



INTERNATIONAL
DAY for the
ERADICATION
of POVERTY
17 OCTOBER



United Nations International Day for the Eradication of Poverty 2018

Concept Note

Theme — “Coming together with those furthest behind to build an inclusive world of universal respect for human rights and dignity”

As we celebrate the 70th anniversary of the proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights^[1] this year, it is important to recall the fundamental connection between extreme poverty and human rights, and that people living in poverty are disproportionately affected by many human rights violations.

Joseph Wresinski was one of the first persons to highlight this direct link between human rights and extreme poverty. In February 1987, he appealed to the Human Rights Commission to examine the question of extreme poverty and human rights and eloquently captured the nexus between human rights and extreme poverty with his profound observation: “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.” With these words, Joseph Wresinski pointed out that strong and audacious national and international laws need to be implemented in a human-rights approach to overcome extreme poverty, and stressed that it is the moral obligation of society and its citizens to guarantee and respect the human rights of people living in poverty.

When the persistence of extreme poverty in society is recognized as a violation of human rights, it engenders a paradigm shift in how mainstream society understands and addresses poverty. It directs attention to the prevailing social exclusion, discrimination and daily assaults on human dignity that accompany poverty. It highlights the need to dismantle discriminatory systems that perpetuate cycles of poverty in different cultural contexts. It

forces us to look beyond providing an adequate income for people in poverty and to focus on the dignity, capabilities, choices, security and power every individual need for the full enjoyment of their fundamental civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights.

Such an approach should lead to more appropriate and effective responses that do not trample on human rights in the pursuit of economic growth and development. However, people living in extreme poverty, especially those furthest behind, can be neglected or overlooked by politicians, policy-makers and service providers because of bias, social exclusion, discriminatory attitudes and their lack of political, financial and social influence. In these situations, human rights continue to be violated as a direct consequence of inappropriate policy or the failure of governments to act in a timely and decisive manner. Moreover, those furthest behind can be discouraged from asserting or exercising their human rights because they fear retribution or other dire consequences from people with power and authority.

When faced with the unrelenting despair of poverty or the painful violence of conflict, people can become homeless and be always on the move or are forced to migrate or relocate to another country to seek a better life or refuge from violence. Unfortunately, many migrants and refugees often face daunting challenges while in transit, as well as discrimination, social exclusion and human rights abuses in their country of destination.



An important tool in the fight against extreme poverty is the *Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights*^[2] which provides the first global policy guidelines focused specifically on the human rights of people living in poverty. These guidelines are intended to be used by governments to ensure that public policies, including poverty eradication efforts, reach those members of society living in poverty, respect and uphold their rights, and to address the significant social, cultural, economic and structural obstacles to the enjoyment of human rights. One of the recommendations in these guidelines is the implementation of social protection systems, including social protection floors, that can promote inclusive development and ensures that no one is left behind.

However, government policies alone cannot create the social inclusion that is fundamental to reaching those left furthest behind and overcoming poverty in all its dimensions. The commemoration of October 17 each year, when people living in poverty take the floor and share their experiences, demonstrates how we can achieve greater social inclusion by enabling people from all walks of life to come together to respect the human rights and dignity of people living in poverty. It underscores the importance of reaching out to people living in poverty and building an alliance around their priorities with citizens from all backgrounds to end extreme poverty. It recognizes the important mutual roles and relationships we have with each other based on our common and equal dignity.

The persistence of poverty, including extreme poverty, is a major concern for the United Nations and, at its 72nd session, the General Assembly launched the Third United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (2018–2027), under the theme “*Accelerating global actions for a world without poverty*”. It is important that the Third Decade’s inter-agency, system-wide plan of action to coordinate the poverty eradication efforts of the United Nations system includes an effective partnership with people living with poverty.

The International Day for the Eradication of Poverty can strongly complement such initiatives because it aims to ensure that the active

participation of people living in extreme poverty and those furthest behind is a driving force in all efforts made to overcome poverty, including in the design and implementation of programmes and policies which affect them. Only by creating and nurturing a genuine partnership with people living with poverty will it be possible to build an inclusive world where all people can enjoy their full human rights and lead lives with dignity.



Celebrated since 1987 as the World Day for Overcoming Extreme Poverty and recognized by the United Nations in 1992,^[3] the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty promotes dialogue and understanding between people living in poverty and their communities, and society at large. “*It represents an opportunity to acknowledge the efforts and struggles of people living in poverty, a chance for them to make their concerns heard and a moment to recognize that poor people are in the forefront in the fight against poverty.*” (United Nations, Report of the Secretary General, A/61/308, para. 58)

1 United Nations General Assembly resolution 217A, 10 December 1948.

2 The Human Rights Council adopted the *Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights* by consensus through its resolution 21/11, in September 2012.

3 <http://www.un.org/Docs/journal/asp/ws.asp?m=A/RES/47/196>

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Note: The views in this document do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations or its Member States.