

**Special Session of the International Committee for October 17
at the International Organisation of the Francophonie, Paris
June 10, 2016**

Donald Lee, President of the Committee

Madam Secretary General, Excellencies, Distinguished Guests and Friends,

The International Committee for October 17 is very honoured that the International Organisation of La Francophonie has graciously hosted this special segment of our meeting that has adopted the theme “Leave no one behind”.

The call to “leave no one behind” has become a popular catchphrase, especially in discussions of the United Nations development goals.

Why?

When the United Nations launched the Millennium Development Goals in 2000, it held out the promise of united global action against the scourge of extreme poverty. In particular, the first goal of the MDGs proclaimed the lofty intention of the global community to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.

However, the actual plan to implement this poverty goal soon became a matter of concern for many people, particularly among those working closely with people living in poverty.

When the United Nations General Assembly agreed to set the target to halve — not eradicate — the number of people living in extreme poverty by 2015, many people believed that the United Nations had effectively condemned more than half a billion people to continue to suffer the severe deprivations of extreme poverty for at least 15 years.

Which half of the people living in poverty would remain in poverty until 2015? Who would we decide; how should we decide which half to help? A child born in 2000 to a family that was not destined to be within the half that would be lifted out of extreme poverty would spend at least the next 15 years socially excluded and economically deprived, with limited access to basic education and health services.

Although the United Nations reported in 2015 that global poverty had been reduced by more than half, this was small consolation to the men, women and children who had been left behind.

To some extent, being “left behind” during the implementation of the MDGs may have been more systematic than random.

Let me explain what I mean.

The United Nations' decision to set the poverty target at 50% rather than 100% of all people living in extreme poverty may have unintentionally created incentives for governments to focus on 'low hanging fruit' rather than on those most in need.

Thus poverty programmes were likely to reach the more visible and accessible rather than people in the fourth world — specifically, the less visible, most marginalized and socially excluded people in society.

But being "left behind" also occurs when people living in poverty are not consulted or invited to participate in the design or implementation of policies and programmes that affect them directly. Therefore, even when people have "overcome" extreme poverty as defined by the MDG income measure of poverty, they could still be effectively disenfranchised or "left behind" within society.

Therefore, there was broad dissatisfaction with the hidden "selectivity" of the poverty target against the less visible, most marginalized and socially excluded people in society. ATD Fourth World and other NGOs lobbied hard, during the lengthy negotiations on the new Sustainable Development Goals, to include appropriate language so that the poverty goal would target all people living in extreme poverty.

Thus it came to pass that the United Nations resolution establishing its 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development contains the pledge "that no one will be left behind" and the promise that the United Nations "will endeavour to reach the furthest behind first."

What do the Sustainable Development Goals and "leave no one behind" have to do with the United Nations International Day for the Eradication of Poverty and the International Committee for October 17.

When Father Joseph's Wresinski issued his call for all people to come together to fight extreme poverty on 17 October 1987, the first World Day for Overcoming Extreme Poverty, he launched a powerful social momentum that led to the inauguration of October 17th as the United Nations' International Day for the Eradication of Poverty in 1992.

Joseph Wresinski's call to action was intended to show the world that it was the violation of human rights and persistent discrimination that allowed extreme poverty to exist in the midst of prosperity. From his first hand experience working with people living in poverty he had been convinced that extreme poverty could not be eradicated unless the less visible, most marginalized and socially excluded people in society were treated with dignity and full respect for their human rights.

However, the United Nations' original resolution to establish the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty failed to include any mention of the spirit or meaning

of the World Day for Overcoming Poverty that had been observed around the world since 1987.

Therefore, when the international Committee for October 17 was established in 2008, one of its goals was to promote the original spirit and meaning of the World Day for Overcoming Poverty within the context of the United Nations' International Day for the Eradication of Poverty.

This is an important goal of the International Committee because the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty can teach and promote valuable lessons about how to implement the Sustainable Development Goals so that no one is left behind.

The United Nations Agenda 2030 emphasises the need for transformative change in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

The true spirit of October 17 provides the framework for a transformation in social interactions based upon full respect for the dignity and human rights of people living in extreme poverty. This transformation recognizes the knowledge and experience of people living in poverty and the important role they play in creating pathways to peaceful and sustainable societies. It values their true partnership and full participation in making decisions that affect them.

It is only when take this bold transformative step that we can begin to create the conditions for poverty eradication that will ensure we leave no one behind.