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**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: Priority Theme: Creating full and productive employment and decent work for all as a way of overcoming inequalities to accelerate the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

### **Statement submitted by the ATD Fourth World and Life Project 4 Youth (LP4Y), a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\***

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

### **Eradicate poverty by creating dignified work for all: Recommendations for an economy respectful of people and the planet**

The [International Movement ATD Fourth World](#) is a non-governmental organization that works to overcome poverty by seeking out people living in the worst conditions of poverty and exclusion and involving them in the fight against poverty. [Blue Project 4 Youth](#) is an international movement of local organizations specializing in the development of innovative solutions for the professional and social integration of excluded Youth living in extreme poverty.

The International Labour Organization defines [decent work](#) as “*productive work for women and men in conditions of freedom, equity, security, and human dignity.*” The [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) asserts that “*everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favorable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.*” However, in 2022, more than 2 billion people (60% of the world’s employed population) [work informally](#). The majority lack social protection, worker’s rights, and decent working conditions. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic hit informal workers particularly hard, especially women. For most people living in poverty worldwide, their work does not mean earning a living wage. It means exploitation, very low pay, difficult or dangerous conditions, and forced layoffs. The suffering caused by lack of resources and means is intensified by degrading and humiliating treatment. People experience disrespect and feelings of futility that prevent them from participating fully in their communities.

ATD Fourth World and LP4Y affirm that **work should enable people to live in dignity, to support their families and to be recognized as useful members of their society.**

People and youth living in poverty are often excluded from accessing decent work opportunities. Many of these people are not part of the traditional labor force. For this reason, their work and expertise are unrecognized and unrepresented.

*“Work with dignity lets us support our families, our homes, our children. It provides shoes, health, and education. Work is very important, it gives us sustenance, and it lets us grow. Without work, we don’t grow. We don’t advance, and we have many setbacks in life. Work gives us a sustainable life.” A person with lived experience of poverty from Guatemala.*

#### **1) Address discrimination based on socio-economic background to ensure dignified work and access to opportunities**

Discrimination is both a cause and a consequence of poverty. Poverty is often a result of long- term discriminatory practices and in turn, people living in poverty experience different levels of discrimination in all spheres of society, especially [access to dignified job opportunities](#). Discrimination based on social status is rarely recognized as a real challenge, even though people facing poverty-related exclusion experience it regularly.

*“You become a burden to society when you don’t have a job, no one reaches out to you. Worse, people get scared that you’ll ruin their lives.” A person with lived experience of poverty from France.*

**ATD Fourth World and LP4Y call for the adoption of national and international laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of socio-economic status.** The purpose of a right to non-discrimination is to protect individuals by guaranteeing them fair and equal access to the opportunities available to them, and to

provide avenues for recourse to take legal action. By condemning ‘povertyism,’ we directly address the dimensions of social abuse, institutional abuse, and the nonrecognition of their contributions.

## 2) *Develop innovative programmes to generate income and build solidarity*

People living in underserved communities and neighborhoods try to get a job but too often land nowhere or in a useless position, with no positive impact on their life journey. In this case, their jobs function to keep them in a cycle of poverty and exploitation. In principle, jobs are the way to emancipate oneself from poverty, but can also be a trap of oppression that keeps people in poverty despite all their efforts.

To address systemic discrimination and create work opportunities, ATD Fourth World develops alternative work experiences: income-generating pilot projects that give priority to people in the worst conditions of poverty. These innovative programmes, named “Working and Learning Together” (WLT) and developed in partnership with businesses, allow people affected by extreme poverty to generate new economic resources and re-establish social engagement while respecting the earth’s resources.

First launched over 15 years ago, WLT programs operate in countries such as France, Senegal,<sup>1</sup> Madagascar,<sup>2</sup> Guatemala, and the United States. WLT is grounded in three ‘factors for success’ which define the conditions needed for positive outcomes for workers and their communities, and that create a model which may be transferable to other contexts. These factors are meaningful participation, a supportive environment, and an approach that values all individuals:

- Programmes must have the clear ambition of **reaching those who are most excluded** or who are experiencing extreme poverty, and to **support these individuals in order to ensure their continued and meaningful participation.**
- Education and training are not sufficient to help the most excluded people earn a decent wage. **A wider, supportive environment is necessary**, tailored to the individual’s circumstances. Creating an environment for peer support among WLT workers improves outcomes for all community members, encouraging mutual assistance and solidarity.
- **Valuing all individuals is essential.** Workers, in particular those in the informal economy, are often stigmatized by the general population as lazy, incompetent, or untrustworthy. The real contributions they make toward more sustainable societies are unrecognized.

