

NEWS RELEASE
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**A New Non-Violent Movement To Fight Poverty Needed Today,
says Marian Wright Edelman, at UH Law School Symposium**

Honolulu- One of the country's foremost authorities on children and a winner of the Medal of Freedom - the nation's highest civilian honor - informed and inspired an audience during a panel discussion about poverty and children held at the William S. Richardson School of Law on August 23.

Marian Wright Edelman, founder and president of the Children's Defense Fund, is a legendary advocate for improved education and opportunities for children, especially minority children. She shared statistics showing the growth of the number of children living in poverty, and called on people from all walks of life to create a new movement equal to the civil rights and anti-war movements of the past.

"Every 17 seconds a teenager is arrested..." she said... "Every 29 seconds a child is born into poverty... Every 67 second a child is born without health insurance... Every 85 seconds a child is born to a teenage mother..."

She called the inequalities between rich and poor "a serious threat" to democracy and told the crowd "we need to find our voice and say 'no'..."

"All of us have to stand up and speak out against budget cuts. We have to wake up and speak out... Dr. King is not coming back. We're it. We have to find our voice... We've been missing that non-violent movement to keep our country from destroying its future.

"This is the most dangerous time we've lived in. We've lost our way and we have to get it back."

Her husband, Georgetown Law Center Professor Peter Edelman, is a renowned scholar with an expertise about poverty. He warned that the number of Americans living below national poverty levels would virtually double - going from 46 million today to 86 million - if not for such social assistance policies as Social Security, food stamps, child tax credits and the women/infant/children assistance program put in place since the late 1960s and early 1970s.

"If we didn't have these public policies we'd have 40 million more people in poverty," Edelman told the audience at the Law School during the first of three appearances in Hawai'i. Edelman, the author of the new book: "So Rich, So Poor: Why It's So Hard to End Poverty in America," said the U.S. today faces its worst poverty crisis in the last 12 years, equivalent to those in the early 1960s and 1980s.

At the same time, Edelman said the entitlements keeping the numbers of those living in poverty from doubling are already eroding and are now under further attack.

“We’ve blasted a huge hole in our safety net at the bottom.”

Edelman blamed the crisis on public policies beginning during the Reagan Administration; the ongoing recession; and systemic change in America’s post industrialist society where more than one-third of the population – about 103 million people – now have incomes below twice the poverty level for a family of four, which is equivalent to \$46,000.

“We’ve become a low-wage country,” he said. “What happened? The industrial jobs we had that built the middle-class disappeared and were replaced by a large wave of low-paid jobs. Half of the jobs pay less than \$34,000 a year. These wages have only grown by 7 percent over 40 years, that’s one-fifth a year.”

Inherent in these statistics is a structural problem, he explained, that involves the growing number of single mothers coming into the workforce in low-paying jobs, and the growing number of new and necessary occupations but occupations that pay poorly. Edelman cited home healthcare aides for the elderly where average pay is below the poverty level for a family of four; and child-care – a growth area but one where the average pay is also below poverty level.

“Our democracy is in danger,” he warned. “There is too much power at the top and we have to change that.”

Rounding out the panel discussion, Appleseed Center executive director Victor Geminiani explained that children in Hawai‘i are particularly at risk because of the state’s high cost of living, low wages, and lack of housing. He said 40 percent of children on the National School Lunch Program in Hawai‘i are going without breakfast even though they’re eligible for the federal program that also provides breakfasts for children in poverty. His organization is helping a pilot program to change that in three schools in high poverty areas.

Professor Calvin Pang from the Law School noted that Hawai‘i’s poverty statistics are rising, and have now hit 12.5 percent of the population – 156,000 people – compared to 7.5 percent just five years ago. Additionally the rate of homelessness in Hawai‘i is “the highest in the nation,” said Pang, with 6,100 people homeless, 41 percent of them children. Of that number 2,500 are unsheltered.

The Edelmanns’ appearances in Hawai‘i were co-sponsored by the University of Hawai‘i Law School and the Hawai‘i Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice. A fundraising dinner for the Appleseed Center is scheduled for this evening, Friday, Aug. 24. The dinner takes place from 5-8 p.m. at Downtown Restaurant in the historic Hawai‘i State Art Museum at 250 Hotel St. Admission, including dinner and drinks, is \$75. RSVPs are still available by calling the office at 587-7605 or by visiting the website at <http://hiappleseed.org/rsvp> or by email to mind@hiappleseed.org