

# Stories of Hope

— 2011–2012 —



*Celebrating human-rights partnerships*



# — Contents —

Introduction

Story 1: Dalia Ziada ..... 1

Story 2: Patrick Lafontant ..... 5

Story 3: Chrisantus Mwandihhi ..... 9

Story 4: Maria Aguilera ..... 13

## **Introduction**

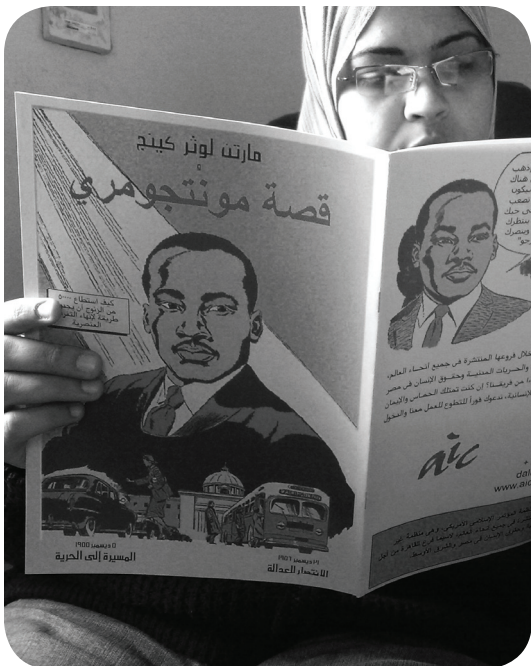
*This book is full of inspiring stories about real people who work with UUSC around the world to improve people's lives.*

*These human-rights partners of UUSC come from different countries, speak different languages, and work to protect different rights. However, they all share goals with us.*

*They will inspire you to join their struggle — because it's not just their struggle, but everyone's struggle!*

*We hope you, too, will 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 [uusc.org](https://www.uusc.org) to learn more.**



**Dalia is a youth leader and human-rights activist in Egypt.** She is shattering barriers to empower a generation of Egyptians who are experiencing democracy for the first time.

---

## Story 1:

# Dalia Ziada

---

**D**alia Ziada is a dynamic human-rights activist, shattering barriers to empower a generation of Egyptians who are experiencing democracy for the first time.

Dalia started as a youth organizer who wrote a powerful essay about her experience as a young Muslim woman in Egypt. Submitted in 2006 to the annual Dream Deferred essay contest sponsored by UUSC partner the Hands Across the Mideast Support Alliance (HAMSA), the essay caught the attention of the American Islamic Congress (AIC), HAMSA's parent organization.

In 2007, at age 25, Dalia opened and became director of AIC's North Africa office in Cairo, Egypt. A civil-rights organization formed after the September 11 attacks, AIC promotes tolerance and the exchange of ideas among Muslims and between other peoples. Based in the heart of the Middle East, the Cairo office works to protect free expression, promote nonviolence, and advance women's rights.

Becoming director of AIC-Egypt was not easy. Security services could arrest Dalia, and religious extremists could denounce her — and many did. But this did not stop her.

Inspired by Martin Luther King Jr., Dalia spread the word about nonviolent action by working with UUSC to translate a comic book about the Montgomery bus boycott into Arabic. She handed out the comic and also trained youth activists from across the Middle East in Morocco in 2009. When security forces tried to keep her from publishing the books, Dalia met with an officer, and they read through the comic book together over coffee. At the end of their meeting, he granted permission to print — and then asked, “Could I have a few extra copies for my kids?”

When Dalia first began talking with people about nonviolent protest, there wasn't an Arabic word for “nonviolence.” She created a translation — “لا للعنف” — that is now commonly understood in Egypt. Her efforts were an important part of the movement that led to the 2011 nonviolent revolution. In Cairo's Tahrir Square, copies of the comic book were passed around as protesters stood strong against the opposition.

Now Dalia is working to educate voters throughout Egypt, many of whom have never voted in an election, and encourage them to take part in their budding democracy. To get ready for the fall 2011 elections, with seed grants and support from UUSC, Dalia created a program to reach out to young voters and other citizens, teach them about their rights, and explain how to learn about candidates. The campaign — Fahem Haqi (or “I

know my rights”) — trains 10 activists, who then in turn train 10 others, and so on. They will also organize and conduct poll monitoring.

