

Unitarian Universalist Service Committee

Associate Member Report to the Unitarian Universalist Association

June 2008

The Unitarian Universalist Service Committee advances human rights and social justice around the world, partnering with those who confront unjust power structures and mobilizing to challenge oppressive policies. We envision a world free from oppression and injustice, where all can realize their full human rights.

This year was a banner year for UUSC. We took on a new visual identity, adopting a logo that features two outstretched hands joining together, with a stylized version of the UUSC chalice connecting them. We also moved to new headquarters, purchasing a historic building in the heart of Central Square, in Cambridge, Mass. Our decision to move to 689 Massachusetts Avenue was prompted by our growing success. As we engage the world in more effective ways, our staff has grown...and we plan to grow even more.

Advancing Environmental Justice

UUSC focuses on the human right to water as the cornerstone of our commitment to environmental justice.

UUSC's partner the Coalition Against Water Privatisation (CAWP) helped local residents win a constitutional challenge to the prepaid water system in Johannesburg, South Africa. In 2003, a water utility installed prepaid water meters in low-income black neighborhoods, limiting supplies to an average of just 6.6 gallons of water per person per day – or half the amount the World Health Organization has set as the minimum amount needed to meet basic human needs. The decision is a major victory for South Africans and others around the world struggling for water justice.

In Guayaquil, Ecuador, UUSC partner El Movimiento Mi Cometa (My Kite Movement) took steps to hold InterAgua, a subsidiary of the U.S.-based Bechtel Corporation, accountable for poorly managed water services that resulted in an outbreak of hepatitis A among schoolchildren in 2005. Due to Mi Cometa's efforts, the World Bank Ombudsperson is now investigating Bechtel's water concession in Guayaquil.

In the United States, the Environmental Justice Program teamed up with Boston-based Mass Global Action (MGA) to launch a program called The Color of Water Project, which educates and

empowers local residents to be proactive about securing the right to water in their communities. A study by MGA found that the number of water shutoffs in Boston had tripled since 2002, mostly affecting low-income communities.

Promoting Economic Justice

UUSC's Economic Justice Program promotes the right to a living wage, protects the rights and dignity of workers in the informal economy, and supports workers organizing around the world.

In Kenya, UUSC continued to work with the Kenya National Alliance of Street Vendors and Informal Traders (KENASVIT) and the Rock Women Group to support and organize street vendors and child workers, and change policy to recognize their rights and contributions. With the Center for the Promotion and Defense of Human and Labor Rights (CEPRODEHL) in Mexico's Yucatan and the Commission for Human and Labor Rights in Tehuacan, UUSC supported maquila (or factory) workers as they demanded safer working conditions, advocated for wage and gender equity, and built bridges of solidarity across borders. UUSC also partnered with groups in Mississippi and Arkansas, MPOWER and the Northwest Arkansas Workers' Justice Center, which organize workers in one of America's most abusive and dangerous industries – poultry processing.

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Building on The UUSC Coffee Project and our partnership with Equal Exchange, UUSC supported Porvenir Financiero, a financial-literacy program that trains women, young adults, and indigenous farmers to better manage their worker-led cooperatives. With our partner Global Labor Strategies, we supported research and muckraking journalism that shed light on how U.S. corporations are undermining the creation of new labor policy and protections in China.

Defending Civil Liberties

UUSC's Civil Liberties Program found creative ways to fight the erosion of civil liberties – such as freedom of expression, the right to privacy, and due process – in the United States and around the world.

UUSC reached across cultures and generations to fund the translation of a comic book about the U.S. civil rights movement into both Arabic and Farsi. The project was undertaken by UUSC program partner Hands Across the Mideast Support Alliance (HAMSA), an international civil-rights initiative that builds bridges of understanding across cultures and faiths. Now people in Middle Eastern countries can grasp the power of how individuals, like Martin Luther King, Jr., and Rosa Parks, when inspired and organized, can spark a movement for change.

The Civil Liberties Program is working with several grassroots organizations as part of its efforts to confront the Iraq war and the abuses it has engendered. We partnered with Appeal for Redress, an organization of active-duty U.S. military personnel who are concerned about the war in Iraq and support the withdrawal of U.S. troops. Appeal for Redress is a vehicle for men and women in uniform to speak out against the war while exercising their most basic civil liberty – the right to express dissent.

Another UUSC partner is Iraq Veterans Against the War, of which Camilo Mejía, the first combat

veteran to refuse to return to Iraq, is the national chair. Through UUSC's nomination, Mejía was awarded the Adin Ballou Peace Award. He now appears regularly at UUSC-led public events around the country.

Protecting Rights in Humanitarian Crises

Joint UUA-UUSC appeals have funded our response to major disasters such as the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and the 2005 Gulf Coast hurricanes.

Kenya

UUSC's response to the political and humanitarian crisis that erupted in Kenya in December 2007 was immediate: we issued a statement supporting the right of the people of Kenya to a just electoral process, sent an emergency assessment mission to the country to investigate the root causes and humanitarian implications of the crisis, joined with the UUA to establish the UUSC-UUA Kenya Crisis Fund, and provided testimony to the World Bank, U.S. State Department, and both the House and Senate subcommittees on Africa. UUSC is now working with our long-term Kenyan partners KENASVIT and Rock Women Group to integrate a crisis-response capacity into their existing human- and labor-rights work.

Gulf Coast response

In 2007, to commemorate the second anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, UUSC and the UUA joined with Gulf Coast partner organizations in a "29 homes in 29 days" campaign to help hurricane survivors return to New Orleans. Volunteers included a group of teenagers from inner-city Boston neighborhoods who are part of a program of the Unitarian Universalist Urban Ministry and a group of adults organized by the UUA's Thomas Jefferson District, which includes Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and parts of Tennessee and Georgia.

