

Guest at Your Table

2009-2010

STORIES of HOPE

*Celebrate UU
faith in action*



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Introduction

This book is full of inspiring stories about real people who work with UUSC around the world to improve people's lives.

These friends of UUSC come from different countries, speak different languages, and work to protect different rights, such as the right to water and the right to education.

We know that you will learn a lot by welcoming them into your home as guests at your table. They will inspire you to join their struggle – because it's not just their struggle, but everyone's struggle!

When you share your blessings with UUSC through Guest at Your Table, you become a partner with UUSC and our friends in the global movement for justice, equity, and compassion. Together, with your generous support, we are changing the world.

Visit www.uusc.org/myguests to learn more about the new guests at your table.



Women in Myanmar are running their own start-up businesses, after Cyclone Nargis – raising pigs and chickens, fishing, and opening food shops.

Story 1: Daw San

Daw San is a widow who lives in a tiny village in the country of Myanmar. Tonight, like most nights, she is building a fire and singing to her two pigs, which live in the sty behind her home.

Before they go to sleep, she tells them the story of how she survived a terrible storm that blew in from the sea, washing away her home and most of her tiny village. The storm was called Cyclone Nargis. It was the worst storm that anyone in Myanmar could ever remember.

“The rains poured down,” said Daw San, “and the winds blew without stop, bending the palm trees and blowing the rooftops off of our homes.”

As the water rose, Daw San climbed up into a big tree, where she stayed for two whole days, as she waited for the terrible storm to end. When it was finally safe again, she climbed down and looked around her, but she hardly recognized anything. Nothing looked the same. Trees were uprooted, Daw San's house had washed away, and the roads were thick with mud.

She was alone and scared, but soon she found a few other people. "What shall we do?" they wondered.

Someone found some coconuts, and they took turns drinking the healthy milk inside. But there was very little to eat. They decided to go to a bigger town, where they could find more food and fresh water. They climbed inside a tiny boat, one of the few boats that had not sunk, and they paddled with all their strength to a new town.

Three long months went by as Daw San and her friends lived in a big camp. But she missed her house, her village, and her friends. Soon, she knew, it was time to go home, even though she had very little left after the storm.

When she got back to her village, she met people who wanted to help her. They were part of a group called MBEAN (*em-been*). MBEAN is a UUSC partner that

supports people like Daw San to rebuild their homes, start new businesses, and rebuild their lives.

“Now, you can see,” said Daw San, “things are much better for me. I have a house again – and you two little pigs to raise.”

Down the road is Moe Moe, a mother of two. She now runs a food stand, where she sells delicious bowls of mohinga, a breakfast food made with toasted rice, onions, ginger, and catfish.

Life may not be exactly the way it was before the storm, but Daw San and Moe Moe are working hard every day to make a better life for themselves, their families, and their community.

After a big disaster like Cyclone Nargis, people can lose everything, and for those who did not have much to begin with, the road to recovery can be long and difficult. But with generous contributions from people like you, UUSC can support Daw San, Moe Moe, and hundreds of other women to rebuild their lives. Can you help UUSC reach more people today?

Visit www.uusc.org/humanitariancrises to learn more about UUSC's Rights in Humanitarian Crises Program.



Guadalupe Nuñez, right, is one of the many voices of Tonyville, calling for the right to clean, affordable water for everyone in California.

Story 2: Guadalupe

In California, food is big business. Farms in the Golden State grow over half of all the fruits and vegetables we eat in this country, from lettuce to green grapes to bright red strawberries. They also make most of our milk and cheese.

Anyone who knows how plants and animals grow knows that it takes a lot of water to make that much food. It takes millions of gallons of fresh, clean water.

But what about the people who live in California, near these big farms? Is their water clean enough to drink? Or to cook with or take a bath?

Let's use our water detective skills to find out. Let's begin by asking a resident of California, Guadalupe Nuñez, about her water.

Guadalupe lives in the small town of Tonyville. Most people in Tonyville work as farmers, and many speak Spanish.

A few years ago, Guadalupe and her neighbors noticed that there was something wrong with their tap water during some months of the year.

What was wrong with it? “When we drank it, the water had the same metal taste as when you have a coin in your mouth,” said Guadalupe. “It also smelled horrible.”

Unable to drink the water in their homes, Guadalupe and her neighbors decided to investigate where their water comes from and why it sometimes tasted so bad.

When they brought a water sample to a laboratory to be tested, they learned that it had dangerous levels of a chemical called nitrate in it. Nitrate is used in fertilizers to make plants grow fast, and it is also found in livestock and animal wastes.

