



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.

October 17, 1987, Joseph Wresinski (1917-1988), Founder, International Movement ATD Fourth World

Fourth World Movement/USA * 7600 Willow Hill Drive * Landover, MD 20785-4658 * 301-336-9489 * Vol.38 No.1 * January 2006

Listen Up and Be Informed

By Charles Courtney

Last October, Mary Jo Bane, Thornton Bradshaw Professor at the Kennedy School of Government of Harvard University and a member of the Advisory Committee of Fourth World Movement/USA, spoke at a reception hosted by the Ambassador of France to the United States as to why she counts it an honor to be a friend of the Movement. *"The Fourth World Movement volunteers work with the poor and the excluded to help them speak for themselves and bring their own knowledge about their conditions and their own knowledge about what they need to the people who need to know that and who need to be able to work with them. Working with the poor in this way is the only way, I believe, that we will be able to make progress against these problems."*

This issue of the *Fourth World Journal* highlights the views of those living in poverty and their ability to speak in public about their lives. Listen to their words at the ceremony to mark the *International Day for the Eradication of Poverty* at the United Nations, or in their meeting with Secretary General Kofi Annan, or in explaining what Hurricane Katrina meant to them. Allow these people to speak and be heard by those who need to hear them: all of us.

The alternative is to allow another opportunity to pass by, as happened when a panel of ordinary residents and community leaders from New Orleans appeared before a committee of Congress. The Democrats didn't hear the panel because, not trusting the majority party, they did not even show up. The Republicans, distrustful of the panelists, did not listen sufficiently to their message. One Congressman was unwilling to hear that "looters" were "feeding the people" because, after all, some TV sets were stolen. When requested not to use the term "Causeway Concentration Camp" because no one there was led to a gas chamber, one woman stood her ground. She said, *"Families were separated, food and water were insufficient, sanitation was lacking, arbitrary orders were given, and people died."* Sadly, elected leaders from both parties missed a rare chance.

In these pages, you have a chance to encounter real people speaking about real life. Listen up, and let what you learn inform what you say and think about poverty issues.

In the Eye of the Storm

One Family and Their Struggles in the Face of Hurricane Katrina

In the early hours of Monday August 29, Hurricane Katrina made landfall along the Gulf Coast near New Orleans. In the days and weeks that followed, the damage that it had wrought to the city and to parts of Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana fed the images that many of us saw on television and much of what we read in our newspapers.

The bare facts are still chilling: the breaching of the levee system flooded the city, more than thirteen hundred died and more than a million were displaced, making Hurricane Katrina the most destructive and most expensive natural disaster in the history of the United States.

But behind these bare facts are the stories of people, of families and of whole communities hit hard by this disaster, not least those living in persistent poverty. One such example is the Rogers family, with whom the Fourth World Movement has been in contact for several years. The New Orleans neighborhood in which they lived has seen its share of difficulties: living conditions in the area have never been easy and families burdened by precarious circumstances come and go as they move from place to place. But there is a sense of community present there also, as the experience of the Rogers family during the hurricane makes clear.

According to Ms. Rogers, people were already beginning to stand together on the Sunday night even before the hurricane struck. *"We went over to a friend's house because the wind started getting high and it started raining: it wouldn't stop. We stayed over there; we were sitting in the house watching TV and then the lights went off. We looked over and the lights had gone out over by the house of my other neighbor, Ms. Mary, so we all went over there, got her and we all stayed at the first friend's house until the next morning."*

Thus Ms. Rogers and her neighbors watched the hurricane blow through the city. By Monday afternoon, the winds had died down and the rain had stopped, but looking out from her neighbor's upstairs apartment it was clear that the water was still rising. With no electricity and only dirty water coming out of the taps, the families decided to leave together when the water reached half-way up the dozen or so steps to the ground floor apartment.

"We all walked down. Ms.

Mary got a walking stick so she could feel her way because she's an elderly lady, fifty-nine years old. Me, her, four of my kids, two of her grandsons and another one of her grandsons, we all started walking.

"We made it to St. Charles Street, where we'd heard they were giving rides to people to the Convention Center. There was no water on St. Charles Street, so we waited and we waited and we waited; nobody would ever come. It was getting dark by then, so they said, 'Everybody, walk down to Napoleon and St. Charles.' Napoleon was about five or six more blocks down. We started walking and the further we walked, it felt like, we started walking into water again."

