



Rights Now

The newsletter of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee



PACIFIC ISLANDERS TACKLE THE CLIMATE CRISIS

THIS SUMMER, UUSC HOSTED A CONVENING OF PACIFIC ISLAND LEADERS

addressing the climate crisis and its impacts on their homes, lands, and lives. The idea of a regional gathering was sparked by our 2018 "First Peoples' Convening on Climate-Forced Displacement," the first international gathering of its kind that brought together frontline representatives of 28 communities into one multi-cultural, multi-generational space. It was there, in Alaska, where members of many different Indigenous communities met for the very first time — to discuss how they all were facing similar, yet unique, experiences around climate-forced displacement. At the request of our partners, we built upon the

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Lóre Stevens: Reflection on her Ministerial Internship at UUSC



In preparation for ministry within the Unitarian Universalist tradition, most students undertake at least one — and often two or more — ministerial internships as part of their formation process. Internships in congregations, hospitals, and nonprofits like UUSC provide real-world experiences of ministry as well as the opportunity to integrate theory and practice.

UUSC had the privilege of hosting Lóre Stevens as a field education intern last academic year. She is now the intern minister with the First Universalist Church of Minneapolis.

I'd seen the little boxes before. Every year, they'd appear in a pyramid at my church, First UU Nashville. Take 'em home, fill 'em up. Guest at Your Table, what a nice idea. That was pretty much all I knew about the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee.

After encouragement from my beloved Nashville congregation, I headed to Harvard Divinity School. There, I learned a lot more. The UU symbol of the flaming chalice, for example, was originally created for UUSC! The new organization

(at the time) had helped many Jewish refugees flee Nazi-occupied territory. One of the refugees, Hans Deutsch, had created the symbol for them.

I interned with UUSC the entire past academic year. Their areas of focus are international justice and accountability, migrant justice, and climate/ disaster justice. Rather than swooping in to "save" people, UUSC partners with grassroots organizations run by and for the people directly affected by these global injustices.

The program I was most proud to work on was the Congregational Accompaniment Project for Asylum Seekers (CAPAS). The CAPAS team helps UU congregations discern and prepare to host asylum seekers as they await hearings.

Imagine all the homes and communities that have been ripped apart by war or climate disaster and the people who have been forced to flee to seek safety. Perhaps some of you reading this have experienced just that. Somali British writer Warsan Shire wrote, "You only leave home when home is the mouth of the shark." But imagine if you run right into the jaws of another beast: detention.

CAPAS helps asylum seekers get out of detention and into comfortable, welcoming homes

until they have a hearing, are allowed to work, and can begin to rebuild a sense of home for themselves. Some congregations host guests themselves, while others offer financial support or supplies for the journey. I hope that if you're reading this, you can inspire your congregation to consider what action is right for you.

UUSC is one of the best ways Unitarian Universalism expresses its — our — values. I look forward to singing their praises in my future ministry. I hope the flaming chalice, which they first lit, never goes out.

This article has been edited for length. Please visit uusc.org/my-time-interning-at-uusc to read Lóre's full reflection.



FOLLOWING IN OUR FOUNDER'S FOOTSTEPS: PAVING A PATH TO SAFETY THROUGH CAPAS

The story of an unaccompanied teenage refugee and her family's escape from Afghanistan with help from UUSC and the Williamsburg Unitarian Universalists.

Amina Dost* was separated from her family during the chaos at the Kabul airport when the U.S. Armed Forces withdrew from Afghanistan last summer. After the Taliban takeover of the country, Amina's father, a teacher, was in real danger — the Taliban had already killed one of his colleagues. The family knew they needed to flee.

Amina recounts what happened at the time of her separation:

“My family heard that the airport was letting people in, so they sent my brother and me to find out who they were letting through and how often the planes were leaving. Among the crowds and chaos, I got separated from my brother and swept up and accidentally counted as part of another family ... I couldn't tell the Taliban at the airport that I wasn't supposed to be there because the Taliban [doesn't] believe women should speak and I was afraid that if I said I wasn't supposed to be there, they would have kidnapped me and married me off to someone in the Taliban. So I then boarded a U.S. evacuation flight with this family and flew to Doha.”

After spending several days and nights in Doha, Amina was sent on a flight to Philadelphia by U.S. officials. Once she was in the U.S., she was sent to a shelter for unaccompanied minors in Michigan, before ultimately being placed with a foster family in Virginia. Amina's foster mom is a member of the Williamsburg UU, and it was there that Amina was connected to UUSC's Congregational Accompaniment Project for Asylum Seekers (CAPAS), a program that welcomes and supports asylum seekers entering the U.S.

With the help of pro bono lawyers from the immigrant justice organization Vecina, CAPAS began exploring options to help the rest of Amina's family

flee Afghanistan, requiring constant advocacy and problem solving by all involved. For example, several of Amina's family members did not have passports, so the Williamsburg UU partnered with the UU Fellowship of Durango in Colorado to help raise money to cover the passport fees.

Although it took multiple trips for all of Amina's family members to evacuate Afghanistan, finally, by August — one year after the U.S. military officially left Afghanistan — everyone had safely flown from Kabul to Doha. Today, they remain in the processing system of the U.S. government, while UUSC, the Williamsburg UU, and the pro bono lawyers continue to advocate for the family's entry into the U.S.

While this process has been full of hurdles — and the end goal of reuniting Amina's family is still on the horizon — the successes so far have brought great fulfillment. "The story is still in progress," says Jessica Sapalio, the CAPAS program coordinator, "but we are thrilled that Amina's family members have made it out of Afghanistan and are safe. This collaboration has been a beautiful demonstration of the interconnectedness of us all."



