

Unitarian Universalist Service Committee

Associate Member Report to the Unitarian Universalist Association

June 2009

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. UUSC envisions a world free from oppression and injustice, where all can realize their full human rights.

With more than 40,000 members and supporters, UUSC is a powerful force for change in the world. Every day that positive change is evident, 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. This year, UUSC highlighted the collective, collaborative nature of this change under the banner, "**Advancing human rights is the work of many joining hands.**"

Advancing Environmental Justice

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

In Ecuador, El Movimiento Mi Cometa was successful in campaigning to include human-right-to-water provisions in the new national constitution. The privatization of water services, like the now unconstitutional concession in Guayaquil, will be terminated. Ecuador will write a new water law, with Mi Cometa playing a key role in negotiations.

With the UU Legislative Ministry of CA, UUSC launched the CA Water Justice Curriculum, a specialized version of UUSC's Water Justice Praxis. The project, funded by the UU Veatch Program at Shelter Rock, helped initiate California's historic Human Right to Water Act of 2009 (AB 1242). If passed, this state law will help to ensure that residents of the most populous U.S. state will have access to safe, affordable water. It will also provide further legal grounding for the effort to protect the human right to water for everyone around the world.

This year, UUSC developed a new programmatic, policy, and advocacy focus on climate change. As part of UUSC's Green Sanctuary effort, UUSC launched Hope in Crops, a carbon-offset pilot project, with the SoilFarm Multi Cultural Group, in Kakamega, Kenya. The rural cooperative is made up of human rights defenders who were tortured and imprisoned for defending the last rainforest in Kenya. The project nurtures indigenous plants and tree species, while building sustainable livelihoods.

UUSC and NorthStar Asset Management won a major shareholder advocacy victory when PepsiCo adopted a human-right-to-water policy in March 2009.

Promoting Economic Justice

UUSC's Economic Justice Program promotes the right to a living wage, advances the rights 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 and the Rock Women Group to support and organize street vendors and child workers and change policy to recognize their rights and contributions, particularly in response to the 2008 post-election crisis.

With the Center for the Promotion and Defense of Human and Labor Rights in Yucatan, Mexico, UUSC supported maquila (factory) workers as they trained fellow workers on their rights and advocated for policies to demand safer working conditions and gender equity. With its partner Global Labor Strategies, UUSC supported research and muckraking journalism that shed light on the labor situation in China, a critical arena in the global movement for workers' rights.

UUSC also partnered with groups in Mississippi and Arkansas, MPOWER and the Northwest Arkansas Workers' Justice Center, to organize workers in one of America's most abusive and dangerous industries — poultry processing.

Building on the UUSC Coffee Project and its partnership with Equal Exchange, UUSC supported

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the Southern Alternatives Agricultural Cooperative through its Small Farmer Fund. Southern Alternatives is a pecan-processing cooperative, led by African American women in rural Georgia, which helps to anchor the local economy by securing safe, sustainable jobs for its members.

Defending Civil Liberties

UUSC's Civil Liberties Program found creative ways to repair civil liberties in the United States and around the world.

UUSC and its partners the National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT) and the Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition (TASSC) celebrated President Obama's executive orders to ban torture and close down the detention center in Guantanamo Bay. UUSC also joined NRCAT and TASSC to push for a Commission of Inquiry to investigate whether members of the Bush administration violated U.S. and international laws against torture.

UUSC continues to address gross violations of civil liberties in the United States, borne disproportionately by Muslim and Arab Americans. Incidents of racial and religious profiling have increased dramatically since 9/11. In response, UUSC is embarking on a Building Bridges for Civil Liberties project with two partners, Muslim Advocates and Hands Across the Mideast Support Alliance. The goal is to bring together UU and Muslim- and Arab-American communities in three cities: Chicago, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C. Mutual respect and understanding that cross lines of religion and culture are crucial to protecting the civil liberties of Muslim and Arab minorities.

To ensure military personnel and families are heard as the Obama administration reformulates plans for Iraq and Afghanistan, UUSC supports Appeal for Redress, Military Families Speak Out, Veterans for Peace, and Win Without War Coalition. UUSC is concerned about the rise in violence in Afghanistan and the security of its three Afghan partners, which provide human-rights training for women and children.

