

Rights Now

The newsletter of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee



**SPECIAL EDITION:
HOPE, COURAGE, & ACTIONS OF
WOMEN LEADERS**

REMEMBERING MARTHA



Martha Sharp alongside the Diamant sisters, three refugees the Sharps helped transport from Europe to America in the dawn of WWII.

*Sometimes the woman “behind the man”
was actually out front.*

Many of us know well the story of UUSC’s founders, Waitstill and Martha Sharp. Most understand that though Rev. Waitstill Sharp was asked by the American Unitarian Association to make the trip to provide relief for refugees fleeing Nazi invasion, Martha was also an integral part of the mission. When Waitstill left Europe to do some of the administrative work required for the larger mission to continue, Martha stayed behind and arranged for the dangerous delivery of milk products for families and organized the first transport of children and youth out of Southern France.

I felt a special sense of admiration recently, on a visit to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, hearing the museum's archivist and curator Rebecca Erbelding describe the Sharps as groundbreaking leaders. On their first trip, the Sharps managed all U.S. relief from their office in Prague. And most impressive, all of the Kindertransports during the Holocaust were modeled after the one Martha arranged. As she expressed her own admiration for the Sharps' important work, Dr. Erbelding confided to us, "Martha is my favorite though. Her courage and leadership were remarkable."

Martha had the ability to recognize a need and provide assistance where others were unable or unwilling, often starting where other organizations had left off or given up. We, at UUSC, give thanks for this powerful founding mother whose story continues to inspire and guide us.

And so, we see her spirit today in UUSC's partner organizations, many of them founded and led by women, mostly women of color. Our partners work in communities whose access to support is most limited, yet these women leaders remain resilient and determined in the face of injustice.

In recent years, it has been thrilling to watch other remarkable women claim their time and take their place in the halls of power. We celebrate the experiences and skills that these leaders are bringing to our nation and the world. As we celebrate them, let us also remember Martha, and all the other women whose names we do not know, who are inspiring and guiding us in bringing hope, courage, and action to us all.

With gratitude,

MaryKath Mon



UUSC CENTERS THE VOICES OF WOMEN LEADERS AROUND THE WORLD.

Here are just a few of our 50 women-led and women-focused partner organizations that we work hand-in-hand with to advance human rights.

SOUTH PACIFIC

Informed by the local Fijian community and led by Makereta, an indigenous Fijian woman, **Social Empowerment Education Programme Ltd (SEEP)** brings together over 60 coastal communities displaced by climate change in an effort to better inform the island's relocation process. By harnessing their collective knowledge, SEEP has been able to map out the potential losses indigenous groups will sustain during relocation efforts, and better prepare for the preservation of their communities' culture and traditions.

Based in Papua New Guinea, **Tulele Peisa (TPI)** has been working since 2006 to relocate Carterets Islanders to safe and secure locations on the mainland in a way that enables the sustainability and prosperity of relocated families. Ursula, the Executive Director of TPI, is a native of the Carteret Islands and works alongside dozens of Carteret women volunteers in leading the work of the organization.

Pelenise, the National Coordinator for Live & Learn Kiribati, speaks at the First Peoples' Convening on Climate-Forced Displacement

Live & Learn Environmental Education Kiribati (LLEE) promotes a greater understanding of human and environmental sustainability through educational projects and program offerings on the island of Kiribati. Led by Pelenise, an i-Kiribati woman, LLEE relies heavily on the expertise of women in this community who serve as leaders and active members of the organization.



CENTRAL AMERICAN MIGRANT TRAIL



UUSC staff members Rachel Freed (L) and Angela Kelly (R) alongside Activate Labs' Monica Curca at the U.S.-Mexico border.

Fundación entre Mujeres (FEM) has been working for nearly 25 years running an over 300-member strong cooperative in Nicaragua and training women in bio-intensive gardening so that they are able to provide for themselves and their families. FEM's leadership is comprised entirely of rural women, with a membership of identical makeup.

Asylum Access Mexico (AAMX) is led by Alejandra Macias Delgadillo, and provides legal and reintegration assistance to migrants as they navigate the asylum-seeking process in Mexico. AAMX supports thousands of refugees annually, many of whom are women who have survived violence and human trafficking.

Founded by Monica Curca, an artist and former refugee, **Activate Labs** takes a holistic approach to refugee and immigrant justice advocacy work at the U.S.-Mexico border in Tijuana and the Texas Valley. Their Refugees Welcome Project, trauma healing workshops, and art and storytelling-based initiatives have lifted up the stories of migrants impacted by family separation and zero tolerance policies.

