

Unitarian Universalist United Nations Office

Associate Member Report to the Unitarian Universalist Association

June 2009

The Unitarian Universalist United Nations Office (UU-UNO) promotes the goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all, as reflected in the United Nations Charter. Through targeted education, advocacy and outreach, we engage Unitarian Universalists in the work of the United Nations.

This year was extraordinary for UU-UNO because we were uniquely able to very effectively represent UU values in several ways at the United Nations. Our resurgent role has given the UU-UNO extraordinary clout at the United Nations. This expanded influence has attracted new members, individual and congregational contributions and grant funding both from within and from outside the UU faith.

(See footnote for acronym descriptions)

Advancing Human Rights for All

In September 2008 Executive Director Bruce Knotts participated in the United Nations Human Rights Conference in Paris to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) signed in Paris in 1948. He was described as “inspiring collective global action” by insisting that LGBT rights be on the agenda of this historic conference. His persistence on this issue led conference organizers to appoint Executive Director Bruce Knotts as the conference LGBT caucus coordinator. He led a midday LGBT workshop and co-moderated a breakout session focused on issues affecting vulnerable groups including LGBT, extreme poverty, the disabled, ethnic discrimination and genocide in Darfur, Sudan.

UU-UNO commitment to ending discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity was strengthened in December 2008 with a generous grant from the Arcus Foundation which provides for a full-time Program Associate and a paid fellow. Work done by the UU-UNO and other human rights organizations at the UN resulted in a statement signed by 66 nations calling for the end to criminal sanctions and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. The United States Government joined this effort in March 2009. Turkey and the Ukraine joined subsequent to the USA making 69 nations working to end this terrible oppression. 55 nations oppose this initiative with 68, as yet, undecided. The UU-UNO will not cease its advocacy until everyone everywhere can enjoy a safe and dignified life.

The UU-UNO is the only faith-based organization at the UN (out of about 400) that has an LGBT advocacy program. The UU-UNO has built a reputation for success. It is now consulted by other organizations on this and on several other issues. Even organizations which disagree with its LGBT initiatives give it credit for its thoughtful and diplomatic advocacy. Even these opponents of LGBT rights call on the UU UNO for help in area where there is common agreement, such as climate change, ending genocide in Darfur, etc.

UU Clout at the United Nations

UU-UNO leadership on Human Rights has catapulted it into key leadership positions at the United Nations, making it one of the most influential organizations (out of 4,000) at the UN. UUs often lament the loss of the influence they once exercised. At the United Nations through the UU-UNO, UUs are tremendously influential. The UU-UNO plays leadership roles on the following UN committees and working groups:

1. United Nations NGO/DPI Executive Committee as Treasurer (Representing 2,000 UN NGOs)
2. Planning Committee for the 2009 UN DPI/NGO Disarmament Conference in Mexico City.
 - a. Outreach Sub-committee Co-Chair.
3. Planning Committee for the 2008 UN DPI/NGO Human Rights Conference in Paris.
 - a. Outreach Sub-committee
 - b. LGBT Midday workshop organizer
 - c. Empowerment Breakout Session Co-Moderator
4. NGO Committee on Sustainable Development (Climate Change) as Co-Chair
5. NGO Committee on Human Rights as treasurer
6. NGO Committee for UNICEF
7. Center for UN Reform Education Board of Directors
8. Ecumenical Working Group
9. Darfur/Chad Working Group
10. Gender based violence in Sudan Working Group as Chair

Expanding UU-UNO Envoy Programs

A critical communication link between the UU-UNO office and UU congregations in the United States and Canada is the Envoy Program. Envoys receive information from the UU-UNO office and plan events in their local congregations to showcase UN activities and UU opportunities in the global community. Our commitment to expand the Envoy program and include both adults and youth was strengthened in November 2008 when the UU Veatch Program funded **SHOUT – for Justice: Developing a Congregational Base for UU International Social Justice Action** providing for a full time Coordinator, program materials and outreach to congregations.

Partnering with International Stakeholders

In November 2008 Executive Director Bruce Knotts accompanied UUA President Bill Sinkford and his delegation on a visit to leaders of the UU-UNO program partner, the Manya Krobo Queen Mothers Association of eastern Ghana, and their Every Child is Our Child (ECOC) HIV/AIDS program in Odumase. Through the contributions of members and congregations, the UU-UNO can sponsor nearly 160 HIV/AIDS orphans and vulnerable children to attend school and receive health care, while supporting the achievement of the UN's Millennium Development Goals of acquiring primary education, reducing hunger and poverty, and promoting gender equality.

Fostering Education for UUs

The UU-UNO annual three- day Intergenerational Spring Seminar convened in New York City in April to consider world religions and their impact on human rights. Attended by 140 UU's,

drawn from congregations throughout North America, a committee of young people produced a Spring Seminar Statement describing the role religion plays and the role it ought to play in protecting and ensuring human rights. The statement will be distributed throughout the United Nations and used by the attendees' in their home congregations and communities.

The quarterly newsletter, *Windows on the World*, is designed to inform UUs of issues before the United Nations and to communicate activities of the UU-UNO staff. Similarly, the UU-UNO webpage is regularly updated to keep UUs abreast of UU-UNO activities.

The theme of the 2008 UN Sunday was "Human Rights: Dignity and Justice for All". The UU-UNO provided a syllabus to guide congregation leaders in communicating the theme. Executive Director Bruce Knotts has spoken at 34 UU Congregations to inform and motivate engagement in activities of UU-UNO. The UU-UNO office was represented at the International Convocation of Unitarian Universalist Women in Houston as well as the Canadian Unitarian Council meetings held in Ottawa, in May 2008.

Promoting UU-UNO Memberships

Our network of UU-UNO members in the United States and Canada continues to grow with 449 new members so far in FY 2008. In July, our 2008-2011 Strategic Plan ratified by the UU-UNO Board of Directors specifies a growth of at least 400 new members per year. Through the dedication and devotion of our Executive Director, Office Staff, Board of Directors and Advisors, we have exceeded our strategic plan goals in the categories of memberships, individual contributions and grants. We continue to lag behind our goal in obtaining major donor support. We are working to meet all our goals in FY 2009.

We offer special thanks to the President, Moderator and Director of the UUA International Office, for direction, advice, support and counsel.

Acronyms:

ECOC: Every Child is Our Child (a program to help orphan children in Ghana)

DPI: United Nations Department of Public Information

LGBT: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization

UDHR: Universal Declaration of Human Rights (signed in Paris, 1948)

UN: United Nations

UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund

UUs: Unitarian Universalists

UUA: Unitarian Universalist Association

UUSC: Unitarian Universalist Service Committee

UU-UNO: Unitarian Universalist United Nations Office

Submitted 4/30/09

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