### Working for sustainability in Guatemala

Since 2009, Working and Learning Together programs in Guatemala have experimented in creating work opportunities that address the question of sustainable livelihood. They involve opportunities for training in craftwork, producing and selling products in a spirit of mutual solidarity and fair trade. These individuals, mostly women, are involved in the conception of the program and will continue to participate in its evolution thanks to regular evaluations. The knowledge of work and learning conditions are at the heart of this programme which questions the necessity

<sup>1</sup> Séminaire international “Travailler et apprendre ensemble: Les conditions d’une économie plus humaine par la participation de tous,” ATD Quart Monde, 2010

<sup>2</sup> Good Practices for Reaching People in Extreme Poverty, CASE STUDY” – International Movement ATD Fourth World, Madagascar, 2011

of an economy based on competition between people. Work opportunities range from recycling paper from local dumps to produce artisan craftwork to carpentry.

#### The refusal of uselessness: a pilot programme in France

In France, historically, ATD Fourth World programs around work are based on a triple refusal: the refusal of begging; refusal of assistance; and the rejection of uselessness. It is in this context that fourteen years of WLT program in the country gave rise to *Territories of Zero Long Term Unemployment* in 2016, a program which hires, on a voluntary basis, long-term unemployed people on permanent contracts, at minimum wage and on time, to do work that is locally useful but not carried out because it is considered unprofitable for the traditional market. These businesses are funded, for the most part, by the reallocation of costs and lost earnings associated with long-term unemployment. The objective: to show that **no one is unemployable and that thanks to collective mobilization, the economy can be at the service of people and the planet, provided that those furthest away are at the heart of the process**. Launched by ATD Fourth World and then joined by other players in the fight against exclusion, the program gained unanimous support of the Parliament and has led to calls to make reality the right to employment.

#### Foster youths' professional inclusion by co-constructing pedagogies

Youth from marginalized areas often don't have access to trainings that develop important skills needed to integrate a company. To address this discrimination, LP4Y develops *pedagogies* co-constructed with young people, which aims to bring together private companies from all sectors, civil society organizations, public institutions, and local government authorities. Different training programs have been created, adapted for youth in rural and urban areas. The youth are organized into project teams and develop a local activity. This experiential learning provides them with their first positive professional experience. A weekly allowance is paid to the youth, allowing them to focus on training and make savings essential to their professional integration and economic security. This program is active in *seven countries*.

Successful approaches should be expanded to reach all marginalized populations. Programs and policies should take a **holistic approach incorporating social, environmental, and economic factors to tackle extreme poverty in the long-term, and in partnership with the local population, authorities and private sector**.

### **3) *Redefining our societies towards a just transition: social protection, validation of the care economy and green job opportunities***

"Our Common Agenda" of the UN Secretary-General calls for a "*renewed social contract anchored in human rights*" emphasizing trust, inclusion, protection and participation, and valuing what matters to people and the planet. Ensuring a renewed social contract will require a universal social protection system, the recognition of unpaid care work, the validation of the care economy, and access to dignified job opportunities in the context of climate change and transitioning economies.

- *Four billion people* in the world cannot access social protection, even though it is a right. The Covid-19 crisis has shown the importance, beyond emergency measures, of setting up **sustainable social protection systems capable of covering the entire population, including people living in extreme poverty**. The challenge is immense, given that many work in the informal economy or are without legal existence. ATD Fourth World supports the International Labor Organization's efforts to develop a *Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for a Just Transitions*.

- There is a huge necessity to **recognize and value the economic and social contributions of people working in the care economy**. Globally, women face the precarity of the informal economy most often in their roles as caretakers, where *“unequal distribution, intensity and lack of recognition of unpaid care work undermines women caregivers, preventing them from accessing egalitarian human rights and securing disproportionate vulnerability to poverty their entire lives.”*<sup>3</sup>
- **The most vulnerable communities should benefit from training and job creation programs transitioning to an economy respectful of people and the planet** that could create **24 million new jobs** annually. Well-designed policies should strengthen social protection and support investment that leads to employment creation and fairer income distribution. Adopted in 2015, the **Paris Agreement** repeatedly mentions that climate action must contribute to the eradication of poverty and access to basic human rights. In 2022, the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment was **recognized** by the UN General Assembly. Globally, 1.2 billion jobs depend on a stable and healthy environment, especially in areas such as agriculture, fisheries and forestry. Most people and communities living in poverty rely on these jobs.

Ensuring access to dignified work for all, through innovative approaches, and a sustainable and respectful working environment is a practical means for positive societal change. These approaches must be designed with the participation of people with a lived experience of poverty and with the goal of reaching those who are furthest behind first. Dignified work, in the context of a just transition, represents a means through which everyone, regardless of socio-economic status, can contribute meaningfully and have their rights respected.

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<sup>3</sup> Extreme poverty and human rights: Note by the Secretary-General, United Nations General Assembly, August 9, 2013. <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N13/422/71/PDF/N1342271.pdf?OpenElement>