Dalia is a young, daring, and creative woman deeply committed to taking action for positive change, despite the risks. In addition to her other work, she helped launch an annual film festival about human rights in Cairo, currently in its third year. She maintains a blog and helps other youth with online advocacy — not only in Egypt but around the world!

*Dalia believes that everyone should have a voice and a choice in democratic society. We hope you will join UUSC in sustaining her grassroots efforts to advance human rights and social justice. Continue to support Dalia and our shared values by becoming a member of UUSC today!*

**More ways you can take action:**

- Visit [uusc.org/civilliberties](https://uusc.org/civilliberties) to learn more about UUSC's Civil Liberties Program.
- Support due process and justice for Muslim Americans by working with UUSC partner Muslim Advocates.
- Facilitate understanding and cooperation between UUs and Muslim Americans through a Building Bridges workshop ([uusc.org/buildingbridges](https://uusc.org/buildingbridges)).
- Make a donation to UUSC today at [uusc.org/givetoguest](https://uusc.org/givetoguest). UUSC does not accept any government funds or denominational support — our members and supporters sustain this vital work!



**Patrick is a Haitian youth who survived** on his own growing up in a particularly disadvantaged neighborhood in Port-au-Prince. Fortunately, Patrick found hope through art — and a new purpose after the earthquake.



---

## Story 2:

---

# Patrick Lafontant

**A**t 23 years old, Patrick Lafontant could easily be on a different trajectory in his life. Growing up in the particularly disadvantaged neighborhood of Carrefour Feuilles in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, many youth his age turn to drugs and gangs to make friends and money. After his father died, he was rejected by his mother and turned out into the streets. Fortunately, Patrick found hope — and a new life — in 2008 through an art workshop created by the Association for the Promotion of Integral Family Healthcare (APROSIFA), a UUSC partner.

APROSIFA's mission is to promote family health and well-being, particularly for women and children living in Carrefour Feuilles. Formed in 1993, APROSIFA has focused its services on reproductive rights, infectious diseases, malnutrition, and, more recently, art therapy for at-risk youth. APROSIFA educates and empowers people to work together to improve the quality of life for their community and its members.

The youth art workshops grew out of an idea that APROSIFA Director Roseanne Auguste had. After talking with youth that survived gang violence, she realized that if she could provide young people with a safe space and engaging activity to occupy them after school and on weekends, she might just keep them from harm. In the workshop, Patrick's artistic talent blossomed,

and he took part in several exhibitions. With money from selling his paintings, he was able to return to school in September 2009 as he continued to paint. He even reconnected with his mother and reconciled with his family after inviting his mother and stepfather to one of his art exhibits. Perhaps most importantly, Patrick says, creating his art has allowed him to reclaim his dignity.

The devastating January 2010 earthquake threatened to change all of that. APROSIFA immediately got to work providing relief and rehabilitating 700 families in their region. UUSC partnered with APROSIFA so they could continue offering desperately needed health care, livelihood support, and community projects to protect children.

Since July 2010, Patrick has been teaching art workshops for 15 youth in his community as part of APROSIFA's broader program of art therapy for at-risk youth. UUSC funding has not only allowed Patrick to continue pursuing his dream of being an artist, it has also contributed to his development as a leader and made it possible for him to share his experience with other youth.

Today, there are nearly 70 kids who come for an average of two hours a day to work on art projects. With UUSC support, APROSIFA provides the supplies, the space, and the training. The students can sell what they make and keep the profits. And the process itself is healing. "Each of these pieces is about what has happened to

them,” Roseanne explains, pointing to a row of panel-sized paintings leaning against the wall. “Things that maybe they cannot yet speak about. But the art speaks for them.”

Especially in the wake of the earthquake, these art workshops provide an extremely valuable way for young people to deal with the trauma they’ve experienced, to open up new possibilities for making a living, and to cultivate hope.

