



# Stories of Hope

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## Guest at Your Table

2006-2007

Celebrate UU  
faith in action

### Securing rights in humanitarian crises

Ah Maung, a dedicated teacher in her native Burma, served a lengthy prison sentence for teacher union activities. During the years she was in jail, her two children died. So when she was freed five years ago, Ah Maung fled to safety in southern Thailand, where she settled along with 51,000 other undocumented Burmese refugees.

But “safety” is a misnomer. The Burmese refugees in Thailand are often exploited, harassed, and threatened with deportation by Thai forces. And conditions got worse when the Indian Ocean tsunami hit in 2004. Burmese refugees were expelled from relief shelters and taken off relief lists. Many were forced to return to Burma.

UUSC program partner Grassroots Human Rights Education (GHRE) is righting that wrong. It has established relief centers for Burmese refugees. With support from UUSC, GHRE also helps refugees obtain documentation to work legally in Thailand. Recently, GHRE staff members were detained by Thai border police. If they had not had these permits, they would have been jailed and eventually deported.

Every day, Ah Maung travels to teach refugee children in one of GHRE’s education centers, even though she faces arrest because of her undocumented status. But her center director offers hope. With GHRE’s help, he says, she will soon get papers to work legally. When she hears these words, Ah Maung’s face lights up: “That will be so wonderful,” she says.

### Protecting the right to water

Fifteen-year-old Amina lives in Tabata, a neighborhood of 28,000 people in the drought-stricken Tanzanian capital of Dar es Salaam.

When Tabata did not receive aid from international institutions such as the World Bank, they worked with UUSC program partner the Tanzania Gender Networking Program to campaign for international funds. The campaign paid off — in water and much more. Enough aid poured in to dig a borehole well and buy a pump. Residents laid pipes throughout the neighborhood and established the Tabata Residents Water Committee (TRWC).

Today, the TRWC administers the system (now grown to three wells), and establishes rates based on ability to pay. The community built a school, which gets its water free, and also launched a revolving loan fund to promote small businesses run by women.

Amina graduated from the school’s vocational training program with a seventh grade education and now works for the TRWC as a water seller, collecting fees. She is able to support herself while making a positive contribution to her community. And the Tanzania Gender Networking Program continues to campaign for the right to water — safe, affordable, accessible, and sufficient water for each person’s needs.



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### Strengthening workers' rights

Realea and Marcelino both work in a poultry processing plant in Mississippi. Realea is a single African-American mother in her 30s from Carthage, Miss. Marcelino is 22 and Mayan Mam. He was forced to leave Guatemala after trade policies opened the market to imports of cheap, subsidized U.S. grain, making it impossible for him to earn a living on his family's land.

Realea separates livers from gizzards in the largest poultry processing plant in the United States. She tries to ignore the stabbing pain in her forearms that gets worse by the day, a result of repetitive motion and the unwillingness of supervisors to implement rotation on the line.

Up the line, Marcelino spends his days hanging live chickens by their feet — a staggering 50 birds per minute. He favors his right arm, since he sustained a severe injury to his left arm when his smock sleeve was pulled into the blades of the slaughter room's unprotected fan.

Working with UUSC program partner the Mississippi Poultry Worker Center, marginalized workers like Realea and Marcelino are coming together to strengthen workers' rights to safe working conditions and building bridges among workers of diverse backgrounds. Realea is taking Spanish classes and using her new skills to help injured Latino coworkers find doctors and healthcare. Marcelino has been able to obtain legal advice following his injury. UUSC supports this workers' rights project in Mississippi, and we're working to expand it to other regions and industries.

### Defending civil liberties

Juan and his wife, María, work tirelessly and courageously for civil liberties in their native Guatemala. Both Mayans, they have defended and promoted human rights for other indigenous Guatemalans who have been subjected to discrimination, exploitation, and intolerance at the hands of their own government.

When she was seven years old, María survived a massacre in the village of Río Negro. In the 1982 massacre, 107 children and 70 women died at the hands of the Guatemalan army and civil patrollers. The community was one of several destroyed to make way for the Chixoy Hydroelectric Dam.

Today, Juan and María are working for the rights of the Mayan people, for the people of Guatemala, and for people everywhere who are concerned about universal human rights. Juan is the director general of UUSC program partner the Maya Achi Association for the Integral Development of Victims of Violence (ADIVIMA), which seeks to bring those responsible for the Rio Negro massacre to justice. María works with other massacre survivors, providing counseling and helping them organize politically.

ADIVIMA works to protect civil liberties and the rights of Mayan people to become part of the democratic process. A major focus of their work is unearthing mass graves to gather evidence. However, they continue to struggle against government-led persecution and a recent peaceful rally resulted in criminal charges being brought against Juan and six other organizers. UUSC supports the work of ADIVIMA in seeking justice for the victims and survivors of the massacres.