Having waited for several hours, the Rogers family and their neighbors were finally taken to the Convention Center. Even there, in the face of terrible conditions, Ms. Rogers' daughter, Lucy, explained that there was a great deal of concern for the fate of the most vulnerable. *"We slept outside, in chairs. I didn't go to sleep: I was watching over my little brothers and my mom... I had to help my little brothers and a lady with a little, itty-bitty baby. I had to help her too. I used to take turns to put the baby to sleep at night, and help feed the baby because she was sick."*

After approximately four days in the Convention Center, the family was bussed out to a shelter set up on camp grounds in a neighboring state. As much as the family was happy to leave the Convention Center behind them, they then found themselves disorientated in other ways. There was a culture shock at being housed in a rural environment as opposed to the urban life of New Orleans. For Lucy, the difference was striking. *"I haven't ever been around a whole lot of trees before. (I'm used to having my) friends right across the street and stores right around the corner. But all there is here is woods. They don't even have buses for you to get anywhere."*

With friends and neighbors being, for the most part, sheltered in other states and hard to make contact with, homesickness began to set in. The Rogers family was even aware of family members who had been transported to other locations far away from the rest of the family. Against such a background, it was the simple things that were the hardest to bear. Asked what she

missed the most about New Orleans, Lucy's answer was immediate.

"School! I want to go to my own school... (I'm missing) my friends and my teachers. They could understand me, because here a lot of people don't understand how we talk. Most of the time, like when I go somewhere - they take us in the van to go to Wal-Mart and different places like that - they don't understand what I'm saying."



Despite the difficulties of their life in New Orleans and their struggles in the neighborhood that they call home, the Rogers family was still anxious to be able to return. For Lucy, the issue was straightforward: *"It's ok here (at the shelter camp) but I just like my house better."* For Ms. Rogers, the issue was slightly more complicated. She was still trying to learn from the lessons of the storm and its aftermath to see what that meant for her own future and that of her children. *"It was rough but we made it,"* she said. *"There were so many people. You just had to stand in line and wait, and try to keep everybody together so you wouldn't get separated. You didn't know where your family members were at; you just tried to stay together."*

Since these interviews with the Rogers family took place, Hurricane Katrina has continued to take a toll upon the family. Deprived of contact with the friends she has grown up with, feeling lost in such a rural setting when so acclimatized to an urban life and finding it hard to make real friends in the shelter environment, Lucy left to stay with the family of one of her friends in a second neighboring state. The rest of the family has also left the shelter and moved, at the invite of friend of the family, to a small town in eastern Louisiana. The housing situation is far from straightforward there, but still Ms. Rogers sees this move as the first step in getting the family closer to New Orleans and one step closer to the place they call home.

See also *'...Friends'* p. 4

The Day Mrs. Tita Villarosa Met Mr. Kofi Annan at the United Nations

By Catherine Moore

Mrs. Tita Villarosa has spent the last fifteen years living in a cemetery in Manila. Living in a place reserved for the dead, her situation is the type of example that commonly gets mentioned when talking about the need to end poverty. While it is important to acknowledge that these situations exist, it would be easy to let her living conditions overshadow who Tita is. To define Mrs. Villarosa by her poverty is to turn a blind eye to a strong, inspirational woman who wants to make and is capable of making an impact on the world.

Mrs. Villarosa is the mother of four and the grandmother of thirteen. Within her community, she is referred to as 'Aunty,' an illustration of the respect and affection in which she is held by others in her community. She is a central support person for those who live around her, someone others go to when they have problems. She refuses to be afraid or ashamed to ask for things her or her community needs, which frequently leads to her going to great lengths to find assistance for other families as well as her own. Mrs. Villarosa's strength and determination have seen her own family and others through numerous hard times.



It was this strength and determination that brought Mrs. Villarosa halfway around the world to New York City to be part of a delegation that met with the Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, for the *International Day for the Eradication of Poverty*. She was one of thirteen delegates from around the world, many carrying with them a unique first hand experience of living in poverty, who came to share their stories with Kofi Annan, the United Nations and New York City and to encourage the United Nations to work in partnership with the world's poorest.

Getting the delegates to New York was no easy task. The Fourth World Movement had been trying to

arrange a meeting with Mr. Annan for two years; however, final confirmation that he had agreed to the meeting came only two weeks before. To arrange visas, flights and time away from family and other commitments for the delegates was a major undertaking. The delegates came from France, Guatemala, Haiti, The Philippines, Tanzania, and the United States. That the delegates agreed and were prepared to come to New York at such short notice was testimony to their commitment to represent their communities and to eradicate poverty.