*UUSC’s work in solidarity with APROSIFA strengthens the cultural wealth that already exists in Carrefour Feuilles and helps young people reclaim their dignity and rights in the midst of crisis. Make sure this work — and UUSC’s unique approach of serving people left out of traditional relief efforts — continues by becoming a UUSC member today.*

**More ways you can take action:**

- Visit [uusc.org/humanitariancrises](https://uusc.org/humanitariancrises) to learn more about UUSC’s Rights in Humanitarian Crises Program.
- Learn about other human-rights leaders partnering with UUSC by visiting [uusc.org/partners/rhc](https://uusc.org/partners/rhc).
- Take part in a service-learning trip to support UUSC partners and ensure a just recovery; check out upcoming trips at [uusc.org/learn\\_by\\_doing](https://uusc.org/learn_by_doing).
- Use UUSC’s online resources, available at [uusc.org/haitiresources](https://uusc.org/haitiresources), to keep your friends, family, and congregation informed and involved in UUSC’s work in Haiti.
- Make a donation to UUSC today at [uusc.org/givetoguest](https://uusc.org/givetoguest). UUSC does not accept any government funds or denominational support — our members and supporters sustain this vital work!



***Chrisantus is helping lead communities in protecting the rain forest and water sources. As director of the SoilFarm Multi-Culture Group in Kenya, he started a program to work with youth, shown above standing with him and proudly displaying their seedlings.***

---

## Story 3:

---

# Chrisantus Mwandishi

**T**his is a story about how a village in Africa is working to save a rain forest, water sources, and ultimately the climate. Chrisantus Mwandishi, a veteran human-rights defender and protector of the Kakamega Rain Forest, is leading the charge.

Chrisantus is the director of the SoilFarm Multi-Culture Group (SFMG), a UUSC partner in Kenya. SFMG is working to protect the Kakamega Rain Forest — Kenya’s last remaining rain forest — located within a region that also is home to two main rivers that feed Lake Victoria, the source of the Nile River. As Kenya adopts the human right to water, passed in the 2010 constitution, SFMG is raising awareness of the need to protect this critical habitat — and taking action to do so.

“The right to water has been signed into the constitution, but current efforts are in big towns and very little is being done by the government on access to safe drinking water in rural areas,” Chrisantus explains. “We have these streams, but they are no longer safe. The water is contaminated because the fertilizer used in the farms finds its way into the streams as water flows downstream.”

Chrisantus faced a huge challenge — stop the cutting of trees and the poisoning of water sources while still making sure that people had ways to make a living. SFMG met that challenge with a groundbreaking education and training program. Together with UUSC, SFMG created the Hope in Crops project, a school program focusing on youth action that teaches children in 30 local schools about protecting the environment, planting trees, growing crops, and raising bees.

The crops that the children — and by extension, their families — learn to grow are traditional species like beans and cassava, which are beneficial for the environment. Hardier than non-native species, these crops retain water — as opposed to plants that parch and poison the soil — which supports local water sources.

At the same time, SFMG began training farmers about using organic manure instead of fertilizers, and started working on producing enough organic manure to support the communities. Knowing the influence of local chiefs, SFMG works with them on this campaign because of the mutual trust and respect they have with the communities.

Chrisantus told us of the project's success: 200,000 trees planted, over 5,000 children in school learning to become environmental stewards and activists, and 300 families with safer water and sustainable livelihoods restored. The planted trees even support the new constitutional law that every piece of land have 10 percent tree cover.

Hope in Crops helps inform youth and families, provides assistance for local projects, creates new opportunities for earning income, and provides solutions to counter the damage of deforestation. Replanting and restoring the rain forest not only preserves the local habitat, it also helps purify the water, stabilize local water sources, and address climate change. This work has far-reaching impact — in the Kakamega region, across the continent, and throughout the world.

*Chrisantus works to empower his local community while being mindful of the larger impact. UUSC is proud to partner with someone who upholds and respects the interdependent web of existence. Join us in working for environmental justice and the human right to water! Become a member of UUSC to help our global community.*

**More ways you can take action:**

- Visit [uusc.org/environmentaljustice](https://uusc.org/environmentaljustice) to learn more about UUSC's Environmental Justice Program.
- Facilitate understanding with resources — lesson plans, videos, and articles — for covenant groups or worship services at [uusc.org/environgjustresources](https://uusc.org/environgjustresources).
- Purchase a hand-carved honeybee ornament from the UUSC store at [uusc.org/hope\\_crops\\_ornament](https://uusc.org/hope_crops_ornament) — and directly support the Hope in Crops project!
- Advocate for legislation supporting the human right to water resources and information are online at [uusc.org/gotwater](https://uusc.org/gotwater).
- Make a donation to UUSC today at [uusc.org/givetoguest](https://uusc.org/givetoguest). UUSC does not accept any government funds or denominational support — our members and supporters sustain this vital work!



