

Opposing state-sponsored torture

The Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq and the Bagram Theater Internment Facility in Afghanistan were sites of some of the most egregious examples of civil-liberties violations seen in years – acts of torture, as depicted in photographs and drawings by U.S. military personnel who staffed the facilities. These horrifying images announced to the world that, despite being a signatory to the Torture Convention and despite its long-standing disavowal of the practice, the United States was torturing people.

It is the firm position of UUSC that government-sponsored acts of torture, under any circumstances, are profoundly immoral, unjustified, and illegal.

UUSC partners with groups that not only oppose the use of torture as a form of intelligence gathering and a tool of

war, but that also work with survivors to help them recover from long-term physical and emotional damage. UUSC supports the Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition, whose members speak out against torture by providing public education and testimony to the U.S. Congress, United Nations committees, and other national and international bodies.

UUSC also supports the Sudan Organisation Against Torture (SOAT) in their ongoing work to rehabilitate Sudanese survivors of torture – including Darfurians, who have been targeted by government-sponsored acts of violence and genocide. SOAT provides assistance and information to survivors and educates them on their human rights.



What you can do

- ▶ Visit UUSC's website for up-to-date action alerts regarding civil liberties.
- ▶ Join the Human Rights Defenders activist e-mail list.
- ▶ Join UUSC for Freedom Summer: A Civil Rights Journey.
- ▶ Use UUSC's Covenant Group Gathering module "Living on Democracy's Edge" to explore democratic participation in your congregation.
- ▶ Become a member of UUSC or renew your membership.

Visit our website, www.uusc.org/civil-liberties, for more information.

UUSC calls for justice against U.S. government officials who authorized the use of torture.



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Defending CIVIL LIBERTIES



At the Civil Rights Memorial in Montgomery, Ala., participants on a UUSC Civil Rights Journey reflect on the achievements and memory of those who lost their lives in the struggle.

How often do you make a phone call without thinking about your right to privacy? Or write a heated e-mail or blog without thinking about your right to freedom of speech? It is easy to take civil liberties for granted, even though people around the world have fought and died to secure these rights.

Civil liberties are essential to realizing the bright promises of our nation's founders: "Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Enshrined in international legal instruments, like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, civil liberties protect all persons against abusive exercises of government power. On a national level, they are guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution, or, more specifically, the Bill of Rights.

Since the September 11 attacks, new laws such as the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA), the USA Patriot Act, and the Military Commissions Act have compromised our freedoms under the pretext of advancing national security. In places like the Guantanamo Bay prison system, due process and prohibition of torture, cornerstones of democracy and international law, have been suspended, redrawing the legal and moral landscape of our country and the world community. Every day, more and more evidence surfaces showing that civil liberties have been a casualty of the Bush administration's policies and the so-called Global War on Terror.

In order to defend civil liberties, we must know what our rights are, keep constant pressure on elected officials to respect them, and support organizations working to protect civil rights and democratic processes. With everyone's active participation, we can guarantee our rights and those of people around the world.

Know your civil liberties:

- ▶ Freedom of speech
- ▶ Freedom of assembly
- ▶ The right to due process of law
- ▶ The right to privacy
- ▶ The right to be free from torture and cruel and inhuman punishment
- ▶ The right to vote
- ▶ Freedom of religious worship
- ▶ Freedom of the press
- ▶ Right to petition the government

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere”

UUSC defends and upholds the principle that all people are entitled to basic human rights and civil liberties, acknowledging that without robust democratic institutions to protect these rights, people are at risk of government abuse.

UUSC’s Civil Liberties Program analyzes how the dimensions of class, ethnicity, gender, immigration status, national origin, race, and religion affect people’s ability to exercise their rights. We work to empower

those who are being denied their legal rights, recalling the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., who taught us, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

In order to achieve our goals, UUSC provides strategic thinking, technical support, and seed grants to organizations doing important work on issues such as freedom of speech, due process of law, and opposing torture. These grassroots organizations and civil-society groups are made up of everyday heroes who are committed to the cause of protecting individual freedoms.

Peacemaking and the Iraq War

UUSC is proud to be part of the growing peace movement to end the Iraq war and the abuses it has engendered. By calling for peace, democracy, and the rule of law, we seek to rectify the grave harm done in the name of the so-called Global War on Terror, of which the Iraq war is a leading example.

Active-duty military personnel, veterans, and their families in the United States have articulated some of the most powerful reasons why the war in Iraq is unjust and why the fight to maintain our civil liberties is so crucial. As part of our opposition to the war, we lift up their basic human right to speak out, petition Congress, and express dissent against the war. Yet, some of these brave individuals, the very people who have put their lives on the line in service of our country, have had their rights limited by government officials.

To guarantee their right to freedom of speech and freedom of assembly, UUSC advocates for and supports two national organizations, Appeal for Redress and Veterans for Peace. In 2007, Appeal for Redress presented a petition to members of Congress, signed by more than 2,000 active-duty soldiers, sailors, marines, and air force personnel, including over 300 officers, appealing for the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq.

Wayne Smith, manager of UUSC’s Civil Liberties Program, decries “The Human Price of the War in Iraq,” at the UU Congregation at Shelter Rock, Manhasset, N.Y.

