

Unitarian Universalist Service Committee

Associate Member Report to the Unitarian Universalist Association

June 2014

Challenging injustice, advancing human rights

The Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC) is a human rights organization powered by grassroots collaboration. In 15 countries throughout the world, UUSC fosters social justice and works toward a world free from oppression. UUSC's innovative approaches and measurable impact are grounded in the moral belief that all people have inherent power, dignity, and rights.

In partnership with dedicated UUSC members, tireless activists, and inspiring grassroots organizations throughout the world, UUSC aims to ensure that fundamental human rights are realities for everyone — no matter race, gender, or class. UUSC works specifically with people and communities who are denied their rights because of who they are — women, people of color, religious minorities, and others — and who are not served by mainstream human rights organizations.

Every day, UUSC is taking action to advance a full array of human rights — promoting economic justice, bolstering environmental justice, and protecting civil liberties. UUSC also works to deliver aid with dignity and advance the rights of people left behind during humanitarian crises, which include forgotten conflicts and natural disasters. In addition, UUSC works with the UUA through the UU College of Social Justice to help UUs deepen and sustain the work of justice in their congregations and communities.

Featured initiatives

UUSC bolsters its work with grassroots organizations by seeking to achieve systemic change at the highest levels.

Choose compassionate consumption

UUSC engages people in owning their power as values-driven consumers, acting to protect workers' rights, and joining a movement for economic justice.

- Released statement by UUSC President Bill Schulz and UUA President Peter Morales declaring that raising the minimum wage is a moral imperative; the statement, which more than 14,000 supporters signed, was delivered to key legislators
- Worked to support the Fair Minimum Wage Act (FMWA), which would raise the minimum wage, and advocated for provisions to raise the tipped minimum wage; generated almost 900 calls to Congress urging them to pass the FMWA
- Partnered with the Restaurant Opportunities Centers United in raising awareness of the challenges faced by restaurant workers, many of whom receive a tipped minimum wage of only \$2.13 per hour
- Supported state coalitions working to raise the minimum wage; in Massachusetts, helped rally 4,795 volunteers who gathered 282,000 signatures for ballot initiatives on minimum wage and paid sick time
- In a petition signed by approximately 5,000 people (and counting!), called on Darden Restaurants to support the FMWA, pay a living wage, and enact paid sick days for all employees
- Worked with the Northwest Arkansas Workers' Justice Center to organize around wage theft legislation and conduct research examining conditions in the Arkansas poultry industry
- Dramatically expanded offerings of ethically sourced merchandise in UUSC's store — supporting small farmers, empowering women-owned cooperatives, and creating awareness of products that honor workers' rights and environmental sustainability, with proceeds supporting UUSC's work

Sustainable recovery in Haiti

In the wake of the 2010 earthquake, UUSC has made a long-term commitment to creating a recovery that advances justice for Haitians.

- Broke ground on a sixth eco-village in the Haitian countryside with the Papaye Peasant Movement (MPP) to support earthquake survivors with new homes and livelihoods
- Worked with MPP and the Bright Educators of Delmas to bring sustainable food gardens into Port-au-Prince; just 10 recycled container gardens will feed a family of four for a year and provide vegetables to sell at market
- Produced a set of videos about the gardens for use in educating supporters and replicating the project in other areas
- Exceeded goal of more than 100 commitments from individuals and congregation to create a garden and sponsor one in Haiti during Justice Sunday
- Facilitated training of 100 community leaders in trauma resiliency skills
- Empowered at-risk youth with viable employment skills and art therapy through partnerships with Zanmi Timoun and the Association for the Promotion of Integral Family Healthcare
- Continued advocating for the Assessing Progress in Haiti Act, which UUSC helped draft; the legislation passed the House of Representatives and is making its way through the Senate

The human right to water

UUSC is on the cutting edge of ensuring that all people — no matter their skin color or bank account — have access to safe, affordable water.

- Worked with partners in California to ensure implementation of the historic Human Right to Water Act (A.B. 685)
- Conducted ongoing research on discrimination in U.S. water and sanitation sector
- Generated 700 calls to Congress from UUSC members urging ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which affirms the human right to water
- Worked with Observatorios Ciudadanos de Servicios Publicos (Citizens Observatory on Public Services) in Ecuador on implementation of the country's constitutional human right to water
- Advocated adoption of the human right to water in the new national constitution of Tanzania
- Supported CEDHA's Sali Dulce River litigation (which impacts 5 million water consumers) and "right to the glacier" work to protect the water sources of 8.7 million people living in Argentina and Chile
- Continued advocacy in partnership with the Commission for Peace and Ecology in Guatemala to hold Goldcorp accountable for contamination of the water sources of indigenous communities
- Supported the Habitat International Coalition (Latin America) in pursuing litigation to enforce the human right to water in Mexico
- Pursued corporate accountability for the human right to water through strategic partnerships

Additional work

In addition to its featured campaigns, UUSC is working throughout the world with a variety of partners to advance a range of human rights. See below for a few more examples of ongoing work.

Disaster relief in the Philippines

- Raised more than \$1 million from generous supporters for the UUSC-UUA Philippines Typhoon Haiyan Relief Fund
- Disbursed emergency grants to the UU Church of Philippines, IBON, Citizens Disaster Response Center, and PKKK Rural Women's Coalition
- Provided trauma resiliency training to more than 40 community leaders in partnership with the Trauma Resource Institute
- Equipped more than 1,000 schoolchildren with the tools for trauma resilience
- Developed project with the Pagtambayayong Foundation to create model organic farms, building on eco-village model in Haiti, to benefit 300 families in northern Cebu

Torture accountability

- Supported grassroots organizing by the North Carolina Council of Churches and the National Religious Coalition Against Torture for release of report by Senate Intelligence Committee on CIA use of torture

- Mobilized constituents to appeal to Senator John Burr, who changed his position and supported making report public, as well as Senators Collins and King, who voted for declassification

Asylum seekers in immigration detention

- Worked with the Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition on policy brief detailing experience of torture survivors in immigration detention and recommending key policy changes
- Advocated for important provisions in immigration reform to protect torture survivors seeking asylum

UU College of Social Justice

A collaboration of the UUA and UUSC, the UU College of Social Justice (UUCSJ) strives to help Unitarian Universalists catalyze justice in their communities through programs that help them cross boundaries and learn new models for justice work.

- Grew Youth Justice Trainings, offering three justice leadership trainings throughout the country for high school youth, and added one-day youth training at General Assembly
- Doubled summer internships for college-age young adults, with more than 20 internship placements at 14 different organizations, both in the United States and abroad
- Completed the *UUCSJ Study Guide for Cross-Cultural Engagement*, designed as an adaptable tool for learning and reflection; the guide prepares participants for their short-term immersion with justice partners and assists them on their return as they discern new ways to engage as advocates, activists, and allies
- Continued to strengthen short-term experiential learning journeys in Chicago, Haiti, Mexico, Mississippi, and India
- Offered first BorderLinks Theology and Justice program for seminary students, with an intensive focus on immigration justice and ministerial formation

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689 Massachusetts Avenue

Cambridge, MA 02139

617-868-6600 | uusc.org