

OH BEAUTIFUL FOR PATRIOT'S DREAM

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It is a pleasure to be with you today to present the work of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee. I am the UUSC Pacific North West Regional Coordinator. My volunteer job is to support our local representatives, represent the UU Service Committee and liaise with churches in the region.

I would like to thank the Rev. Cecelia Kingman Miller for inviting me here today, and a big thank you to Pam Iverson, your UUSC Local Representative. Pam's work over the years in this church is deeply appreciated by UUSC.

I would also like to thank this congregation for your generous contributions to our disaster relief fund for New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. You can be proud that UUs came through to stand beside the marginalized of this great American city. (At coffee hour, please pick up a copy of my notes on a visit to our New Orleans partners.)

UUSC puts our UU Values into action for Human Rights on a national and international level. With offices in Cambridge, Ma., as an entity independent of the UUA, we are able to advocate and act for Human Rights in powerful ways.

We have a public policy manager in Washington, D.C. We are funded by UUs, members, the Guest at Your Table Campaign, congregational donors, and friends. Our mission statement reads: "UUSC advances human rights and social justice around the world, partnering with those who confront unjust power structures and mobilizing to challenge oppressive policies."

Under the leadership of Dr. Charlie Clements, the work of UUSC is focused on four main program areas: Advancing Economic Justice, Defending Civil Liberties, Protecting Rights in Humanitarian Crises, and Environmental Justice. We do our work by empowering carefully chosen and effective grassroots organizations and their leaders. The funded partners are chosen through the lens of our UU values.

Our Economic Justice Program's major campaign is to raise the federal minimum wage in the U.S., and we have a project supporting the organizing of women workers in Guatemala and informal workers in Kenya and the United States, the UUSC Coffee Project, and a partnership with an African-American women-led Pecan Cooperative in southwest Georgia.

Our Environmental Justice Program focuses on the Human Right to Water in the U.S., South America, South Africa, and South Asia – and corporate accountability, with shareholder advocacy that pressed PepsiCo to adopt a human-right-to-water policy for all of its worldwide operations.

Our Disaster Relief Program has focused on helping to rebuild communities after Hurricane Katrina on the Gulf Coast, the Tsunami, Myanmar's Cyclone Nargis, the war in Gaza, and the post-election violence in Kenya. It also has long-term projects in Uganda and Darfur.

Our Outreach and Mobilization Program reaches out to congregations to assist them in realizing our human rights goals through advocacy and other means. We also offer JustJourneys to learn more about our projects and JustWorks Camps so UUs can do hands-on work alongside our partners to further human rights. We have special UU JustWorks Camps for youth. (Be sure to take a brochure at the coffee hour.)

Today I want to focus on our work in the United States as we work to fulfill the patriot's dream. It has not been easy to feel good about the U.S. these last few years. It has been hard to feel any pride or hope. Yet I found when I thought about the outstanding work of our human rights programs and our partners and programs, it helps me hold my head up as an American. It gives me hope to know that UUSC is realizing the best of our ideals and patriot's dreams. It is always a spiritual experience for me to sing "America the Beautiful." I tear up thinking of how beautiful we could be and I hope we can make those words true.

Our Civil Liberties Program has focused on challenge the negative policies adopted as part of the War on Terror. Program Manager Wayne Smith views the Iraq War, the loss of Civil Liberties, and U.S.-Torture as results of the War on Terror.

Since the Sept. 11 attacks, new laws such as FISA, the USA Patriot Act, and the Military Commissions Act have compromised our freedoms under the pretext of advancing national security.

Our partners in Civil Liberties are: Torture Abolition Survivors Coalition, and we are founding members of NRCAT, the National Religious Campaign Against Torture, Afghan Center, Barakat, Humanitarian Assistance for Women and Children of Afghanistan, Hands Across the Middle East, Muslim Advocates, Appeal for Redress, Military Families Speak Out, Veterans for Peace, Iraq Veterans Against the War, Soldiers of Conscience, and the Win Without War Coalition.

In 2007 and 2008, UUSC and the UUA called for a responsible end to the Iraq War. In 2008 UUSC mounted a major campaign to bring an end to the Iraq War. This was the "Iraq War: Who Pays the Price" campaign, and it was the theme for GA 2008 and Justice Sunday 2008.

At GA we held workshops to train UUs in working against the war. Camilo Mejía, president of Iraq Veterans Against the War, a UUSC partner, spoke about his experience in the army and his work. UUs were mobilized to act. At GA there was a youth pizza party and workshop with Mejía for UU youth.

UUSC did outreach to congregations with information and tools, sample sermons and covenant group guides available on our web site. These tools gave information on the high monetary and moral price that Americans were paying. "The Cost of War" article in our Spring 2008 copy of *Rights Now*, UUSC's triannual newsletter, called on UUs to spread the word to all about the

financial and moral costs and the loss of our civil liberties in the War on Terror. Our goal was to help congregations convince every American that the cost was too great.