As for Amina, she just graduated from high school and is making plans for college as she eagerly awaits her family's arrival. "My life totally changed since I came to the USA," she said. "Everything is very different and it's good. People are nice and different, and school is good. Since I came here, I learn new things every day." She continues to have a positive outlook on life, sharing that, "I hope for peace and kindness for all people, especially kids and people in our situation."

***For security purposes, Amina's name has been changed.**

URGENT!

ACTION NEEDED:

Urge Congress to Pass the Afghan Adjustment Act (AAA)

The Afghan Adjustment Act (S.4787 / H.R.8685) helps welcome at-risk Afghans by providing a roadmap to permanent status so that they can become lawful permanent residents in the U.S. Help ensure that this legislation passes by contacting your Members of Congress. Learn more by visiting uusc.org/AAA and take action now.

WHAT IS CAPAS?

CAPAS, UUSC's Congressional Accompaniment Project for Asylum Seekers, supports communities of faith as they welcome and sponsor asylum seekers in their communities. CAPAS provides multiple ways for congregations and individuals to offer solidarity, including: hosting asylum seekers (through housing, legal representation, medical care, transportation, and more); providing shorter-term support to families that were recently reunited with their children after being separated; and getting involved in fundraising or advocacy. UUSC staff works closely with groups throughout the process and provides ongoing support and connection to other congregations doing similar work.

Learn more at uusc.org/capas or contact us at capas@uusc.org.



"I love that so many immigrant justice and accompaniment groups that I encounter are either run by, founded by, or supported by UUs. Many of these organizations and efforts are working in close partnership with asylum seekers or are following their lead.

Knowing that members of our faith community regularly and repeatedly take a stand for justice, take risks to save lives, and bravely show up in solidarity for asylum seekers, gives me tremendous hope. I am excited to see how we can expand our impact together as more and more congregations join this effort!"

– Jessica Sapalio
CAPAS Program Coordinator

**✦ MIGRATION ✦
IS A HUMAN RIGHT**

UUSC HOSTS REGIONAL CONVENING ON CLIMATE-FORCED DISPLACEMENT

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learnings from our international convening to host a gathering specifically for Pacific Islanders, which took place in Fiji this past June.

Learnings from the 2018 First Peoples Convening

One key takeaway of the 2018 convening was the importance of nurturing and celebrating cultural identity.

Indigenous communities encounter unique challenges due to the climate crisis, especially given the risk of sacred sites and customs being lost if they are forced to leave their homes and integrate into other communities. Not only do they disproportionately face rising seas, saltwater intrusion, melting permafrost, and other climate impacts, but they often have a profound connection to the ancestral homes and lands that are affected.

As UUSC partner Ursula Rakova explains it, "The islanders are connected to the island. They were

born there, they grew up on the island, and having to move means detaching themselves from the islands that they're connected to."

UUSC worked closely with our partners to once again co-design and co-facilitate our gathering this summer. What made our first convening so impactful, and subsequent collaborative advocacy robust, was the strong network of support among community leaders who shared their wisdom, listened to each other's experiences, and opened up to each other's learnings.

Summer Gathering in Fiji

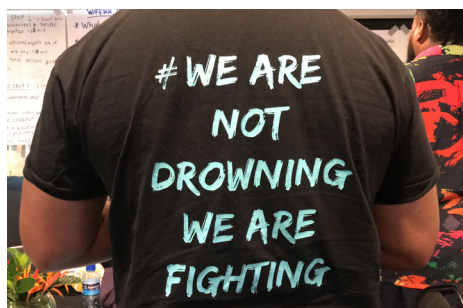
Since UUSC's 2018 convening, our world has been devastated by the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, our partners must face severe climate impacts on top of navigating the challenges of a global health crisis. In April 2020, for example, a Category 5 cyclone in the Pacific severely damaged the Solomon Islands and forced the government to lift its social distancing measures to allow for storm evacuation, further exposing Pacific islanders to the virus.

This summer, after multiple postponements and holding virtual meetings in the interim, our partners gathered in person for a regional gathering in the Pacific.

Joining to discuss their lived experiences these past few years, our primary goal was to build connections between Pacific Island partners and collaboratively envision ways to address both climate- and pandemic-related issues in their communities. Our partners exchanged stories and experiences, brainstormed solutions to loss and damage caused by the climate crisis, and identified initiatives to confront the compounding effects of COVID-19 and climate change.

Despite the recent swell of natural disasters and the impacts of the ongoing health crisis, UUSC's partners have made significant strides in their climate justice work since our 2018 gathering in Alaska.

It is thanks to the deep knowledge and leadership of these community representatives, alongside the passionate support of our members, that we were able to come together for a second time in a way that upholds the dignity, power, and agency of Indigenous and First Peoples.



WHO WAS THERE?

CLIMATE TOK

ECOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS
FOUNDATION

JO-JIKUM

KIOA ISLAND COMMUNITY
ORGANIZATION

LIVE & LEARN KIRIBATI

LOSS AND DAMAGE YOUTH
COALITION PACIFIC

PACIFIC CLIMATE WARRIORS

PACIFIC ISLAND CLIMATE ACTION
NETWORK

TUVALU CLIMATE ACTION
NETWORK

FROM WHAT COUNTRIES?

FIJI

KIRIBATI

MARSHALL ISLANDS

TUVALU

SOLOMON ISLANDS

REGIONAL BODY REPRESENTING
15 COUNTRIES IN THE PACIFIC

Support the next generation of human rights leaders.

***Extend your commitment to human
rights into the future by naming
UUUC in your will or estate plans.***

***Learn more at plannedgiving.uusc.org
or contact Carly at ccronon@uusc.org***

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FRONT COVER: Participants of the
June 2022 Pacific Island Convening.
Photo credit: Ariela Zibiah