Did Guadalupe and her neighbors stop their investigation there? No, they didn't. They decided to find out why the water company was not making their water clean and safe enough for families to

drink year-round. They also wanted to know how the law could help them.

With support from the Community Water Center, a UUSC partner based in California, Guadalupe and her neighbors created a special water group called La Voz de Tonyville. That is Spanish for “The Voice of Tonyville.”

Together, they convinced the state of California to issue an order requiring their water company to produce clean, safe drinking water all 12 months of the year. Now Guadalupe and her neighbors can drink the water that is piped into their homes.

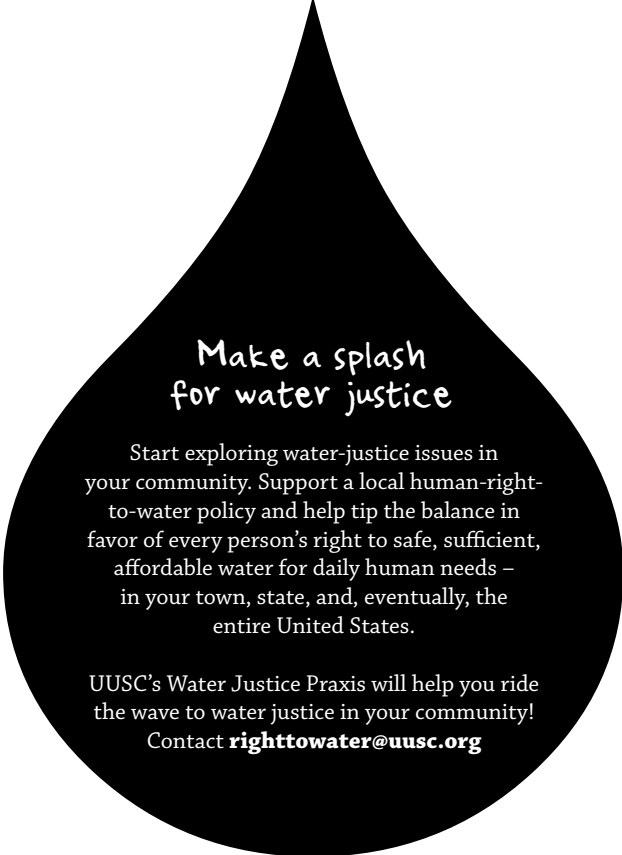
Across California, more and more people like Guadalupe are learning about their water and how to protect it. UUSC is joining them. This year, the Community Water Center, UUSC, and hundreds of their friends headed to Sacramento, the California state capital, to help pass a new law called The Human Right to Water Act of 2009.

If this act were made into law, it would guarantee that all people have the right to clean water, for themselves and their families.

It would mean that people in California would be safer and healthier – kids too! And it would be an important step toward some day guaranteeing that everyone in the United States and around the world has the right to clean, safe, and affordable water.

Do you know where your water comes from? Does everyone in your town have enough clean water to drink and take a bath? These are all questions for an experienced water detective, like you! Find out the answers to these questions using UUSC's online Water Justice Praxis. To help make sure everyone in California, and eventually everyone in the United States, has enough clean water to be safe and healthy, please share your blessings today with UUSC.

To learn more about UUSC's Environmental Justice Program, visit **www.uusc.org/righttowater**.



Make a splash for water justice

Start exploring water-justice issues in your community. Support a local human-right-to-water policy and help tip the balance in favor of every person's right to safe, sufficient, affordable water for daily human needs – in your town, state, and, eventually, the entire United States.

UUSC's Water Justice Praxis will help you ride the wave to water justice in your community!

Contact **righttowater@uusc.org**



Schoolteachers are bringing lessons in human rights back to their classrooms, for the next generation of Afghans.

Story 3: Abdul Khan¹

In Faryab Province, in northern Afghanistan, a special workshop is in session. Men and women are sitting together in a classroom to learn more about their rights as Afghans and as human beings.

This is a special group, made up entirely of schoolteachers. Although men sit on one side of the room and women on the other, they take turns standing and speaking before the class. They see each other as colleagues and allies in the work of transforming young lives.

Written in Dari on the blackboard at the front of the room are the words *human rights* and *women's rights*. For some, these are new concepts, but for all, the promise of equality, freedom, and dignity is inspiring, especially for the women in the group. They know that many of

¹For security purposes, Abdul Khan's real name has been changed in this story.

the girls in their classrooms will struggle to uphold these rights, in particular the right to an education and the right to choose when and whom they marry.

Helping to organize this class of 27 schoolteachers is Abdul Khan, a courageous, young Afghan man who works with one of UUSC's partner organizations in Afghanistan called Barakat. In a country where advocates for women's rights are rare – and increasingly threatened – it is all the more remarkable that Khan has dedicated his life to this work. “Women are the most vulnerable people in Afghanistan,” he says, “but we can change this fact.”