Protecting Rights in Humanitarian Crises

Joint UUA-UUSC appeals continue to fund responses to major disasters, such as the cyclone in Myanmar and post-election recovery in Kenya.

Kenya

Through innovative collaborations, UUSC is aiding vulnerable groups after the 2008 post-election violence in Kenya. With the Kenya National Alliance of Street Vendors and Informal Traders, UUSC implemented a revolving loan fund for traders to replenish their stocks, continue their organizing work, and focus on inter-ethnic conflict resolution. With the Rock Women Group, UUSC is protecting the rights of orphans and child workers following the crisis. Through the Kakamega Grassroots Initiative, in Western Province, UUSC assists the "dispersed displaced" through training and small loans to get back on their feet as small vendors and farmers.

Myanmar (formerly Burma)

The UUSC-UUA Cyclone Nargis Relief Fund supported critical relief and recovery in rural villages devastated by the May 2008 storm, including: food aid at a time when most organizations were unable to access survivors, livelihoods recovery programs for over 550 women-headed and vulnerable households, protection and education for unaccompanied children, and technical aid to ensure that homes and buildings are rebuilt to cyclone-resilient standards. UUSC's collaboration with grassroots partners also includes strengthening their capacities to assess needs and plan practical responses. UUSC is currently developing long-term program work in the regions of Myanmar affected by conflict.

Darfur

Because women and girls living in camps in Darfur face specific risks, UUSC is weaving a web of protection. This program reduces women's vulnerability to gender-based violence by organizing firewood committees and firewood escorts outside the camps to improve women's safety. It trains UNAMID police and community police on gender-sensitive protection. The program has established four women's centers that provide leadership training so women can make their voices heard by camp leaders and benefit from income-generation opportunities inside the camps. UUSC worked with national and international policymakers to guarantee the funding and political will needed to safeguard women and girls in Darfur.

Gaza

UUSC is responding to the crisis in Gaza by partnering with a sister organization to jointly support Youth Bank, an initiative that engages young people in helping their communities recover from the recent war.

Practical actions prioritize single-parent families, and injured, ill, and elderly neighbors: people who might otherwise be overlooked.

Northern Uganda

UUSC, with local partner Caritas, is helping the displaced return from two transit sites in Pader to ten villages after two decades of war. The Caritas team helps people find lasting solutions to the challenges of rebuilding their communities through dialogue, traditional conflict resolution, leadership building, psychosocial assistance, and concrete support, such as food and housing assistance.

Outreach and Mobilization

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

UDHR 60th Anniversary and Justice Sunday

UUSC kicked off its year-long celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in October 2008, with stories and videos highlighting how UUSC's work flows directly from the UDHR. UUSC asked people to Listen, Reflect, Act – *Listen* to the stories of UUSC partners, *reflect* on their work and the larger struggle for human rights, and *act* for human rights.

On International Human Rights Day, December 10, UUSC held the first-ever Rights Night to honor long-time activist Rev. Gloria White-Hammond with the Eleanor Roosevelt Human Rights Award. A similar Rights Night event was held in the San Francisco Bay Area in February 2009.

As part of Justice Sunday 2009, UU congregations around the country celebrated the 60th anniversary of the UDHR. Congregations used UUSC materials and speakers to reflect on the role that the UDHR and other human rights principles can play in helping UUs to fulfill their commitment to social justice. UDHR activities also included a youth photo contest and a contest for religious educators.

Drumbeat for Darfur

UUSC's Drumbeat for Darfur campaign complements UUSC's programmatic work in Darfur, with a focus on improving protections for displaced Darfurian women and girls.

This year, UUSC partnered with the national Tents of Hope project, started by the United Church of Christ, to encourage UU congregations and other constituents to decorate tents with images and messages of hope

and peace. UUSC created educational and advocacy materials for Tents of Hope participants, including advocacy tent cards requesting congressional oversight of the UNAMID mandate and improved protection measures. Thousands of cards were sent to policymakers in Washington, D.C. In November 2008, UUSC staffers and hundreds of UUs attended the Gathering of the Tents, on the Mall, where 300 colorful tents from 48 states were displayed. UUSC staff presented three interactive workshops, and Charlie Clements was a featured speaker at the rally.

