



Rights Now

The newsletter of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee



INSIDE BURMA: AN ANALYSIS OF THE CRISIS

By Hannah Moy

You can't miss it. Everywhere in the news, you see images of women and children climbing over barbed wire to reach Bangladesh, overcrowded refugee camps with starving babies and inadequate resources, or perhaps worse, people who do not make it across the border at all.

All of these individuals are trying to escape the deadly violence occurring in Burma (Myanmar). The military

has relentlessly brutalized, killed, and driven out the Rohingya, a Muslim ethnic minority located in Rakhine State, after a militant group attacked security posts in August 2016. The state has since sanctioned indiscriminate killings. So-called security forces have raped women and girls. Homes, mosques, and entire villages are torched into flames. Hundreds of thousands of people are forced into

Continued on page 2

Continued from cover

concentration camps, which the US Holocaust Museum calls “modern forms of apartheid.” The UN human rights chief has identified the entire crisis as “a textbook example of ethnic cleansing.”

Yet the Burmese government denies abuses, and instead describes the Rohingya as terrorists, discounts the violence as fake, and declares that international aid groups are misinformed. Aung San Suu Kyi, Burma’s leader and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, has remained silent throughout.

UUSC THEN AND NOW

The situation in Burma has received more media attention recently, but violence has been occurring for years. That is what led UUSC to explore partnerships in Burma back in 2002. Since the government prohibited human rights monitors from making assessments and providing aid, however, we kept program details confidential to ensure the safety of our partners. Now, years later, UUSC would like to provide some details of what we have been up to.

Under former military dictatorship, Burmese citizens – ethnic and religious minorities in particular – were under constant threat of human rights violations, including lack of access to healthcare



Rohingya refugees fleeing violence in Rakhine State. Photo by K M Asad/LightRocket.

and education, forced labor, and sexual violence. In response, UUSC partnered with grassroots organizations to organize peace-building trainings between Muslim and Buddhist people, support women’s leadership groups in rural communities, and provide education for children whose schooling was being withheld by the military.

In 2012, Burma transitioned to a quasi-civilian government, bringing hope that the lack of national unity and repressive military rule would be addressed. Unfortunately, minorities such as the Rohingya continued to suffer state-sanctioned human rights violations, and hostility has only escalated since then. UUSC has therefore intensified its commitment to addressing the crisis.

IN BURMA...

We are delivering emergency aid. Thus far, nearly 600,000 refugees have fled Burma into Bangladesh, but continue to face inhumane treatment upon arrival. UUSC is alleviating harsh conditions for refugees and asylum-seekers by partnering with the Center for Social Integrity to deliver medicine, phone cards, and hygienic supplies.

We are strengthening the capacity of organizations that document human rights violations committed against ethnic and religious minorities. This information will be used to advocate for reforms to current governance, and will counter the government's claim that Burma is moving away from military control.

We are building inclusive communities that value and respect diversity, starting with persecuted minorities – ethnic and Buddhist Rakhine, Rohingya, Muslim, and others. These groups have long histories of conflict amongst each other – adding to the violent clashes instigated by the military. By meeting each other in safe spaces, learning about their rights, and connecting with local leaders, they will work together to address military-generated challenges affecting their villages.

IN THE UNITED STATES...

We are engaging in strategic advocacy designed to influence the UN and the US government to take a rights-centered approach to diplomacy in Burma, and ultimately, to pressure the Burmese government into protecting the rights of the persecuted.

Already, UUSC has participated in a campaign that resulted in the UN Human Rights Council establishing a fact-finding mission, which will document human rights violations and assess alleged crimes under international law in Rakhine State, including abuses against Rohingya Muslims and other minorities.

UUSC also joined a panel in submitting a testimony to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, a bipartisan body of the US Congress, which led the UN Human Rights Council to authorize an independent investigation into Rakhine State.

UUSC will continue to lead efforts in and outside of the US so that those affected are out of harm's way.

Guest at Your Table is a wonderful opportunity to involve your church in learning more about UUSC's Burma program. Visit uusoc.org/gayt to read personal stories from our partners and a kid-friendly narrative on the crisis.

Hannah Moy is UUSC's Associate for Foundations and Donor Communications.