Abdul Khan, 26, is determined to support Afghan women and girls as they work to advance their rights and empower themselves, particularly through education and literacy programs.

“The only way we can make Afghanistan a freer nation is to destroy illiteracy and uproot it forever,” he says. This is a challenging goal in a country where just one in ten Afghan women can read and where girls in some areas are forbidden by local Taliban to attend school. Nevertheless, class by class and student by student, Khan and the schoolteachers are making progress.

One teacher in the classroom, Kareema, is encouraged to learn that human rights are not new to Afghanistan.

They already form a part of the national laws, as part of the constitution. They also form part of her religion, Islam. “As a Muslim, I knew about many of the rights and laws in the Qur’an. And now I am learning about other human rights too. This changes and adds to my ideas, and my life.”

As the six-day human-rights workshop draws to a close and the teachers collect their graduation certificates, their real work begins.

With support from Khan and his coworkers, the teachers will write new lesson plans for their classrooms based on human rights. Where appropriate, the teachers will introduce discussions about the rights of children and women. Khan explains, “Our teachers are like messengers. They will bring these messages to their students and families, who really need to know their rights.”

Sharing one’s knowledge with the world is a blessing. Like Abdul Khan and the Afghan schoolteachers, you can play a role in raising awareness about human rights and social justice in your community. Support the sharing of knowledge in places where human rights are most at risk, like Afghanistan, by giving to UUSC today.

Visit www.uusc.org/civilliberties to learn more about UUSC’s Civil Liberties Program.



As a woman leader, Jacinta helps other informal vendors organize for their rights – rallying under the slogan, “Let the people trade!”

Story 4: Jacinta

Jacinta is a tailor in the town of Machakos, Kenya. With the help of her young apprentice, she makes a living by weaving and selling school uniforms in her one-room market stall. “On busy days, we set up the loom on the sidewalk to attract more business,” she says.

Vendors here in this bustling marketplace sell almost everything. Men usually handle durable goods, such as shoes and electronics. Women typically deal in less expensive perishables items, such as fruits and vegetables. Today, the streets are lined with neat piles of fresh produce: cabbages, potatoes, bananas, and leafy greens.

As customers come and go, money changes hands all day. Although it is informal, this kind of work represents a large and critical segment of the economy, employing over 60 percent of Kenyans. Yet most people work without adequate legal or social

protections, making the day-to-day operation of their small businesses all the more challenging.

This is why Jacinta and many of the traders here belong to the Kenya Alliance of Street Vendors and Informal Traders (KENASVIT), a UUSC partner and a collective voice for the rights of informal workers. As one of KENASVIT's many women leaders, Jacinta is also chairperson of the Machakos Group for the Disabled.

In 2008, when post-election violence rippled across Kenya, KENASVIT, with UUSC's support, had an important role to play in helping vendors rebuild their lives – and help each other in the process.

After Jacinta lost all of her wares in riots, she wasn't sure if she would be able to start again. "Without collateral or experience with credit, I didn't have any chance of getting a loan from a bank," she explained, "even a small one, like I needed." As a single mother, she worried about how she would provide for herself and her four children.

Then she found out about the recovery program and revolving-loan fund designed by KENASVIT and UUSC to help vendors get back on their feet.

With a small business loan of \$70 at the fund's reasonable five-percent (5%) interest rate, Jacinta

was able to restart her tailoring business. She purchased new supplies and repaired her loom. Now her repayments are helping other vendors to take out loans: “I repaid my loan as fast as I could, so others can benefit.” Some of the loan’s interest is even supporting grassroots groups like the Machakos Group for the Disabled.

Because the revolving-loan fund is democratically administered by members themselves, it is strengthening members’ business skills and their sense of solidarity. That is what is so special about KENASVIT and the way it organizes. “It was my fellow vendors who gave me this loan,” shared Jacinta. “And we are determined as a group to support each other in every way that we can.”

For Jacinta and her fellow traders, lending a hand meant working together to reach a common goal. Hand in hand, they are organizing and rebuilding their lives after the 2008 political crisis, including with help from UUs like you. There is still so much to be done. With the revolving-loan fund, your gift goes a long way toward making a difference in the lives of informal workers and street vendors like Jacinta. Can you lend a hand today by supporting UUSC?

Visit www.uusc.org/economicjustice to learn more about UUSC’s Economic Justice Program.

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**For more information about UUSC, visit
www.uusc.org.**



Remember: Before you bring your Guest at Your Table box back to church, be sure to complete the form so that UUSC can thank you for your generosity!



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