

## Contribution to the Youth Summit March 2007

International Movement ATD Fourth World

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ATD Fourth World works in close proximity to the poorest families in Europe amongst which are the youth who face the biggest challenges in life. We have used this opportunity to gather the voice and opinions of these youth in Europe who are far from participating in normal youth activities and who bear witness to the shortcomings of efforts made to ensure a European model that is based on important human values set out in the Charter of Fundamental Rights.

*“The more I advance in my life, the more I have fear. People don't want to have children because they don't know if they will have work in the future.”*

This is the insecurity that still exists for many young people in Europe. What kind of future do they want for the European Union and for their societies?

### The Social and Economic Model

The European Social and Economic model should be based first and foremost on **human rights and values**; freedom, equality, social justice and dialogue. The Charter Of Fundamental Rights of the European Union exists in writing but how far do we have to go in order to make these grand and impressive words a reality in the daily lives of **all** European citizens?

#### Values

Social Justice, Equality, Liberty

*“I don't participate in the society where I live, not a lot of people do. There are some people who are not accepted in society and that is really hard. It's hard to live alone without friends ...there is no justice”*

*« When you are poor you have less contact with society, you close in on yourself...this can happen to people who have problems. It can be dizzying. And we don't understand why they are there, how they occurred. It can happen to all of us... »*

There were many reactions that echoed the content of these quotes. There is a large population of young people that do not feel part of society due to their social situation and this prevents them from taking up opportunities if they are presented to them. This in itself calls into question the existence of social justice for everyone.

*“When we speak of Europe there is equality and liberty but there are exceptions to this.”*

Although there are initiatives put in place to try and ensure equal opportunities for all, it is not always as clear cut as it may seem. Everyone has an equal chance of applying for a job yet not everyone has an equal chance of being successful at getting that job. *“A child who has a secure background whose parents have good well paying jobs will do better at school than a child who lives in a fragile situation and whose parents have difficulties accessing the labour market.”*

This immediately puts them at a disadvantage. This is just one example of how equality does not exist for all, people do not have the same start in life so when they get to applying for that job they don't necessarily have the same opportunities as others. Equality must start from birth not only when you are applying for work.

#### Freedom - Security

Many young people who participated in these debates expressed extreme fragility in their situation. They are best placed to inform us how much further we have to go to ensure that our 'right to liberty and security' (article 6) is made a reality.

*“There is no shame in having a housing that is in bad condition because one day or another you could find yourself on the streets or in bad housing like so many people.”*

#### Integration into the job market

Although there is a strong focus on accessing the labour market, it needs to be stressed that the most excluded young people need to be guaranteed all of their fundamental rights. Without these in place it will always be difficult to support them into taking up their responsibilities. The desire to take up employment is a priority for all but the difficulties in doing this was highlighted in many of the discussions.

*«There is too much criteria in the way of getting work – too old, too young, not enough experience, too much experience, we don't manage to enter into the job market.»*

*«Too much training that leads to nothing. It is important but it should lead to a job. Work experience after work experience doesn't teach you anything...it is not counted as real experience»*

*« We are released into the world of work too quickly. They should create a follow up of students when they have entered the world of work »*

*« It is essential to have housing in order to get work ».*

*“There is too much theory(at school). You don't find work because there is nothing but theory.”*

These young people do not need 'incentives' to work they need **the means and opportunities** to access the labour market. *« ...we are judged too quickly »*

#### Youth and Education

*“ Everything starts at school – equality, liberty, we learn this at school.”*

The education system is a starting place for creating a more equal society , but once again in order to do this more understanding and less judgement is necessary.

*« There is too much selfishness and indifference. People make too many differences, they don't look on the inside of people, we are judged too quickly...there isn't enough respect especially between the youth. »*

*« It is more difficult to concentrate at school when you have difficulties at home. »*

*« Difficulties when you can't have the same things as others in terms of clothing and not being able to participate in different activities etc – makes you different to others. »*

Physical and verbal bullying due to differences, many linked with situations of poverty create very difficult studying environments and can be the cause of lack of attendance and school drop outs. Parents who have lived bad experiences at school in their earlier life do not trust schools to take care of their children and to ensure their safety. How do you make a choice between your child's education and his/her physical well being?

Problems with being placed in 'special' schools are also a re-occurring phenomenon. People with poor backgrounds find themselves placed in schools that are meant for disabled children, when they are not of that category. This is perhaps due to the lack of alternatives, but this does not help these individuals and puts them at a disadvantage later on in life. You leave a 'special' school with a certificate which is not at all valued by employers who immediately label you as stupid. Therefore this results in unemployment. It renders the individual useless, despite their will to find work.

### **Democracy and Civil Society**

*« Listen to the Youth! » « Give a place to the youth! »*

This was the biggest message that came out of our discussion groups. Young people have an enormous contribution to make, they have a lot of profound and inspiring reflections on the world that they live in yet what is missing are the places to share them, to deepen them and to contribute them. It is unfair to say that youth are not interested in politics. It is in fact the opposite, if you give them the opportunity to have their say and take an interest in their views a rich and interesting commentary will follow. The truth is that youth are disillusioned, they are not satisfied with politics and they are not content with politicians.

*« If you don't vote, you leave your vote for someone else. We vote simply so that the person we don't want to win won't win »*

*« There is not enough choice...they're all the same »*

*« They make promises but it doesn't mean anything. We don't believe them anymore which is why we don't vote »*

But at the same time, these youth can see that it is not possible for politicians to do everything.

*« There are things in society that need to be changed...politicians can't do everything though. They have their limits...we have to change things also...»*

This shows their willingness to be involved, it simply requires that efforts are made and places are created in order for them to do it.

*« There are political organisations in my area but there are no young people in them »*

*« There should be organised debates in the local area. This would incite youth to become interested. »*

However the need for these places to be open to everyone, no matter what background can not be emphasised enough. And for this to happen we go back to ensuring that fundamental rights are guaranteed for everyone. It is necessary to take into account the fact that for some people, extra steps need to be taken to enable their participation but if these are taken we will already be working towards a more equal and fair society.

### **Messages**

*« Stop talking and start doing! »*

*« Come to the ground level and see what we do here because that will serve nothing if you don't see us. Don't close the door on all the world! »*

*« There are too many things to change in this world but one priority is equality – that there isn't superiority and inferiority, differences between rich and poor, that there is the same respect even if we are Arabs, poor or have no work. If we are all together we would have more chance of changing things. »*

*« There is too much construction, no-one is interested in the well being of others, nothing but money money money. The most important thing is money, they don't care about anything else. »*

The main message throughout all of these topics is to **have more equality in society**. To create a **more inclusive society where each person can find their place and be heard**. The social side of Europe speaks only of helping people get into work, but we have to go much further in order to make this happen. We have to **ensure that everybody has equal access to their fundamental rights** so that everyone can take up the roles and responsibilities that they would like. These young people testify that we as Europe still have a long way to go in achieving our ideals.