Program Report: Hurricane Matthew, Haiti

By Hannah Moy

Hurricane Matthew struck Haiti on October 2, 2016. The Category 4 storm lasted for three days, affected over 2 million people (about 20% of Haiti's population), and severely impacted some of the poorest areas of the country.

On October 6th of last year, UUSC launched a limited emergency response, thanks to the incredible generosity of our members. A year later, we are happy to share the outcomes of our efforts with those who made this work possible.

While most aid agencies narrowed in on the country's western departments, UUSC strategically focused on Haiti's southeastern coast, in Anse-a-Pitres. Here's why:

In 2013, The Dominican Republic (DR) began stripping citizenship away from residents with Haitian ancestry, expelling them "back" to Haiti – where most have never lived, have no family, and don't even speak the language. These individuals are deemed stateless, left abandoned at the Haiti-DR border without food, water, or shelter. Yet neither the Haitian nor



the Dominican governments have taken responsibility for supporting this population, and the crisis has attracted little attention from the international community. That is why, prior to the storm, UUSC was working with our partner, Zanmi Timoun, to properly welcome arrivals at the border, provide aid, and help initiate their integration into Haiti.

At the time that Hurricane Matthew made landfall, more

than 1,000 displaced people were living in makeshift shelters in and around Anse-a-Pitres. Living conditions in these temporary structures were appalling, and many of these people had been living there for months while waiting to reunite with family members or find permanent residences.

The storm made an already difficult situation catastrophic: camps were completely destroyed, resources were swept away, and cholera threatened to spread throughout the area with no medical assistance or response.

HURRICANE MATTHEW: PROGRAMS AND OUTCOMES

In response to Hurricane Matthew, UUSC partnered with Groupe d'Appui Rapatriés et Réfugiés (GARR), a 25-year old Haitian organization recommended to us by Zanmi Timoun, to provide direct humanitarian aid and livelihood support for those affected.

GARR delivered a variety of basic aid packages, including food, clothing, kitchen equipment, hygiene kits, and tarps. GARR also presented medical awareness sessions in order to prevent further outbreaks of cholera, and helped refugees to obtain official

documentation to live in Haiti. Among the many important reasons to complete this paperwork, the documentation is required for young people to attend Haitian schools.

In total, we supported 1,045 people directly and indirectly, including 105 families (745 individuals) living in camps at Anse-a-Pitres. In addition to providing relief for stateless individuals living in displaced persons camps, our recovery programs prioritized other vulnerable groups of people – namely, women heads-of-families, children, the elderly, and individuals with disabilities.

UUSC would not have been able to mobilize so quickly, nor would our relief program have yielded such positive impacts, without the support of our wonderful members. On behalf of those in Haiti, UUSC staff, and GARR, thank you so very much for your concern and support. We are truly grateful.

Hannah Moy is UUSC's Associate for Foundations and Donor Communications.

Meet the Staff: Rachel Gore Freed

Q&A with UUSC's Vice President & Chief Program Officer

Interview by Carly Cronon

When did you first become involved in human rights work?

I grew up in a multicultural family and spent a lot of time visiting relatives in Southeast Asia, where I witnessed persistent inequalities and the dehumanization that went with it. It made me eager to develop my own understanding of how different political, social, economic and cultural forces shaped how and why people had certain rights over others.

Years later, a pivotal moment occurred during my junior semester abroad in India. I visited a rural fishing community that had been subject to fly ash pollution from a neighboring Exxon plant. Villagers in the community were mostly illiterate and had been told by the company that the fly ash was not harmful. In response to their concerns, the company-sponsored health clinics told villagers they were fine. This continued until a local nongovernmental organization working with a community member tested the water and found strains of harmful chemicals in the fish and streams.



Through outreach and education, the villagers organized the entire community, mobilized, and successfully demanded accountability. This experience helped me to understand the power of local communities and NGOs to catalyze vibrant and democratic social change movements.

What is one of your most cherished UUSC memories or success stories?

