

# Unitarian Universalist Service Committee

## Associate Member Report to the Unitarian Universalist Association

---

June 2011

---

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.

Every day, UUSC is supporting change throughout the world — education on voter rights in Egypt, solidarity in workers' networks in Kenya, legislation on the human right to water in the United States, fair recovery in post-earthquake Haiti, and more. With more than 40,000 members and supporters behind it, UUSC employs a unique approach that integrates partnering with grassroots organizations, mobilizing members to take action, and advocating for changes in public policy. This year, UUSC also developed an exciting new strategic plan for 2011–2015. Laying out essential tactical decisions, the plan outlines UUSC's goals to increase engagement with Unitarian Universalists, reach out to youth, develop new educational programming, significantly expand electronic communications capacity, and effectively measure success.

### Defending Civil Liberties

*UUSC supports creative ways to uphold civil liberties in the United States and throughout the world.*

As revolution began to sweep the Middle East in early 2011, UUSC worked with the Hands Across the Mideast Support Alliance (HAMSA), a partner with an office in Cairo, Egypt, to support the rights of the Egyptian people. Following the ouster of Hosni Mubarak in February, HAMSA moved quickly to transition from active protest to active civic education. Because most Egyptians, particularly youth, do not have any experience in participating in free, open democracies, widespread popular education needs to happen to ensure that the transition from autocracy to democracy is successful. UUSC is working with the head of the HAMSA Cairo office to engage young activists to train other youth on voting rights, democracy, the Egyptian constitution, and election monitoring.

UUSC is also further building human-rights education in another corner of the Middle East. After three years of collaboration in Afghanistan, UUSC and Barakat are bringing together past participants of the innovative Teacher Training for Human Rights program in order to gather best practices on teaching human rights in that country. Former trainers and participants will come together to learn about each other's successes and challenges as well as the overall impact of integrating human-rights education into classroom curriculums. UUSC will work with teach-

ers to identify new ways of training teachers, build on past successes, and effectively translate their rights training beyond the classroom and into the community as a whole.

In addition to supporting rights education, UUSC is continuing to work against the practice of torture, in the United States and on the global stage. With the support of UUSC, the National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT) launched a daring initiative that attempts to prevent torture before it happens. The Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT) requires participating nations to create mechanisms, monitored by international experts, that prevent torture from occurring in all locations where prisoners and detainees are held, including police stations, mental-health facilities, detention centers, and prisons. The United States has not yet signed OPCAT, and with the help of Unitarian Universalists, NRCAT is working to build a grassroots movement to pressure President Obama to ratify this important human-rights protocol.

### Promoting Economic Justice

*From living wages to fair trade, UUSC advances workers' rights and supports workers organizing around the world.*

UUSC's Economic Justice Program worked this year to strengthen people's capacity to organize around living wages, child labor, just working conditions, and fair trade.

### Advancing human rights from field to fork

In 2010, UU congregations purchased approximately 39 tons of coffee, tea, chocolate, and other fair-trade items through the UUSC Coffee Project. In addition, UUSC members and supporters purchased nearly 300 pounds of pecan products from the Southern Alternatives Agricultural Cooperative, a partner in southwest Georgia that UUSC assists in bolstering its business practices.

The Northwest Arkansas Workers' Justice Center (NWAJWC) is organizing against labor violations and building the leadership of immigrant workers in the poultry-processing, restaurant, and construction industries. NWAJWC signed a formal alliance agreement with Occupational Safety and Health Administration to increase information sharing and coordinate the response to worker health and safety issues.

UUSC also initiated a partnership with Restaurant Opportunities Center United (ROC United), a 6,000-member organization that works to improve wages and working conditions for U.S. restaurant workers. UUSC's work with ROC United confronts sexual harassment and discrimina-

tion against women restaurant workers and builds solidarity with restaurant workers throughout the world.

### **Reducing child labor**

In Kenya, UUSC continued working with Rock Women Group to stop child labor by training at-risk youth and members of their households in growing their businesses, which supports children in continuing their education. In addition, UUSC supported Muungano (“Togetherness” in Kiswahili) through the Small Farmer Fund. This partnership helps young people, including gay, lesbian, and transgender youth from nearby Uganda, develop skills in planting traditional organic crops and running catering businesses to avoid prostitution, dangerous work, and other exploitation.