The delegates received a warm welcome from members of the Fourth World Movement in New York. Supporters opened up their homes to delegates who needed a place to stay and helped with cooking and logistics. One group assembled welcome bags, decorated by children at the Street Library and filled with mementoes of the United States and helpful things to have around the city. Young people came in on weekends and days off from school in order to work on a magazine for the delegates, called *I'm From New York!*, to show what it means to them to be teens in New York. It showcased poetry, photographs, collages and statements centered around the challenges and accomplishments in their lives.

On October 15, members of the Fourth World Movement from all over the city came to the Fourth World House for a community-based commemoration of the *International Day for the Eradication of Poverty*. There, delegates met local people and shared their experiences of living in poverty all over the world. Testimonies from both the international delegates and New Yorkers were delivered and simultaneously translated into two other languages so that everyone could understand.

Many of the children from the local Street Library worked with volunteers to prepare a message for the children of New Orleans. Words of hope and encouragement from the children were written into a song to the tune of "I Believe I Can Fly." With the help of the Fourth World Movement team in New Orleans, a conference call enabled the children to deliver their message to a family

that had been displaced by Hurricane Katrina.

Around this event was a whirlwind of activity and meetings for the delegates, who were preparing and polishing the messages they would deliver to Mr. Annan. The delegates worked in small groups to prepare their statements. For many, it was a time to develop friendships with people from different parts of the world. Working together, the delegates discovered that, although they had prepared beforehand in their own countries and were there to represent their own communities, they each had the same message: partnership with people living in poverty should be a fundamental basis for the action of the United Nations. In spite of the language and cultural differences, the delegates all had the same hope that Mr. Annan would recognize people living in poverty as essential partners in the eradication of poverty.

October 17 itself was a day of meetings and ceremony. The delegation was invited to make a courtesy call to the President of the General Assembly, Mr. Jan Eliasson, who was very receptive to their comments. After a press conference at United Nations' headquarters, some of the delegates were invited to be interviewed for United Nations radio broadcasts in their home regions. As in years past, there was a ceremony in the United Nations Gardens at the *Commemorative Stone in Honor of Victims of Extreme Poverty*.



The ceremony heard speeches from the Ambassadors of France and Burkina Faso, who sponsored of the event, and testimonies from people living in extreme poverty. There was music by the Peace of Heart Choir and New Zealand musician Tama Waipara. Maria Victoire, a member of the team in New Orleans, talked about her experiences of working with families in emergency housing shelters in Baton Rouge after Hurricane Katrina. Lenore Cola read a testimony written by Asia Snow about her experience with the Fourth World Movement and Street Libraries, while Crystal and Christopher Dantzler, two young

members of the Fourth World Movement in New York, presented excerpts from the *I'm From New York!* magazine.



Then came the meeting with Kofi Annan. The delegates from the United States, Lenore Cola and Maria Victoire, spoke about the impact of Hurricane Katrina and the importance of not forgetting the poverty that was exposed by the disaster. Sylvie Clause and Bernard Mourgeon from France spoke about the importance of families and the courage family members draw from each other to keep going in difficult times.

Maria Teresa Gonzales de Antuche, from Guatemala, spoke about how difficult it is to build a better future for your children and send them to school when you are living in poverty. "The lack of stable work and housing means that it is difficult to enrol our children in school. Often times, parents have to wake up at two o'clock in the morning to queue up at school, only to be told that there are no places for their children. That's the struggle of families who can't afford to send their children to school, not because they don't want to, but because they can't."

From Tanzania, Mr. Saasita came with a message about the importance of encouraging those who are living in extreme poverty. He told the story of Samweli, a young man who lives on the street. Alongside members of the Fourth World Movement, he took part in a project where he worked with other young people in his situation to support children attending a school for the blind, and found a greater sense of respect for himself. Mr. Saasita stressed the importance of telling stories such as Samweli's to spread the word about the lives of impoverished people and to give hope and encouragement to others in poverty.

When her time came to speak, Mrs. Villarosa wanted to sum up what the delegates had hoped would come from the meeting: to ensure that Kofi Annan would not forget her and that her words would have a lasting impact on the actions of the man she believes has the power to change the world.

