

Unitarian Universalist Service Committee

Associate Member Report to the Unitarian Universalist Association

June 2010

The Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC) 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.

This year, despite a challenging economic climate, UUSC continued to make significant progress for change. The impact of that change has been evidenced throughout the world — by the 6,000 people who have returned home in northern Uganda, by Ecuadorians who worked to include the human right to water in their nation's new constitution, in the growing business of the Southern Alternatives Agricultural Cooperative in the United States, in innovative human-rights education for women in Afghanistan, and more. With more than 40,000 members and supporters behind it, UUSC applies a unique three-pronged approach — eye-to-eye partnerships with grassroots organizations, outreach and mobilization of members, and advocacy for public-policy change.

Advancing Environmental Justice

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

In its work to promote and defend the human right to water, UUSC made gains this year through grassroots organizing with partners on climate change. In Argentina, the Center for Human Rights and the Environment developed groundbreaking legislation to protect strategic glaciers, which they proposed at the U.N. summit in Copenhagen while demanding binding climate-change agreements. The Asia Pacific Research Network also took part in the climate summit, engaging in grassroots mobilization and policy development. Meanwhile, UUSC raised \$4,500 through the Climate Justice Offset Program, educating constituents about the effects of climate change on human rights, promoting 350.org events, and supporting partners.

In Ecuador, UUSC partner El Movimiento Mi Cometa (the “My Kite” movement) is helping write laws to implement the human right to water enshrined in the

nation's new constitution. Mi Cometa is also facilitating negotiation of 3,500 claims against Interagua, a private water utility that violated its contract to provide water and sanitation services. In Kenya, the Hope in Crops pilot project was successfully established in 30 communities, where climate-change mitigation and adaptation projects are now working to ensure food and water security, environmental integrity, and sustainable livelihoods. UUSC and partners also held a briefing this year for the U.N. Human Rights Council Independent Expert on the Human Right to Water.

Domestically, UUSC, its partner UU Legislative Ministry of California, and allies pushed for the adoption of the Human Right to Water Act of California. UUSC used an innovative telecommunications strategy that resulted in 3,000 calls to UUSC members and likely proponents; more than 300 calls were patched through to Governor Schwarzenegger's office. The bill passed the Assembly and Senate with bipartisan support and reached the governor's desk only to be vetoed in October 2009.

In the realm of shareholder advocacy, UUSC is working with PepsiCo on implementation of its human-right-to-water policy, including the formation of a corporate-wide technical team. In response to shareholder actions by NorthStar Asset Management, Inc., with technical assistance from UUSC, Intel adopted an official policy affirming the human right to water and Connecticut Water was pressed to broaden its own.

Further supporting environmental justice in the United States, UU Mass Action Network was awarded a grant to develop a multi-year Massachusetts legislative campaign. UUSC also funded the Minnesota State Action Network to assist them in their campaign to insert a “green jobs” equity clause in a major bonding initiative before the Minnesota state legislature.

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.

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UUSC's Economic Justice Program worked this year with international partners to strengthen people's capacity to organize around issues that included child labor, just working conditions, and fair trade. Completing its post-election crisis response in Kenya, UUSC provided the Kenya National Alliance of Street Vendors and Informal Traders (KENASVIT) and Rock Women Group with seed capital and technical assistance to establish a revolving-loan fund so members could grow their savings, generate profits, and rebuild their businesses. Rock Women Group also worked against exploitative child labor practices by training more than 150 youth and heads-of-household (women, parents with HIV, and widowers) in income-generating activities. In Central America, UUSC helped STITCH expand its union schools for women, multiplying the skills of women organizing against substandard wages, sexual harassment, unfair firings, and hazardous conditions.

Highlights of UUSC's domestic work included assisting the Southern Alternatives Agricultural Cooperative (SAAC) in southwest Georgia to build their business systems and promote their pecans. During the holiday season, UUSC helped SAAC increase pecan sales by 1,167 percent over the 2008 effort, grossing more than \$8,800. UUSC also partnered with the Northwest Arkansas Workers' Justice Center, which is addressing wage theft, conducting direct actions to urge local restaurants to respect wage and hour laws, and holding Know Your Rights workshops and leadership trainings for Latino immigrant workers.

This year, the "\$10 in 2010" federal minimum-wage campaign coordinated by Let Justice Roll (LJR) continued to roll forward. UUSC conducted media outreach, especially when the final step of the increase to the federal minimum wage (authorized by Congress in 2007) took effect in July 2009. UUSC also organized UUs around LJR's Faith Leader Letter to Congress, securing more endorsements than any other denomination in the campaign.