### **Strengthening worker alliances**

Also in Kenya, UUSC supported the Kenya National Alliance of Street Vendors and Informal Traders (KENASVIT) to expand from seven towns to twelve and train their members in negotiation skills. KENASVIT also played a key role in conducting civic education about the new Kenyan constitution, which passed in August 2010 with historic human-rights provisions.

### **Building leadership of women workers**

With UUSC assistance, Guatemalan partner STITCH convened the Women’s Network of Social and Economic Justice in Central America, which organizes against substandard wages, sexual harassment, unfair firings, and hazardous conditions. UUSC also helped STITCH expand its work with women in Mississippi, where women workers are adapting STITCH’s leadership curriculum to empower Latina immigrant workers in the United States.

### **Supporting living wages**

UUSC and the Let Justice Roll living-wage coalition continue asserting that raising minimum wages is crucial for workers and economic recovery. As members of Let Justice Roll, UUSC and ROC United worked together to advocate for raising the wages of tipped workers through the proposed Working for Adequate Gains for Employment in Services (WAGES) Act.

### **Advancing Environmental Justice**

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

UUSC and its partners are making significant gains for the human right to water in the United States and around the world. In July 2010, the United Nations General Assembly made history by recognizing access to safe drinking water and sanitation as a human right. While the United States

abstained on that vote, it later joined a U.N. Human Rights Council resolution affirming the human right to water.

Following those developments, UUSC provided key logistical support for an official visit from Catarina de Albuquerque, the U.N. independent expert on the right to water and sanitation, in February and March 2011. Her meetings with community members from Washington, D.C., to Sacramento, Calif., offered startling insights into the suffering of marginalized communities. She called upon the United States to address discrimination in water access and develop affordable and sustainable solutions. Alongside de Albuquerque, UUSC President William F. Schulz testified to the Tom Lantos Congressional Human Rights Commission on the issue.

In California, UUSC is working closely with the Environmental Justice Coalition on Water and the UU Legislative Ministry of California to set the pace for access to safe, affordable water in the United States. Together with its partners, UUSC is mobilizing supporters to help move a package of six human-right-to-water bills (including A.B. 685) through the California legislature.

In Central America, UUSC’s partners are taking the struggle for clean to water to the courts. Guatemala’s Association of Indigenous Peoples of the Americas of Sipakapa, which has been working to stop the GoldCorp Marlin gold mine from contaminating its water supply, won a ruling from the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights that requests suspension of mine operations. In Mexico, UUSC partner the Habitat International Coalition (HIC-AL) has successfully gotten two human-right-to-water cases on the docket.

On the ground in Kenya, UUSC partner the Soil Farm Multi-Culture Group celebrated the adoption of the human right to water in their new constitution and continued their work to protect the Kakamega Rain Forest, which is essential to the local watershed that feeds Lake Victoria.

UUSC is helping bringing essential work on the human right to water to the global stage. In September 2010, with partners from Argentina and Ecuador, UUSC presented to the Human Rights Council in Geneva. In December 2010, UUSC support enabled partners from the Philippines and Argentina to call on the governments participating in the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change to address the impact of climate change on human rights. In the virtual world, UUSC and the Tanzania Gender Networking Program are working with students from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology on an innovative online game that will support safe-water access in Tanzania.

## **Protecting Rights in Humanitarian Crises**

*Focusing on the rights of marginalized populations, UUSC responds to major disasters and long-term humanitarian crises.*

### **Haiti**

UUSC has an extensive on-the-ground program with several Haitian partners, focusing on displaced people in rural areas, women suffering gender-based violence in camps, children orphaned by the earthquake, and women street vendors. UUSC is piloting various ways to support youth without family, such as Camp Oasis, which provides family-like care, education, and safe housing for 40 orphaned girls, ages 4–14, whose homes were destroyed in the earthquake.

On the policy front, UUSC is working with the Haiti Advocacy Working Group to keep Haiti on the agenda of the U.S. Congress. In July 2010, UUSC facilitated partner testimony in the first congressional briefing on recovery needs that included Haitian civil-society voices. In March 2011, UUSC hosted Haitian women civil-society leaders at Capitol Hill for a week of high-level advocacy focusing on protecting women, girls, and other vulnerable populations, prompting reinvigorated policy-maker action. UUSC has also engaged members and supporters in pressuring Congress to pass legislation to ensure a just recovery for Haiti.

