

First-hand accounts from ATD Fourth World's branch in Haiti: **THE COURAGE AND DIGNITY OF HAITIANS**

Present in Haiti since 1981, the International Movement ATD Fourth World has been experiencing recent events alongside families living in extreme poverty in Port-au-Prince and the surrounding areas. Following several distressing days with no news from our team there, we now have daily telephone contact with them.

In the extremely disadvantaged and outlying neighborhoods where families known by ATD Fourth World live, no aid has arrived yet, despite numerous efforts made to indicate the urgent need in these areas. One Fourth World Volunteer said, *"It's hard for the families in these neighborhoods to see planes constantly arriving, but no aid whatsoever reaching their neighborhoods yet."* These families know that if they don't take it upon themselves to help each other, no one else will. They face these challenges with whatever means they have: rescuing people trapped under rubble, burying the dead, and making every effort to care for those who are injured. Life is continuing despite everything, with an impressive show of courage and dignity. However, without medical care, even the most minor wound becomes infected and death by blood-poisoning becomes a serious risk. Without water and food aid, the lives of survivors, and babies in particular, are in danger.

Each day, ATD Fourth World's team visits families one by one, taking steps to resume activities promoting early childhood development as a first priority. The overall aim of these visits is to regain strength in order to collectively address the lack of food, safe drinking water and medical care, while also beginning to envision how to build the future while still immersed in an overwhelming emergency situation. A member of the team confides: *"The night is a time for crying, shaking with fear, praying or singing. It's a time to come together to get our strength back so that, in the morning, we can continue searching for people who haven't been located yet. It's a time to be together confronted with death."*

Based on what is happening in Haiti today, as well as on its first-hand experience of past events in the Philippines, Honduras, Burkina Faso, and during Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath, ATD Fourth World would like to highlight crucial questions to be addressed:

How can we avoid being submerged by a flood of images? How can we stay attuned to the gestures of solidarity building up from the depths of this country, its history and its soul through the hands, courage, minds and faith of its inhabitants?

Out of respect for the Haitian people, this catastrophe must become an opportunity to develop a new way of taking action collectively, where human and material resources coming from the outside accept the challenge of blending with the intelligence, drive, creativity, and experience of Haitians, and in particular those living in the most extreme poverty.

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*"If people living in persistent poverty question us and push us to question ourselves, it is not because they are asking us to slow down our progress. On the contrary, they are pushing us to go faster and farther, to have a broader vision and to be more ambitious than we are."
Joseph Wresinski -1968*

More information at: www.atd-fourthworld.org