

Proposed Business Resolution for the 2020 UUA General Assembly

“Embodying Human Rights in Our Investment Decisions”

WHEREAS, the pursuit of social justice is at the heart of our identity as Unitarian Universalists; and

WHEREAS, we Unitarian Universalists are guided by our fundamental principles that uphold the worth of every human being; call for justice in human affairs; support the right of conscience and the democratic process; support a world community with peace and liberty for all; and declare respect for the interdependent web of existence; and

WHEREAS, we are also guided by the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the associated UN Covenants and Conventions including the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination; the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the UN Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

WHEREAS, the human rights of immigrants, people of color, women, LGBTQ people, workers, religious minorities, homeless youth, people affected by mass incarceration, and indigenous peoples living in the United States continue to be egregiously violated; and

WHEREAS, the human rights of groups in many countries of the world also continue to be systematically violated. Such groups include but are not limited to the Rohingya of Myanmar and the Uighurs of China who are abused based on religious and ethnic identities; factory workers forced to work without adequate pay in unsafe or unhealthy conditions; immigrants from the Americas, the Middle East and Africa fleeing war, violence, and ecological devastation; Palestinians who have suffered for decades from expulsion, land seizure, and denial of fundamental rights based on their ethnicity; immigrants and asylum seekers warehoused in private prisons in the US; and indigenous people of the Amazon and other parts of Latin America whose lands are taken from them or destroyed; and

WHEREAS, the human rights of all people to a secure future for themselves and their descendants continue to be threatened by climate change and by war, including the possibility of nuclear war; and

WHEREAS, the current national and world systems that allow oppression and human rights violations to continue are massively affected and enabled by the policies and activities of private corporations; and

WHEREAS, Unitarian Universalists should not support or profit from corporations that are deeply complicit in human rights violations; and

WHEREAS, Unitarian Universalists should oppose human rights abuses by using their relationships with corporations as consumers and investors to end corporate complicity with human rights abuses and environmental injustice, and to ensure that corporations abide by the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights; and

WHEREAS, the UUA has a long history of investing, shareholder activism and community investing in accord with social justice concerns through the UU Common Endowment Fund (UUCEF) and its predecessors, which includes endowment funds of the UUA and of many UU congregations and affiliates and is managed by the UUA Investment Committee, and advised by the UUA Socially Responsible Investment (SRI) Committee; and

WHEREAS, the UUA has the potential to build on its pioneering role in the SRI movement by strengthening and publicly promoting the UUCEF’s SRI Guidelines with regard to human rights; and

WHEREAS, clear, regular and accessible communication between the UUA SRI and Investment Committees and UU social justice groups, congregations and individual UUs concerned about social justice issues can help improve the effectiveness and impact of UUA investment screening, corporate engagement and community investment;

THEREFORE:

- 1) Be it resolved that the 2020 General Assembly of the UUA calls upon the UUA to cease the purchasing of securities by the UUCEF in corporations that are consistently, knowingly and directly complicit in egregious human rights violations and violations of international law (“Human Rights Violators (HRV)”)and calls on congregations, affiliates and individuals also to cease purchasing such securities; and
- 2) Be it further resolved that this General Assembly calls upon the UUA to continue to divest the UUCEF holdings of directly held securities of HRV companies, if any, reaching full divestment of these companies within three years and calls on congregations, affiliates and individuals also to divest within this timeframe; and
- 3) Be it further resolved that this General Assembly calls upon the UUA to continue to work with its current and prospective pooled-asset managers to incorporate Human Rights Due Diligence into their investment processes¹;
- 4) Be it further resolved that this General Assembly calls upon the UUA to undertake a comprehensive review of the UUCEF’s SRI Guidelines with regard to human rights concerns, identify significant gaps, if any, and amend the guidelines as necessary; and
- 5) Be it further resolved that this General Assembly requests the UUA to formalize mechanisms for communication between its SRI and Investment Committees and UU social justice groups, congregations and individual UUs concerned about social justice issues regarding development and implementation of the UUCEF’s SRI Guidelines and the impact of UU SRI initiatives; and
- 6) Be it further resolved that notwithstanding any provision above, the UUA shall not take any action that is inconsistent with its fiduciary duty or that is incompatible with the principles of sound investment; and
- 7) Be it further resolved that notwithstanding any provision above, the UUA shall not take any action that precludes the use of shareholder advocacy regarding human rights issues and the purchase of the minimal shares necessary to permit the introduction of shareholder resolutions with HRV companies, moreover, the UUA will sell such shares when the engagement ends or when it seems that engagement cannot produce more results; and
- 8) Be it further resolved that the President and Treasurer of the UUA should prepare a written report for each General Assembly from 2021 through 2023 on our Association’s progress on the above resolutions; and
- 9) Be it further resolved that this General Assembly encourages UUA affiliated organizations, individual UU congregations and individual UUs to examine their investments and corporate engagement plans to ensure support for the human rights of all people as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights with its associated covenants and in the UUCEF’s SRI Guidelines with a view to taking action to end human rights violations, such as public divestment of their holdings in HRV, supporting shareholder activism designed to end human rights violations, and investment in human rights supporting companies and ventures.

Sponsored by UUs for Justice in the Middle East, Black Lives UU, UU RISE, UU Peace Ministry Network and UU Ministry for Earth.

¹ <https://investorsforhumanrights.org/news/call-sign-ons-investor-case-mandatory-human-rights-due-diligence>