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The Patchwork of Our Lives Exhibit in Appalachia

By Fanchette Clement-Fanelli

"This is a very moving display and the quilt is a striking piece of art."

"The quilt and display bring a message of hope, not despair. Hopefully they will encourage all of us to join the movement to eradicate poverty in the world."

"It's amazing how the lives of these people have been brought together in such a work of beauty."

These are just some of the comments elicited from the exhibit based around the *Patchwork of Our Lives* quilt held at the Art Gallery of the Regional Public Library at Wise, in southwestern Virginia, last September and October.

The *Patchwork of Our Lives* quilt is a legacy of the international Fourth World Family Congress which was held in New York in October 1994. Knowing that poor families have been making quilts out of scraps of cloth for generations, a patchwork quilt was seen to be a wonderful way for families from around the world who could not be there in person to be present at the Congress. To make the quilt a reality, hundreds of families gave pieces of cloth that had special meaning for them: burlap from sacks now used in the family home; a piece of red cloth found on a refuse dump by a little girl



and used as a blanket for her doll; a blue cotton square kept after the dress from which it came, bought with a first paycheck, had become threadbare; a strip of cotton cloth that a mother had used to carry her infant children.

The pieces of cloth were then woven together in the community center in Noisy-le-Grand, France, the birthplace of the Fourth World Movement, under the guidance of a volunteer quilter and using a traditional pattern called 'bright hope' where the design moves from darker colors at the edges towards lighter colors in the center. At the very center of the quilt, executed in appliqué, is the logo of the Movement in golden cloth, surrounded by the sentence – in English, French, Spanish, Chinese, Russian and Arabic – from the Commemorative Stone laid at the Plaza of Human Rights in Paris on October 17, 1987: *"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."

Since then, the quilt has traveled the world, from the United Nations to Guatemala last October for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the presence of the Movement there and to New York City for the inauguration of the renovated Fourth World House last January. Taking advantage of the quilt's presence in the United States, and because of the significance of quilting in Appalachia, the team in southwestern Virginia approached the Art Gallery of the Regional Library at Wise with the idea of exhibiting the patchwork there in the six weeks leading up to the celebration of October 17.

The exhibit comprised of the quilt, some twenty-five framed quotes detailing the stories of selected pieces of cloth used in the quilt itself and framed photographs from Movement teams throughout the world. The director of the gallery, Teresa Robinette, skillfully organized the display in the gallery and an opening reception as an opportunity for members of the Movement in the region to meet with members of the library and gallery boards, local quilters and journalists who covered the exhibition in the local press. Over six weeks, more than one hundred people signed the guest book and commented on how the exhibit had

moved them.

The exhibit also inspired the idea of working with more than two hundred and fifty children from four local elementary schools. Inspired by the recent issue of the *Tapori Children's Network* newsletter, 'What Makes a Home Strong?', the students created their own 'paper patchwork' from pieces of card decorated with their own words and drawings, tied together with colorful yarn, to send messages of hope and support to *Tapori* children in New Orleans who had been affected by Hurricane Katrina. The 'paper patchwork' was then hung in the gallery for the closing ceremony of the exhibit, and will now make its way to New Orleans, while collection boxes will be placed in public libraries and community centers throughout the local region for people to contribute their pieces of cloth and their stories for a new Appalachian *Patchwork of Our Lives* quilt that will seek to draw on the rich culture of Appalachian quilting.



United Nations... from p. 2

So Mrs. Villarosa took Mr. Annan by the hand, gently tapped it on the table, and told him that she was willing to help him. *"Mr. Secretary General, we stand beside you, the head of the United Nations, as you make a difference for the poorest in the world. Make us your partners as you move forward the agenda on security, development and human rights for all. Let's pool our knowledge together, yours and ours. Let us act now, no longer separately, but together."*

She had tears in her eyes as she spoke to Mr. Annan and saw him listening. Replying directly to Mrs. Villarosa, he said, *"You're right,"* and accepted her message and challenge of partnership. All of the delegates had made an impact. As people had spoken one by one, the delegates could see it gradually dawning on Mr. Annan these were real people talking about the things that impacted their everyday lives and mattered the most to them.