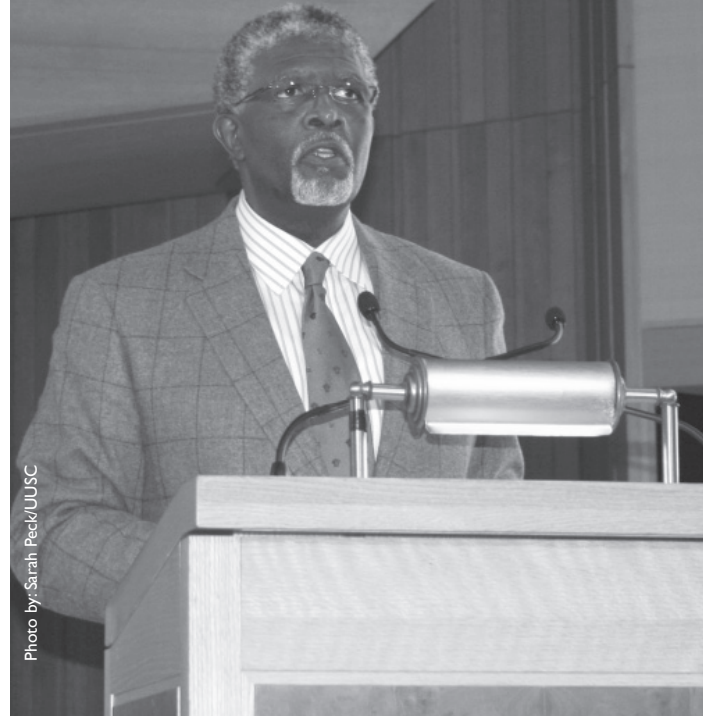


Photo by: Sarah Peck/UUSC

A Civil Rights Journey

UUSC’s annual Civil Rights Journey is a powerful interracial and intergenerational experience for all involved. Led by experienced staff, it helps participants link the work of the past civil-rights movement to the current struggle for justice and equality. Like us, civil-rights advocates of the 1960s confronted unjust policies that funneled money away from strengthening our democracy towards paying for an immoral war.

Today, in the era of national security measures that infringe upon our liberties, the Civil Rights Journey remains a critical experience. Visiting historic sites across the south and meeting witnesses to the movement, participants are imbued with the spirit of civil-rights advocates, like Martin Luther King, Jr. Inspired by their deeds, participants are mobilized to take action back home, keeping alive vital lessons for present and future generations.

Building bridges between Muslims and non-Muslims



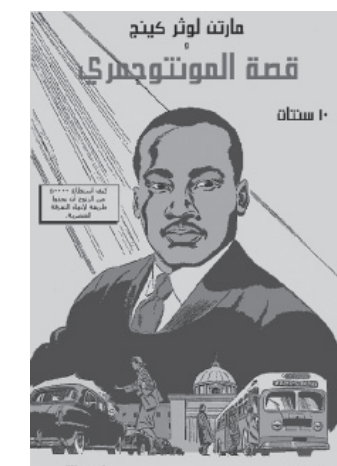
Photo by: Eric Grignoll/UUSC

UUSC program partner HAMSA visits UUSC. From left: Charlie Clements, Mohammed Zine abadine, Nasser Weddady (HAMSA), Atema Eclai, Zehra Hirji (HAMSA), and Wayne Smith.

In the United States, UUSC has developed partnerships with Muslim-American organizations working with non-Muslim communities. Muslim-Americans have been unfairly targeted by many post-9/11 policies, suffering racial profiling, illegal surveillance, and restrictions on their due process rights. We have engaged Unitarian Universalist congregations and other progressive faith groups, inviting them to build cooperative relationships with Muslim communities.

UUSC partners with Hands Across the Mideast Support Alliance (HAMSA), a U.S.-based nonprofit organization, which uses nonviolent activist techniques to support local reformers, protect individual rights, and build grassroots support for positive change. With our support, HAMSA works with Muslim and non-Muslim youth to teach nonviolent techniques used by Martin Luther King, Jr. and others in the U.S.

civil rights movement. In a creative, cross-cultural turn, HAMSA translated a 50-year-old comic book about the Montgomery Bus Boycott into Arabic and Farsi to be used as a tool to teach young people in Middle Eastern countries about the power of nonviolent protest.



UUSC’s Civil Liberties Program has also reached out to Muslims in

Afghanistan, Iraq (Kurdistan), and Sudan (Darfur) to help them defend their civil liberties and human rights and strengthen their democratic institutions. UUSC partners with the Afghan Center and their Women of the World project to provide rights-awareness training for women and girls in three areas: civil law, current interpretations of sharia (Islamic) law, and cultural freedom.

Freedom of Speech in the Middle East

Kareem Amer, a young Egyptian writer, was arrested by Egyptian police and sentenced to four years in jail for “defaming” Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak on his online blog. Egyptian authorities violated Amer’s right to freedom of speech, his right to a fair and public trial, and his right to criticize and confront an unjust power structure – as routinely happens in Egypt, where human-rights abuses are rife.

When news of his arrest and incarceration broke out, a network of activists, led by HAMSA, mobilized to rally on Amer’s behalf to make his story a leading international human-rights case. History has shown that the brave work of people like Amer is critical for all people to live free of the fear of oppression.