

# Unitarian Universalist Service Committee

## Associate Member Report to the Unitarian Universalist Association

### June 2007

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**W**ith a focus on building advocacy, involving youth, and engaging Unitarian Universalists, UUSC continued to advocate for the human right to water, to empower marginalized workers in the struggle for a living wage, to defend democratic freedoms, and to protect the human rights of those affected by humanitarian crises.

This report covers just some of the ways in which UUSC worked with our members and supporters, and program partners, to advance human rights around the world. It also reflects a growing collaboration between the Unitarian Universalist Association and UUSC on matters of advocacy, economic justice, environmental justice, and humanitarian response.

#### Advancing Environmental Justice

UUSC's Environmental Justice Program continued its efforts this year toward guaranteeing the human right to water. Our program partners are engaged in effective and innovative work toward advancing this right, including:

- The legal challenge to Johannesburg's pre-pay water meters by the Coalition against Water Privatization in South Africa.
- The efforts of El Movimiento Mi Cometa ("My Kite Movement") to monitor water services in Guayaquil, Ecuador, after 158 children were stricken with hepatitis A as a result of poorly operated water services.
- Advocacy of alternatives to privatized water distribution by the Federation of Unions of Water Workers in Peru.

In December 2006, UUSC partnered with the Asia-Pacific Research Network to present a day-long workshop in Manila, Philippines. UUSC is also working with the UU Ministry for Earth to minimize UUSC's ecological footprint while helping UUMFE design its program to be socially just.

#### Promoting Economic Justice

UUSC's Economic Justice Program thrived as it worked with program partners to promote the right to a living wage, to protect the rights and dignity of global workers in the informal economy, and to support workers organizing around the world.

In one such partnership, UUSC collaborated with the Rock Women's Group in Nairobi, Kenya, which trains child workers in safe, sustainable trades, creates "job ladders" for informal sector jobs, and places child workers in alternative schools.

UUSC's partnership with the Center for the Promotion and Defense of Human and Labor Rights and the Tehuacán Commission for Human and Labor Rights facilitated success in Tizimín, Mexico, where protests and public visibility helped secure workers' severance pay and back wages after the unjust closure of the Jordache plant there.

Other program partners included the New Orleans Worker Justice Coalition, which tackles widespread abuses of workers in the wake of hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and the Southern Faith-Labor Alliance, a network of labor leaders, clergy, and youth activists.

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UUSC also worked with the Mississippi Poultry Workers for Equality and Respect and the Northwest Arkansas Worker Center to strengthen outreach to women workers and workers of color, and to address on-the-job injuries and wage theft (nonpayment of wages and overtime pay). UUSC also helped the STITCH network of women organizers, unionists, and activists to expand its work among Latina workers in the U.S. South.

## Defending Civil Liberties

Building on the success of the STOP (Stop Torture Permanently) Campaign, UUSC's Civil Liberties Program continued to expand the focus and direction of its work.

A founding member of the National Religious Campaign Against Torture, UUSC serves on its coordinating committee. UUSC also supported the Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition as the coalition testified before the United Nations on torture and other violations of civil liberties.

UUSC overcame a challenge caused by a new requirement that U.S. organizations obtain a special license before providing humanitarian services to certain countries, including Sudan. We can now begin to actively support our partner, the Sudanese Organization Against Torture, in responding to the crisis in Darfur.

## Protecting Rights in Humanitarian Crises

UUSC has progressed in its work to respond to humanitarian crises around the world from a rights perspective. The response to such crises often violates the human rights of the very people victimized by the disaster. Joint appeals launched by UUSC and the UUA have provided the financial basis for this work.

### ***Gulf Coast response***

The UUA-UUSC Gulf Coast Relief Fund has been UUSC's largest and most complex response to a humanitarian crisis. The response in the Gulf Coast is a perfect example of a situation in which the

communities that suffer most from a disaster also suffer from the response. Because of entrenched inequalities of race and class, the crisis response has violated the fundamental rights of tens of thousands of victims of these historic disasters.

In this context, UUSC supported the right to remain, return, and rebuild, especially for low-income communities of color. We also provided support for community organizations working with youth returning to Louisiana, to make child care available to returnees, and to improve antiracism training among organizers.

UUSC and the UUA worked with Gulf Coast-area UU churches to coordinate a program that brought large numbers of UU volunteers to the region to provide hands-on assistance. In April 2007, the Gulf Coast Volunteer Program was transferred to be housed at UUSC and jointly administered by UUSC and the UUA.

### ***Tsunami relief***

Two years after the Indian Ocean tsunami, we continued supporting work in Aceh, Sri Lanka, and Thailand.

- In Aceh, UUSC supported Bungong Jeumpa, which advocates for women's inheritance rights, and an Acehnese legal aid organization assisting women.
- In Sri Lanka, UUSC supported the Sewalanka Foundation's defense of the livelihoods of women and farmers, and aided tsunami-affected communities where escalating conflict has stifled rebuilding.
- In Thailand, UUSC supported Grassroots Human Rights Education as it provided legal aid, documentation, and leadership training for undocumented Burmese workers in tsunami-affected areas.