As Mrs. Villarosa walked out of the United Nations building with the group, she declared that the meeting had not been a waste of time; this was striking considering all she had been through to get there. Mrs. Villarosa knew that she had achieved her goal and had made an



impact on the man she called *"the leader of the world."*

The impact of Mrs. Villarosa and all of the delegates will not soon be forgotten by those who participated alongside them in the events surrounding the meeting. Vicki Soanes, the Fourth World Movement representative to the United Nations, had this to say: *"I know that after a year and a half of listening to speeches, lobbying for input, working hard just to get one sentence on the importance of participation of the poorest into a document and trying to convince people of what the people of the Fourth World know and believe, Tita reminded me why I am doing it. If she can walk up to the Secretary General of the United Nations with her head held high, take his hand, speak clearly and confidently of her convictions, then I am so proud to have facilitated that. I am re-energized to carry on trying to make sure the United Nations doesn't forget people like Tita, and that Mr. Annan doesn't forget that she and all of the delegates exist."*

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'I Have to Look After My Friends...'

Given the uncertainty in the Gulf Coast region caused by Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath, Andrew Hayes and Urs Kehl, members of the Fourth World Movement Volunteers Corps based at the National Center of Fourth World Movement/USA in Washington DC and in Toronto respectively, went to Louisiana in order to support the members of Fourth World Movement/USA from New Orleans. Here is what Andrew wrote about his experiences during his first week in the area:

"Chris was sat on his bed. His arm was in a sling and he was so tired that he was falling asleep in his seat. Around his bed were all the belongings he could still lay claim to: one sports bag, two plastic bags of clothes and one cardboard box of personal possessions. It was hard to imagine that he could do any more that night than sleep and regain some strength but still he jerked himself awake, looked me in the eye and said, 'I have to look after my friends.' And with that, he got up and headed for the door. An hour or so later Chris was back, this time guiding his friends through the registration process, and it was clear why he had made such an effort to support them when he



could so easily have put himself first: of his two friends the woman walked with a cane and only then with difficulty, while her husband had chest problems and ran out of breath easily... Despite his own physical hardship, Chris was there for them.

"On coming here to try and support the team and the families of the Fourth World Movement from New Orleans, one of our first responsibilities was to understand as much as possible how people had been affected by the hurricane and all that followed. To do this, we worked with the American Red Cross in a temporary shelter set up to welcome evacuees from New Orleans. It was here, working at the shelter that I met Chris and saw his willingness to act for those in an even more difficult and desperate situation than himself. But there was not only Chris, for I also met many others like him and witnessed so many other gestures of friendship and support.

"Such gestures were not only made by existing friends but also by relative strangers aware of what it meant for all these people to be in the same situation together. Late one evening a bus arrived with a number of new people to be admitted to the shelter: they had spent most of the day traveling and, as a result, most of them were left feeling hot, cramped and exhausted. One of these new arrivals was a young man who seemed not to want to draw attention to himself and so began to quietly make a space for himself and his bed in a corner of the shelter. A middle-aged grandmother was staying with her family in that corner of the shelter and very quickly she began to talk to this young man so as to welcome him. After this brief conversation, the grandmother immediately demanded a towel and soap so that the young man could take a shower after the long day he had



endured. She did not say it aloud, but the expression on her face spoke volumes about her conviction that her new neighbor may have lost his possessions but not his dignity and that this dignity demanded he should be able to wash and clean himself for the day ahead.

"It is through witnessing acts of grace and kindness such as these that I caught a glimpse of the sense of community that so many speak of as existing in New Orleans. It is this sense of community that continues to be the strength of the city and its people. It is my hope that this sense of community will be one of the building blocks for the new city when it reopens and part of the future of New Orleans."

Editor's note:

To respect the privacy and protect the identity of the people covered in these two articles on New Orleans and Louisiana in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, their names have been changed. As a result, the photographs that accompany these two articles, while taken at Street Libraries in New Orleans, do not portray the people in the articles.

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FOURTH WORLD JOURNAL

The Fourth World Journal is a regular publication of the Fourth World Movement/USA, the US branch of an international association working with and on behalf of those around the world who live in extreme poverty.

The International Movement ATD Fourth World is an NGO in consultative status with ECOSOC, UNESCO, UNICEF, ILO and the Council of Europe.

The Fourth World Journal aims to bring together different points of view, especially those of the very poor themselves, on topics related to extreme poverty. We encourage our readers to share with us their reactions and comments.

Suggested subscription: \$15 per year.

Volume 38, Number 1 - January 2006 - ISSN 0882-3723
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