\$10 in 2010

Through partner Let Justice Roll, UUSC joined a coalition of more than 90 organizations in a grassroots campaign to raise the federal minimum wage to \$10 by 2010. At UUA General Assembly 2008, UUs expressed solidarity with this initiative by passing an Action of Immediate Witness to Raise the Federal Minimum Wage to \$10 in 2010.

Gulf Coast Recovery

UUSC continued to advocate for a just recovery in the Gulf Coast. UUSC sponsored the KatrinaRitaVille Express tour, urging policymakers to include the Gulf Coast Civic Works Project in the economic recovery package. UUSC helped the UUA to launch the New Orleans Rebirth Volunteer Center to keep members up-to-date and mobilized to take action.

UU Statewide Advocacy Networks

UUSC funded nine UU Statewide Advocacy Networks (SANs) in FY09, convened monthly conference calls, and hosted the annual SAN conference. Although UUSC ended its seed grants to SANs, it will continue to collaborate closely with these essential organizations.

UUSC Just Democracy, Inc.

UUSC Just Democracy is a 501(c)(4) organization that provides opportunities for UUs and other progressive, faith-based activists to engage more directly in the political process. This year, Just Democracy successfully completed a pilot project in New Hampshire, where Executive Director Mark McPeak led an issue canvas and a get-out-the-vote campaign for the 2008 elections. Just Democracy also contributed funds to two successful UU candidates running for state representative and co-sponsored a climate change forum.

Education

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

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Experiential learning

The power of experiential learning makes UUSC's JustWorks and JustJourneys programs critical to engaging and inspiring its members and supporters – the moral levers through which UUSC moves the world. UUSC has 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.

For the fifth year in a row, an intergenerational, interracial, and interfaith group participated in Freedom Summer: A Civil Rights Journey. Participants visited historic sites in the U.S. civil rights movement and learned directly from civil rights activists. They also volunteered with a social-action organization in Brighton, Ala.

This year, UUSC JustJourneys to Guatemala and Kenya introduced dozens of participants to UUSC partners and their efforts to promote human rights. The highlight of 2009 was UUSC's first-ever JustJourney to Africa, which brought 11 participants to Kenya to meet directly with 4 UUSC partners and learn more about economic justice, environmental justice, and crisis recovery in Kenya.

Guest at Your Table

Guest at Your Table has been an important part of UUSC and UU culture since 1975, when it first began. During the program, families use a colorful donation box and a copy of *Stories of Hope* to connect them to real life people working alongside UUSC to advance human rights. This year, UUSC's worship and religious education resources highlighted the 60th anniversary of the UDHR.

www.uusc.org, Values in Action, and Rights Now

In June 2008, UUSC unveiled a completely new website, www.uusc.org, specially designed to be more engaging and user-friendly. In March 2009, UUSC launched *Values in Action*, a new monthly electronic newsletter for members of UUSC's eCommunity. *Values in Action* offers key ways for UUSC supporters to get

more active on human rights, at the local, national, and international level. UUSC continued to share important news about its partners, educational programs, and advocacy work through its tri-annual newsletter, *Rights Now*.

Small-group reflection materials

UUSC completed work on a sixth Covenant Group Module for small-group ministries. These curricula help members and supporters explore the qualities of their hearts and spirits that compel them to make a difference, year after year.

UUSC public events

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

Local representatives

UUSC is fortunate to have more than 600 local representatives working in 470 congregations to promote its mission. In 2008, UUSC honored five individuals with its annual Outstanding Local Representative Award: Nancy Doyle, of Murray UU Church, Attleboro, Mass.; Judy Ottman, of White Bear UU Church, Mahtomedi, Minn.; Bobby Robinson, of First Parish in Wayland, Mass.; and Patricia Wellington and Rosemary Hagen, of the UU Congregation of Venice, Fla.

Honor congregations

UUSC celebrates congregations whose members support human rights through exemplary levels of UUSC membership. The generosity of these congregations and their members enables UUSC to continue its vital work, in the United States and around the world. In 2008, four UU churches boasted 100 percent membership in UUSC: the UU Congregation of Cocoa, Fla.; the UU Fellowship of Vero Beach, Fla.; the UU Fellowship of Puna, Hawaii; and the UU Fellowship of Southern Maryland.



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