UUSC also collaborated with the UU Holdeen India Program in its support of two partners, the People's Watch and the All-India Disaster Mitigation Institute.

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These organizations provide economic security to Dalits and tribals alienated from relief programs.

### **South Asia earthquake**

UUSC has provided support for survivors of the South Asia earthquake. Despite the difficulty of providing support in the disputed region of Kashmir, UUSC worked with a consultant in the region to develop a project to organize communities to defend the land inheritance rights of women widowed by the earthquake.

### **Darfur**

Since it began in 2003, mass violence in the Darfur region of Sudan has killed hundreds of thousands of Darfurians and displaced millions more from their homes. Women and girls remain particularly vulnerable to violence. UUSC is working with a consultant on the ground in the internally displaced persons camps in Darfur, focusing on how to improve safety for women and girls.

### **Advocacy**

Sounding the call for real change, UUSC saw advocacy successes in each of its program areas this year.

#### **A Drumbeat for Darfur**

UUSC launched the Drumbeat for Darfur campaign to mobilize activists to respond to the genocide in that region. Our efforts helped pressure Congress to increase U.S. funding for African Union peacekeeping efforts in Darfur to \$173 million.

One of the many ways that we have engaged UUs in our Darfur advocacy work is through the creation of the DVD, "Heroes of the Spirit: Genocide Then, Genocide Now," which connects the work of our founders to our moral response as individuals today to the genocide in Darfur.

In September 2006, UUSC's founders the Rev. Waitstill and Martha Sharp were honored posthumously for their work to rescue Jews during the Holocaust during a ceremony at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in

Washington, D.C. The Rev. William Sinkford, president of the UUA, and the Rev. William F. Schulz, chair of the UUSC Board of Trustees, both took part in this event at which "Heroes of the Spirit" was premiered. Congress also passed a resolution this year honoring the work of the Sharps.

### **Wage Justice**

In the run-up to the November 2006 mid-term elections, UUSC worked to involve its members and supporters in the efforts of the Let Justice Roll Coalition to build support for statewide minimum wage initiatives. The hard work paid off when voters in six states voted to raise the minimum wage.

After the elections, the focus of that work turned to a national debate on the federal minimum wage. The new Democratic majority in Congress made an increase in the federal minimum a priority for the first 100 hours of the new Congress. In collaboration with Let Justice Roll and the Change America Now coalition, UUSC has continued to involve its base in the effort to achieve passage of this important law.

As a new round of statewide work takes shape in the wake of the 2006 successes, UUSC stands ready to continue its work on this fundamental economic issue.

### **Statewide advocacy**

UUSC continued to support the work of UU statewide advocacy networks around the country. This collaboration included hosting the second annual UU statewide advocacy networks conference that took place in Boston in August 2006.

In addition, this year UUSC supported the creation of UUSC Just Democracy, Inc., a nonpartisan advocacy organization affiliated with UUSC. UUSC Just Democracy will provide a structure for faith-based activists to do issue-based advocacy and to interact with other nonpartisan electoral activities at the statewide level. UUSC Just Democracy will launch its first effort to create such a statewide structure in New Hampshire, in close collaboration with the statewide UU network there.

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## Education and Outreach

UUSC conducted many outreach activities to keep our members and supporters informed and active. They included addresses from the pulpit, workshops, youth group visits, and other events such as keynote speeches at conferences, addresses to retirement communities, and film screenings. In addition, we regularly engage our Ministerial Advisory Group in discussions that help us shape our programs and message.

### *Experiential learning*

This year, in addition to a significant expansion of the JustWorks program, UUSC launched JustJourneys, an alternative travel program.

JustJourneys exposes our members and supporters to the lived experience of our partners and their work. Although the first official JustJourneys trip went to Guatemala in February 2007, UUSC hosted two other delegations to Guatemala in 2006.

Participants in the third annual Freedom Summer: A Civil Rights Journey spoke with activists of the civil rights movement of the 1960s and of today. The camp ended with a service project with the Georgia Citizens Coalition on Hunger. Other JustWorks camps included:

- The Lakota Youth JustWorks camp, which brought together Lakota and non-Lakota teens to learn how to use media to tell their own stories.
- A Mohawk JustWorks camp, during which teenagers learned firsthand about contemporary life and culture of Native Americans in the United States.
- A Return to the Earth camp in Clinton, Okla., during which volunteers helped build a burial site for unidentified Native American ancestral remains.

In addition, JustWorks volunteers took part in five Katrina Relief camps in Louisiana and Mississippi. Participants worked with community-based UUA/UUSC partners, helping returning Katrina survivors to clean up and repair their homes.

### *Volunteers and membership*

With more than 47,000 members and supporters, UUSC is a powerful voice for change. And our network of volunteers continues to grow and strengthen, with approximately 600 UUSC local representatives nationwide representing 470 congregations.

The strength of our membership enables UUSC to advance human rights and social justice. By joining UUSC, our members and supporters help ensure that UU values continue to have a place in human rights work around the world.



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