doors but also to share – because there's always something to learn from people living in poverty."

Throughout my involvement, I have understood that people living in extreme poverty are excluded from the beauty of art and culture, and they have a curiosity and aspirations for that. The meaning of my commitment has been to open doors but also to share – because there's always something to learn from people living in poverty. **I've learned about perspectives that I could have never known without their experiences.**

This recent ATD Fourth World Allies meeting in New York, was an achievement for me – an achievement after three years of reaching out to different Allies. The meeting was so strong for me. There was a very high level of sharing and



Anne-Marie (left) and Patrick (right) built a strong friendship through their involvement in ATD Fourth World.

thinking together, as well as the need to be together to speak about our commitment. From our conversations, I also feel that ATD Fourth World Allies need to not only be connected with people living in poverty and Volunteer Corps Members, but also other Allies of ATD Fourth World in other countries.

I think we are starting the process of strengthening *Allyship* and in doing so building ATD Fourth World Movement. For me it's what I really appreciate. I have a dream that Allies will be creative in different ways - about thinking, ideas, and in ways of working together. We are in this movement, and for me that's different from other NGOs and non-profits. It's meaningful that all of us can explore different ways to achieve the goal of eradicating poverty, and in this way we are all together in dignity.

For the full interview of Anne-Marie, please visit 4thworldmovement.org/anne-marie
If you're interested or would like more information on ATD Fourth World Allies Meetings, please contact Lisa Moussalli at lisa.seinbrueck@gmail.com.



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