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Indonesia-Pakistan learning exchange

Survivors of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and the 2005 South Asia earthquake continue to rebuild their lives and find hope in the wake of their tragedy. In November 2007, UUSC held a cross-cultural learning exchange in Aceh, Indonesia, which brought together grassroots Pakistani and Indonesian activists who are working on women's inheritance rights. Although they are from different countries and speak different languages, they immediately recognized each other's experiences. The two groups shared ways to assert women's land-inheritance rights as protected by law.

Darfur

Since the conflict began in 2003, mass violence in the Darfur region of Sudan has killed more than 300,000 Darfurians and displaced millions more from their homes. Women and girls remain particularly vulnerable to violence. UUSC is helping to weave a web of protection for these women and girls. In 2007, through our work with our partners, we established women's centers in two IDP camps in Darfur to empower women. We also held training for male camp leaders in 10 camps to increase their awareness of and sensitivity to women's safety issues.

Outreach and Mobilization

UUSC builds a more engaged and activist community focused on human-rights and social-justice issues.

Drumbeat for Darfur

Drumbeat for Darfur, our campaign to end the Darfur genocide, consumed much of our energy and attention this year. At the UUA General Assembly 2007, in Portland, Ore., UUSC activities and advocacy action centered on the ongoing crisis in Darfur and what UUs can do to help end the genocide. In December 2007, UUSC's D.C. Days of Action brought activists to the capital to lobby on Capitol Hill, march with Mia Farrow and a replica of the Olympic torch (given China's role as host of the 2008 Olympic

Games), and protest at the Chinese Embassy. We also played an active role in campaigns that led financial giants, such as Fidelity Investments and Berkshire Hathaway, to divest their shares in Chinese petroleum companies. Chinese petrodollars aid and abet the genocide, making it possible for the Sudanese government to equip its military and arm Janjaweed militias.

The Cost of Iraq: Who Pays the Price?

This year on Justice Sunday (March 30, 2008), UUSC challenged UU congregations to examine the full cost of the Iraq war and consider who is paying the price. Simple Steps for Justice, the centerpiece of the program, encouraged congregants to participate actively in this year's election process and take action on issues such as the diversion of precious resources from critical areas, including rebuilding the hurricane-battered Gulf Coast.

Wage Justice

We continued to play a lead role within Let Justice Roll, the only national interfaith coalition speaking out on the need for a just minimum wage. Increases in state-level minimum wages won in the November 2006 elections helped catalyze, in July 2007, the first federal minimum-wage increase in 10 years. UUSC and Let Justice Roll activists helped to achieve these victories.

Statewide advocacy

UUSC continued to support the work of UU statewide advocacy networks around the country, through which local activists can be agents for change in the public square and bearers of a powerful, progressive religious voice.

UUSC Just Democracy, Inc.

We incorporated UUSC Just Democracy, Inc., as a 501(c)(4) entity, with the goal of creating opportunities for UU advocacy networks and members of other progressive faiths to engage more directly in the electoral process. Just Democracy launched a pilot project in New Hampshire as a first step towards realizing this vision.

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Education

UUSC's educational programs are a key mechanism for engaging and motivating activists to achieve positive social change.

Experiential learning

The power of experiential learning makes UUSC's JustWorks and JustJourneys programs critical to engaging and inspiring our members and supporters – the moral levers through which we move the world. We have found that while there are many ways to learn about social-justice issues, when someone smells chemicals in a Mexican textile factory or digs in alongside a Gulf Coast partner, the experience can be deep and profound, often transformative.

UUSC linked many of our 2007 JustWorks camps to our work on the Gulf Coast, sending volunteers back to Louisiana and Mississippi to help rebuild homes. In Oklahoma, JustWorks volunteers worked on the first burial site in the nation for “unidentified” Native American ancestral remains under “repatriation” (return to the earth) from museums and institutions for honorable reburial.

For the fourth year in a row, an intergenerational, interracial, and interfaith group participated in Freedom Summer: A Civil Rights Journey. They learned from activists who took part in the U.S. civil rights movement and visited some of the historic sites in the movement. Afterwards, they volunteered with social-action organizations in Birmingham, Ala.

This past year, UUSC JustJourneys to Guatemala and Mexico introduced dozens of participants to our program partners, who are often on the frontlines of confronting unjust power structures. JustJourneys also opened the door for UU congregations to engage in international advocacy

work. The highlight of 2007 was an Election Monitoring JustJourney in Guatemala, in which a 21-person delegation traveled to the rural community of Rabinal to help monitor national elections as official international observers. Rabinal, located in the Guatemalan highlands, was the site of numerous politically driven massacres in the 1980s.

Small-group reflection materials

UUSC completed work on Covenant Group modules for small-group ministries. These curricula will help members and supporters explore the qualities of their hearts and spirits that compel them to make a difference year after year, even when the prospect of public success seems distant.

UUSC public events

UUSC conducted many outreach activities to keep our members and supporters informed and active. We organized workshops, held film screenings, hosted youth-group visits, delivered sermons, addressed retirement communities, and gave keynote speeches at conferences and district meetings.

Volunteers and membership

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

Each day, UUSC staff, volunteers, members, and supporting UU congregations put Unitarian Universalist values into action. And every day you can see these values at work in the slums of Nairobi, in the Ninth Ward of New Orleans, in worker centers in Mississippi and Arkansas, in the Guatemalan Highlands, and in Washington, D.C.



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