### **Kenya**

UUSC works with women displaced by the 2008 violence in Kenya, helping them get back on their feet with revolving loan funds. UUSC partner the Kakamega Grassroots Initiative supported over 30 of these women in recording testimony with leading human-rights groups on the human-rights violations they suffered. These records are finally bringing to light evidence of the post-election violence.

### **Uganda**

UUSC's project in northern Uganda — which helps people displaced by more than 20 years of war return home — has become a model for other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). In 2010, UUSC helped people reestablish their lives in 15 villages and in this fiscal year, the project has spread to 30 villages. Other NGOs have been attracted to work in these villages and provide additional services because the project is so successful.

### **Myanmar**

In the northern Shan state of Myanmar, where Shan communities are at the mercy of armed conflict, a UUSC partner works to organize communities through credit unions. In one township, 10 credit unions cooperated to eliminate a middle man who was exploiting them by selling low-grade seed at very high prices and buying their crops

at a low rate. The money they are saving by purchasing seed in bulk from the town goes to provide health care for members.

### **Darfur**

UUSC training of U.N. police forces in South Darfur on gender-sensitive protection in the camps for displaced persons was so successful that the U.N. police commander requested the training be extended to the police forces in North and West Darfur. Now, the African Union/U.N. Hybrid operation in Darfur (UNAMID) has received 2 million dollars from Scandinavian governments to continue training on gender-based violence.

### **Pakistan**

Following the devastating 2010 floods, UUSC is working with several partners in the southern provinces of Punjab and Sindh to develop sustainable livelihoods for flood-affected women as well as income-generation and shelter solutions for underserved communities.

## **Education and Outreach**

*UUSC's educational programs engage and motivate activists to achieve positive social change.*

### **Developing the College of Social Justice**

With its expertise and rich array of resources, UUSC is launching the College of Social Justice (CSJ), which will house education and training programs, service-learning opportunities, and youth and young-adult programs. UUSC envisions that this exciting new venture will be fully rolled out during the upcoming strategic-planning period.

### **Broadening experiential learning**

This year, UUSC has led several successful service-learning trips, including the Civil Rights Journey and two medical trips that launched the Haiti Volunteer Program. UUSC also embarked on a new partnership with the UUA, together conducting a trip to Uganda, where participants visited UUSC partners working to resettle villages after a 23-year civil war. The model combined the exploration of social-justice issues with the examination of the UU faith in another part of the world.

As part of the CSJ's mission to educate future activists and engage UU congregations, UUSC is targeting trips to youth, emerging UU leaders, and donors for more comprehensive learning experiences. For example, again in concert with the UUA, UUSC planned a trip specifically for seminarians to help build an eco-village in Haiti's Central Plateau, with tailored trip goals and curriculum. Targeting trips also allows UUSC to vary trip fees by incorporating donor-funded scholarships for seminarians and youth.

### **Celebrating committed supporters and activists**

Each year, UUSC honors several individuals and groups for their inspiring social-justice work. From the Volunteer Network, UUSC recognizes outstanding local representatives for their tireless dedication. In addition, the Social Action Leadership Award honors creative, effective leadership by an individual or group working for justice in cooperation with UUSC. And to celebrate the work of congregations and youth, UUSC grants the Social Justice Congregation Award and the Mary Ella Holst Youth Activist Award.

### **Engaging with congregations**

UUSC's annual Guest at Your Table and Justice Sunday programs offer worship materials, religious education, and action resources to connect people with the real-life impact of their support and activism on UUSC's human-rights work. This year, these programs went "green" with primarily electronic resources. Justice Sunday 2011 focused on how UUSC's approach to humanitarian crises delivers aid with dignity. In March, UUSC conducted a virtual Get-Together with well-known Haitian author and activist Edwidge Danticat; over 37 congregations participated.

To further provide educational outreach on human rights and social justice, UUSC piloted a volunteer ministerial speaker program to help meet requests of more congregations. UUSC also hosts youth groups throughout the year for introductions to UUSC's work.



# u u s c

---

**Unitarian Universalist Service Committee**

689 Massachusetts Avenue | Cambridge, MA 02139

617-868-6600 | 617-868-7102/fax | [info@uusc.org](mailto:info@uusc.org) | [www.uusc.org](http://www.uusc.org)