Founded and led by Wai Wai Nu, a Rohingya former political prisoner and outspoken human rights activist, **Women Peace Network's (WPN)** primary mission is to uphold the rights of women and minorities through advocacy, education, and solidarity building across Burmese society. Wai Wai's relentless advocacy and coalition-building from Thailand to Geneva to New York has ensured that the perspectives of Rohingya women are heard across the globe.

"I thought these [Rohingya] women should at least have a dream. I thought I could help these women have a dream."

– Wai Wai Nu, Founder of Women's Peace Network

BURMA

Peace and Development Initiative (PDI) employs a number of different methods in its work building trust between communities in Rakhine State. Their year-long youth program trains young people in human rights, democracy, the environment and gender, and their students have gone on to produce campaigns against sexual harassment. As PDI continues these programs, they are expanding their focus on gender-based violence, working with partner organizations to develop training and awareness-raising resources.

Fortify Rights has been working since 2013 to support human rights defenders and investigate human rights violations. In partnership with UUSC, they brought together more than 20 Rohingya women-activists to discuss their work, establish connections, and develop strategies to tackle the problems affecting their communities.

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT:

Foro de Mujeres por la Vida

Our partner Foro de Mujeres por la Vida (Women's Forum for Life) is one of the few organizations in Honduras working specifically to unify and support women in the country. In addition to documenting cases of gender-based violence and demanding accountability for violence against women, Foro is working to coordinate the women's movement in Honduras by bringing women's organizations together to learn from one another's experiences, develop strategies, share ideas, and advocate for structural changes impacting women's human rights.

What you should know

- After her visit to Honduras in July 2014, the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, Ms. Rashida Manjoo, said that, "in Honduras, violence against women is widespread, systematic and its impact manifests in many ways. It impedes the exercise of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights and development, and therefore obstructs an effective citizenship. The climate of fear in both the public and private spheres, and the lack of accountability for women's human rights violations, is the rule rather than the exception."
- Gender-based violence is frequently carried out by members of powerful organized crime networks who are able to operate with impunity in the country through intimidating or buying-off public officials.
- Fear of retaliation and the social stigma against victims of gender-based violence keep many women from reporting abuse.
- Violence against women is a main factor in migration from Honduras. The current administration has repeatedly tried to stop people fleeing gender-based violence from seeking asylum in the U.S.—disregarding the danger they face by staying in Honduras.
- Foro supports women who have experienced gender-based violence through a community that provides physical accompaniment to women—going with women to report abuse or showing up in solidarity at hearings and trial, for instance. It also provides psychological and emotional support to women who have experienced violence or are facing a human rights emergency.



"UUSC is a great ally for Foro de Mujeres por la Vida (Women's Forum for Life). They are aware of the Honduran context and support our actions not only through grants, but politically as well."

– Carolina Sierra, Executive Coordinator

You can learn more about Foro de Mujeres por la Vida through UUSC's Guest at your Table program. **Visit uusc.org/guest to participate.**

"Women's solidarity can make anything happen."

Jelena Hrnjak, the program coordinator for UUSC's partner organization ATINA, spoke with us about the crucial work they are doing in Serbia supporting refugees and raising awareness around gender-based violence in refugee camps.

Could you tell us about ATINA and its work?

ATINA is an NGO which for 16 years has been providing a comprehensive program for women who suffered gender-based violence or trafficking in Serbia. We set up a program that is dedicated to fulfilling their needs, including safe houses, psychological and legal support and court accompaniment. During the years we've supported hundreds of girls and women to find an exit from the situation they're in. In this type of work, it's often necessary to wait for a period of time, but once you get a result, it's really fulfilling.

How has UUSC supported your work?

You came in 2016 at the right moment. The focus was on 2015 and the middle of 2016, and when the numbers [of refugees from Syria] started to decrease, people thought there was no actual need. You came to be our support, so



we were able to be other people's support.

What gives you hope?

Beautiful, smart colleagues that I am working with. It is one incredible source of energy here in ATINA. The fact that I am loved and that I love proves everyday how beautiful life is. I've seen people who have lost their hope and witnessed how new opportunities can be brought into their lives—that also gives me hope. In the end, what I believe is that women's solidarity can make anything happen.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Did you know that half of UUSC's partner organizations are led by women?

Please join us for this year's Guest at Your Table program to learn more about women leaders who are taking on some of today's greatest human rights challenges.



UUSC.ORG/GUEST

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

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