UUSC Civil Liberties Program Manager Wayne Smith traveled around the U.S. helping UUs mobilize to act and talking about how to frame the issue. Mejia spoke with many congregations, too.

The UUSC website allows viewers to watch videotaped discussions with Mejia and Tom Andrews, of Win Without War, on the Iraq War. I urge you to go to the UUSC website, w-w-w-dot-u-u-s-c-dot-o-r-g, and view these conversations.

We can be proud that UUSC helped fund the making of the film *Soldiers of Conscience*, which was shown many times on PBS. The DVD is available for purchase on our website at a nominal cost. We created a discussion guide for group reflection on the film, and I have copy of the DVD here for you today.

In 2009 our Civil Liberties Program turned to issues of torture, illegal detention and the erosion of civil liberties of Arab and Muslim Americans after 9/11. Fatema Haji-Taki joined UUSC in spring 2008 to work on these issues.

Through its Building Bridges for Civil Liberties project, UUSC urges UUs to reach out to Muslims and Arabs in their communities. We are hoping for something deeper than a visit to a mosque or a Middle Eastern dinner, but we hope for a deeper understanding between UUs and Arab and Muslim Americans – and a friendly hand extended in solidarity to them to defend civil liberties for *all* Americans. Helping with this work is UUSC partner Muslim Advocates, which works with Arab- and Muslim-American communities to confront racial profiling.

On April 2009 the UUA and UUSC sent a letter to President Obama calling for an independent investigation into U.S. torture policies and truth, full disclosure and full accountability to restore our international reputation.

UUSC calls for an end to hostilities in Afghanistan and urges the Obama Administration to use diplomacy and aid to influence outcomes in Afghanistan. Our partners there work to raise awareness among women of human rights and to bring women into civil society.

Also, tangentially linked to the Civil Liberties Program is Freedom Summer: A Civil Rights Journey. Held every summer, this interracial, interfaith journey retraces the steps of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement. We can be proud that we realized many of our dreams there. UUs on the journey can meet and speak directly with people who were directly involved in the struggle. As many know, UUs walked their talk and some were martyred along the way. Reliving those days is a powerful experience. I urge you to consider going on Freedom Summer.

This is a summary of the work of our Civil Liberties Program. I am hoping that you will visit our website and delve into more detail about projects and actions. Our website has many free materials that can be ordered. We have slide shows, low cost DVDs and educational materials that you can use and order for free as tools to further your human rights and social justice work.

We can be proud that UUSC's Rights in Humanitarian Crises Program, together with the UUA, spent \$3.4 million to help local communities rebuild the Gulf Coast after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. The UUA and UUSC sent over 2,000 UU volunteers to the New Orleans and Biloxi area. They worked by day and, at night they participated in antiracism training. We helped rebuild and supported grassroots organizations there, and we lobbied congress to pass the Gulf Coast Recovery Act, a project yet to be realized. Soon we will complete a DVD that shows the work of the UUA and UUSC, called *Rebuilding the Gulf Coast*. This should be available on our web site soon.

You can be proud that UUSC has sent UUs to Indian Reservations in the U.S. to help repair schools, libraries and community centers. We also support a pecan growing cooperative in Georgia that was started by African American women. You can see a video of this cooperative on our web site. UUSC is also active in supporting many organizations working to raise the federal minimum wage.

You can be proud that we are representing UU values standing beside many marginalized peoples in the U.S. and striving to realize our UU American Patriot's Dreams.

I urge you to join our organization and become a member.

You can be sure that your membership and contributions are used with UU values in mind. I urge you to invite a UUSC speaker, for the price of airfare, to come and speak in your community to your church and the general public.

I invite you to visit uusc.org and find out more about our JustJourneys to see our human rights work for yourself and our JustWorks Camps, where you can do hands on work and get to know our partners.

With the new Obama Administration, UUSC has an opportunity to reach many of its human rights goals. Before we were on the outside looking in. Now we are invited to the table. Even before that new administration took office, UUSC was asked for input. Shelly Moskowitz, our public policy manager, who is based in Washington, D.C., got to brief members of the State Department on our ideas and goals.

I have prepared a display of UUSC's U.S. and international human rights work. I invite you to browse the displays together at coffee hour. Be thinking of how your congregation or social justice group could work together to further the ideals that we care about so much.

Before closing, I like to remember that in the middle of the flood of information about UUSC work is the reason we do it – because we are all dreaming and creating that glorious golden city of our ideals. This is a sacred charge.

Let us remember that we do this work because we are lovers of life and the American ideals that unite us. Let us work together to uphold and strengthen and make real the best of our American

Patriot's Dreams, and let's polish those alabaster cities until they gleam again. I ask the blessing of the source of all on us and our work today. Amen.