One of my most cherished moments occurred during my trip to Nepal a few months after the 2015 earthquake, while meeting with one of our partners focused on trauma resiliency. They were helping to train a cadre of local teachers working with rural Dalit youth who had received very little support since the earthquake. We were in a small classroom when

one of the children began to break down—she had lost her mother during the earthquake and was struggling to take care of her little brother. One of the trainers immediately calmed her down, and they sat for a while, talking and focusing on her breathing and the present moment. She managed to calm down, stop crying, and soon was smiling and sharing with us her dreams for her brother and telling us about her hopes for herself. It was really moving. I felt proud to know that UUSC was able to help bring trauma resiliency skills to teachers serving Dalit children in a remote area that had been overlooked by larger recovery efforts.

What is an upcoming UUSC initiative that you are particularly excited about?

I'm in the middle of packing my bags for a trip to Zagreb, Croatia to participate in a convening that

brings together our partners in the Balkans who are helping to serve Syrian refugees. At this convening, our partners from Hungary, Serbia, Slovenia, Macedonia, and Croatia will be coming together to exchange information, build relationships, coordinate responses and collectively strategize on how to navigate the increasingly challenging political environments in which they operate. Our Balkans partners work in counties that have become increasingly hostile towards refugees, and their organizations are facing new government restrictions on their work. I'm excited to talk with them about their experiences and strategize ways UUSC can support their collective efforts during this critical time.

For the full interview with Rachel, please visit uuscs.org/recent-updates.

Carly Cronon is UUSC's Associate for Congregational Giving Programs.



uuscs.org/justice-sunday



JUSTICE SUNDAY 2018

Program Focus: Environmental Justice & Climate Action

Join with UUSC for Justice Sunday to learn more about climate forced migration, and to take action for environmental justice. Our suggested date for Justice Sunday is **March 25**, but we encourage congregations to participate any Sunday during the spring. Resources will be available on **February 15**.

The UU College of Social Justice

Celebrating 5 years of faith-based action

By Kathleen McTigue

This summer, the UU College of Social Justice (UUCSJ) celebrated its fifth anniversary! That's five full years of creating dynamic experiential learning programs and leadership training, grounded in UU values and contemplative practices.

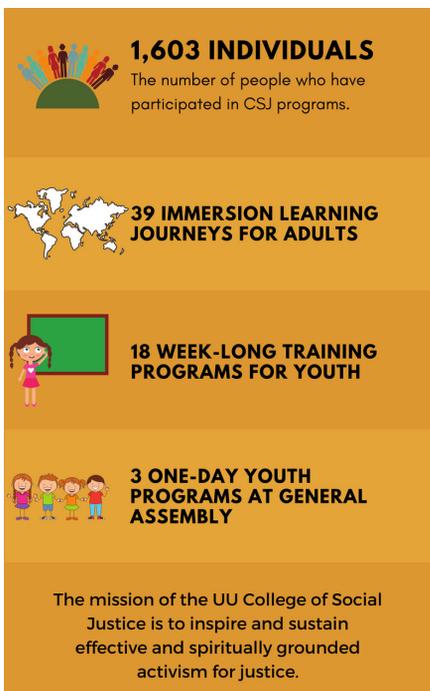
In 2012, UUCSJ was founded as a joint collaboration between the UUA and UUSC with a mission of inspiring, equipping, and sustaining effective faith-based justice activism through an array of experiential learning and justice training programs. Over the past five years, UUCSJ has seen 1,063 individuals participate in short-term immersion journeys, justice trainings, summer internships, and skilled volunteer opportunities. Several of the programs are tailored specifically for young adults (18-35) or youth (14-18).

Participants across the age spectrum consistently report that as a result of a CSJ program they have a greater understanding of justice issues; increased comfort in crossing boundaries of race, class, and culture; a clearer sense of how to move forward in social justice engagement;

and a renewed conviction of the power and relevance of Unitarian Universalism in bringing about a more just world.

To learn more about the impact UUCSJ has had over the past five years, visit <https://uucsj.org/uucsj-by-the-numbers>.

Kathleen McTigue is the Director of the UU College of Social Justice.



Rights Now

Unitarian Universalist Service Committee
689 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02139-3302

Nonprofit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Providence, RI
Permit No. 1367



SHOP WHERE EVERY PURCHASE GIVES BACK TO UUSC.

FAIR-TRADE CHOCOLATE
GIFTS AND HOME GOODS
ETHICAL APPAREL

Give better!

THEGOODBUY.COM