***Maria (left) is a leader for workers' rights with the Northwest Arkansas Workers' Justice Center. Working with UUSC, leaders like Maria are making a difference for immigrant workers, undocumented and otherwise, in the United States.***



---

## Story 4:

---

# Maria Aguilera

**M**aria Aguilera knows the importance of standing up for the rights of immigrant workers — because she has been in their shoes. When she was 16, Maria moved with her family from Mexicali, Mexico, to Salinas, California. In those days, undocumented immigrant children didn't have much opportunity to go to school, so she helped her family by working in the lettuce and strawberry fields. Many companies were underpaying, abusing, and threatening undocumented workers. Maria saw and experienced that — and decided to take action.

At 19, Maria started working for a program that helped immigrant workers with problems on the job, like not having bathrooms where they worked. When people began organizing a union, Maria joined others in evening meetings, kept secret so the local police wouldn't interfere. Maria made handouts about the challenges workers faced in the fields and created a center where workers could come to share their stories and report how companies and supervisors were treating them.

“We explained to our fellow workers what it meant to be part of a union,” Maria says, “and what benefits

it would have for us — better hours, better working conditions, and more security for our families so, as immigrants, we wouldn't be as vulnerable.” Sometimes people lost their jobs, but Maria and her fellow workers kept at it, knowing their work would improve lives.

By 2001, with more job stability and many workers' issues resolved at the center in California, Maria was ready for a new challenge and found it in Arkansas working at a poultry-processing plant. There she saw the same injustices she had been working against for 10 years in California, so she began volunteering for the Northwest Arkansas Workers' Justice Center (NWAJWC), a UUSC partner that improves conditions for low-wage workers through educating, organizing, and raising public awareness. Then, after moving away from Arkansas for several years, she returned in 2009 and was hired at the worker center as an organizer in 2010.

People come to NWAJWC looking for help with discrimination, wage theft, and other violations of workers' rights. With support and funding from UUSC, Maria helps people build themselves up bit by bit so they can decide how they want to grow in their lives. As she explains, “If your self-esteem is low, you let things happen on the job that are inexcusable, even to the point where I've seen cases of people being hit by their bosses. That's not acceptable.” Together with

UUSC, NAWAJC is making it possible for workers — especially women, who Maria works with — to gain confidence and a sense of security.

Maria talks passionately about the people she works with. “In each of their stories, I see a reflection of my own life,” she says. “Many of us come from another country and get stuck and isolated in a small circle, where we have no opportunity to learn. We need to keep moving forward. At NAWAJC, we help people get out of those small circles, discover what’s in their community, and educate themselves. People pass it along to their children, so they can live life with freedom and equality. UUSC helps us grow as an organization so we can better support the community.”

*Maria works with women at NAWAJC as peers, in the spirit of UUSC’s eye-to-eye partnership model. Like you and UUSC, she strives to honor the inherent worth and dignity of every person. We hope you will join us in supporting economic justice and the rights of undocumented workers by becoming a UUSC member.*

**More ways you can take action:**

- Visit [uusc.org/economicjustice](https://uusc.org/economicjustice) to learn more about UUSC’s Economic Justice Program.
- Find out how you can help UUSC protect the rights of food-chain workers at [uusc.org/fieldtofork](https://uusc.org/fieldtofork).
- Make a donation to UUSC today at [uusc.org/givetoguest](https://uusc.org/givetoguest). UUSC does not accept any government funds or denominational support — our members and supporters sustain this vital work!

**For over 70 years, the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee has been a leading voice for social justice, thanks to the generosity and support of members just like you.**

As a member of UUSC, you join a community of more than 40,000 supporters who share your ideals and values. You also stay up-to-date on pressing human-rights issues through special mailings, action alerts, and a subscription to our newsletter, *Rights Now*.

**Join us** — with a gift that earns membership for you and your loved ones this year!

**For more information about UUSC, visit [uusc.org](http://uusc.org).**



**Unitarian Universalist Service Committee**

689 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, MA 02139-3302

617-868-6600 • 617-868-7102/fax

[volunteerservices@uusc.org](mailto:volunteerservices@uusc.org) • [uusc.org](http://uusc.org)

CFC#11685