UUSC was excited to launch the Get Together House Party, a new project to engage constituents in national conversations within their local communities. In March, 34 hosts in 23 states brought people together for a potluck meal and a conference-call discussion with Steven Greenhouse, *New York Times* reporter and author of *The*

Big Squeeze: Tough Times for the American Worker. UUSC provided hosts with comprehensive resources to promote and organize the event in their communities.

UUSC also revamped the Coffee Project, making it easier for our constituents to get involved in fair trade, one of UUSC's most popular issues. UUSC promoted the Coffee Project at the 2009 Liberal Religious Educators Association (LREDA) Conference and partnered with Equal Exchange and Global Exchange to engage constituents in the Reverse Trick-or-Treating project for the third year in a row.

Defending Civil Liberties

UUSC's Civil Liberties Program supports creative ways to uphold civil liberties in the United States and throughout the world.

The Building Bridges program, which fosters greater understanding of and solidarity with Arab and Muslim Americans, continued this past year, with workshops held in the Los Angeles/Pasadena area. Panel topics included using model local legislation to address racial and religious profiling, successful community responses to hate crimes, and activist strategies for future action. UUSC is assessing sites in Washington, D.C., and Seattle for similar workshops modified to suit local contexts.

The National Religious Campaign Against Torture, a UUSC partner, responded this year to polls indicating that large numbers of people of faith believe torture is justified by launching its "300 congregations in 30 states" campaign. This effort engages faith communities through a specially designed film and study guides tailored to different faith traditions. Additionally, UUSC partner Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition continued to insist that survivors' voices be heard, building on momentum gained from successful June 2009 Torture Awareness Month activities, including testimony before a hearing of the Congressional Human Rights Commission sponsored by Rep. James McGovern.

Reaching out to members with an action alert, UUSC mobilized constituents to urge President Obama to restore civil liberties and reject indefinite detention. In response to news that he was considering issuing an executive order keeping intact "prolonged" detention of

individuals held at Guantanamo Bay, grassroots voices joined together to decry the practice.

UUSC also supported Military Families Speak Out's efforts to strengthen chapters nationwide and address high rates of Native American recruitment by laying the groundwork for its first chapter on a reservation — Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, one of the poorest areas in the United States. Iraq Veterans Against the War's field organizers worked on launching an exciting GI organizing campaign to protect freedom of speech for active-duty service people.

Defending civil liberties internationally, UUSC collaborated with partners in Afghanistan and Iraq to support several pioneering programs. Despite dangers to organizations promoting women's rights in Afghanistan, UUSC partners Barakat, Humanitarian Assistance for Women and Children of Afghanistan, and the Afghan Center continued to successfully integrate rights-awareness trainings into innovative settings, including programs for schoolteachers and participants in microfinance loan programs. Iraqi partner ASUDA worked to strengthen democratic processes through rights-education workshops for women that covered voting rights and political participation.

Protecting Rights in Humanitarian Crises

Focusing on the rights of marginalized populations, UUSC's Rights in Humanitarian Crises Program responds to major disasters and long-term humanitarian crises.

Haiti

Following the devastating January 12 earthquake in Haiti, UUSC and the UUA launched a joint relief appeal, which is shaping up to be the largest-scale disaster response since Hurricane Katrina and the Indian Ocean Tsunami. UUSC has partnered with several grassroots urban and rural organizations to provide immediate relief, such as food, shelter, and medical supplies, and work on developing long-term recovery strategies. UUSC has also brought teams to Haiti for trauma-treatment training and alternative fuel and resource development. Mobilizing members, UUSC trained more than 225 volunteers to help Haitians in the United States apply for Temporary Protected Status at a number of clinics organized by UUSC and allies. UUSC also pressed the White House

to use its leverage with international donors to cancel Haiti's existing foreign debt and provide aid in the form of grants, not loans. Towards those ends, UUSC also supported the Debt Relief for Earthquake Recovery in Haiti Act.

Darfur

UUSC continued to expand women's protection work in Darfur, providing technical assistance in gender-sensitive training for police and U.N. security forces, arranging instruction for imams in the Qur'anic basis of women's rights, and expanding opportunities in camp-based women's centers. Through meetings and draft language and policies, UUSC influenced U.S. State Department officials, the U.N. Police Doctrine Development Group, the FY10 House Foreign Operations Appropriations bill, and UNAMID to strengthen and prioritize gender-sensitive protection in Darfur and other conflict zones. UUSC constituents and partners also took action that successfully pressured TIAA-CREF and American Funds to divest from companies that abet the genocide in Darfur.

Northern Uganda

With partner Caritas Pader, UUSC has helped over 6,000 people sustainably return home to 14 villages. After more than 20 years living in camps as a result of brutal war, people have reclaimed their homes and culture through traditional cleansing and reconciliation ceremonies, strengthened leadership, and community dispute resolution. Practical livelihood assistance has taken the form of an innovative communal oxen project to facilitate agricultural production, the development of tools to lessen the work burden for women and youth, and 27 new income-generation efforts. As team leader Jackie Okanga shared on a U.S. speaking tour, the success of this work will be showcased in a best-practice model to be shared with other nongovernmental organizations.

Myanmar

In addition to wrapping up its response to Cyclone Nargis, UUSC launched a successful pilot project in Myanmar, strengthening resilience in war-torn communities of Shan State by working with Buddhist institutions to provide communal revolving-loan funds. UUSC is also developing a second pilot project to reduce the vulnerability of women and girls to exploitation in Shan State.

Kenya

In ongoing response to post-election violence in Kenya, UUSC expanded the Kakamega Grassroots Initiative's support of the "dispersed displaced" by extending training and revolving-loan funds to 60 people and instituting a program to trace relatives who disappeared in the violence.

Education and Outreach

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

Experiential learning

The best way to learn is to experience something firsthand. UUSC provides weeklong journeys that offer deepened knowledge about human rights and social justice — and lifelong inspiration to act. By the end of the 2010 fiscal year, UUSC will have conducted three programs. The sixth annual Civil Rights Journey followed the footsteps of pioneering civil-rights leaders of the 1950s and '60s through Alabama and Georgia. An Ecuador JustJourney trip brought attention to UUSC partner Mi Cometa's successful efforts to increase low-income people's access to safe, affordable water and will help seed human-right-to-water initiatives in the United States. And a youth JustWorks Gulf Coast camp provided hands-on opportunities to work directly with local communities on direct-service projects while learning about root causes of injustice.

Social Action Committee outreach

UUSC has made several targeted efforts this year to identify and build relationships with Social Action Committees (SACs), as well as develop best practices in delivering services to this congregational "gatekeeper." This past November, UUSC held a workshop for Massachusetts SACs and convened a highly successful SAC Organizing Weekend attended by several key SAC members.

Ministerial lunches

Through a newly established program, UU ministers were given the opportunity to meet with UUSC staff to learn about the organization and to share insight into how the organization can best achieve its congregation-based goals.

UUSC 2.0

This year, UUSC bolstered education and outreach ef-

forts in social-media outlets, enabling people to easily keep up with what's happening at UUSC and in the wider world of human-rights activism. On Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and UUSC's website, members and supporters read on-the-ground reports, watch videos about UUSC's issues and partners, share thoughts about the pursuit of human rights — and take action. As part of an emerging video strategy, UUSC also produced and distributed *Rebuilding the Gulf Coast*, a DVD that effectively communicates the unique UUA-UUSC partnership in the Gulf Coast recovery process.

UUSC events

UUSC raised its profile among UUs and the general public through a variety of events. The second annual Rights Night on December 10 honored pioneering human-rights activist Mel King and attracted a diverse crowd of 150 attendees from the greater Boston area. UUSC also celebrated its 70th anniversary in conjunction with First Church in Belmont, Mass. In addition to workshops and a booth at General Assembly, UUSC speakers delivered sermons or presentations at 21 UU congregations and three non-UU events this year.

Volunteers and membership

With more than 40,000 members and supporters, UUSC's volunteer and membership community plays an essential role in the advancement of human rights.

Guest at Your Table

An annual tradition since 1975, the Guest at Your Table program connects members and supporters to the real-life impact of their support. Inspired by Stories of Hope featuring UUSC partners, members raise significant funds for advancing human rights each year. The worship materials and resources help members create a comprehensive program to nurture lasting connections to UU principles, build awareness about social justice and human rights, and strengthen UUSC's work. This coming year, Guest at Your Table will be "going green," with materials available earlier online and sent by mail when requested. Visit UUSC's booth at General Assembly for prelaunch materials and information.

Justice Sunday

Using multigenerational activities for learning, advocacy, and action, culminating in worship, the annual Justice

Sunday program provides a comprehensive guide to deepen understanding of a key human-rights issue — with this past year highlighting economic justice. Justice Sunday helps put UU values into action with worship resources, planned activities for adults to relate and respond to key issues, and recommended religious-education resources.

Local representatives

UUSC is fortunate to have more than 600 local representatives working in over 400 congregations to promote its mission. In 2009, UUSC honored two individuals with its annual Outstanding Local Representative Award: Phyllis Morales of Jefferson Unitarian Church, Golden, Colo., and Sue Sherman of the UU Church of Sarasota, 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 2009, two UU churches boasted 100 percent membership in UUSC: the UU Fellowship of Vero Beach, Fla., and the San Juan UU Fellowship in Friday Harbor, Wash. UUSC also recognizes congregations that have demonstrated their commitment to social justice through an institutional gift to support our work; six UU fellowships received the Helen Fogg Chalice Award for their exemplary level of giving.



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