



# Rights Now

The newsletter of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee



## BUILDING LASTING MOVEMENTS

**"THANK YOU ... FOR BEING UN-REASONABLE," SAID REBECCA SOLNIT**

in her 2019 address to youth during the climate strike. "You're not being reasonable," of course, is what they always say when you dare to challenge the status quo, to call out injustice, to imagine a better world.

I am reminded of Solnit's words today, as we endure the first year of the current presidential administration. At UUSC, we are privileged to be in relationship with dedicated members, organizers, activists, and grassroots communities who dare to be unreasonable at a time when racism, discrimination, hate, violence against women, and anti-LGBTQI+ policies are normalized, seen as reasonable.

The chaos, the unapologetic racism, the illegal power grabs, the contempt for democratic norms can be overwhelming. And of course are the same reasons our values and defiance are needed right now.

Advancing human rights in the face of powerful systems of oppression is what UUSC's grassroots partners have always done and will continue to do in the next four years, and the four years after that.

After hearing the U.S. election results, Juan José, from UUSC partner Asociación Pop No'j in Guatemala, wrote to us expressing solidarity and reminding us that "the resistance of centuries makes us strong."

And Kasia, a partner in Poland who works for the Association for Women's Rights in Development, said she remains hopeful because, "where there is injustice, good people organize."



UUSC's mission affirms the inherent dignity of all people. I want you to be confident that when you join UUSC in our vital work, you are part of a larger movement that continues to champion social justice and human rights, no matter the challenges ...

And with you your help, I can promise you that—in the words of our Senior Partnership Officer here at UUSC, Lis-Marie Alvarado—"the movements we build will outlast any U.S. President."

*May Keith Mon*

**"The movements we build will outlast any U.S. President."** -Lis-Marie Alvarado, UUSC Senior Partnership Officer

# ASYLUM IS A HUMAN RIGHT:

## UUSC's Community Accompaniment Program with Asylum-Seekers

**Throughout UUSC's history, we have found ways to accompany, shelter, and defend the rights of those who are at risk of persecution. Today, we remain dedicated to this mission.**

Asylum is a life-saving human right enshrined in the United Nation's 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and protected by law in the United States for more than 40 years.

Already severely curtailed in recent years—for example through limited ports of entry, the "Remain in Mexico" policy, and the faulty Customs and Border Patrol mobile app—access to asylum in the U.S. has now been effectively shut down by the new administration through executive order, falsely citing an "invasion."

As a result, people seeking refuge on the basis of legitimate fears of persecution and torture in their home countries are being turned away or rapidly expelled, and those already in the process of pursuing legal asylum in the U.S. face fear and uncertainty.

UUSC has been supporting asylum-seekers through our Community Accompaniment Program with Asylum-Seekers (CAPAS) since 2019, when we identified a greater need for solidarity as well as a desire from our membership to mobilize. Since then, we have trained close to fifty community and faith-based groups to host and accompany individuals or families seeking legal asylum in the United States.

**UUSC matches asylum-seekers and CAPAS hosts and supports them throughout the accompaniment process as asylum-seekers get settled and build connections in their new communities.**

This starts with getting the individual or family released from detention, arranging for legal

*(continued on page 7)*

# DEFENDING TRANS LIVES:

## An Interview with the Pink Haven Coalition



At a time when trans and gender expansive lives and rights are under immediate threat, UUSC is partnering in coalition with Pink Haven to assist with the urgent task of getting people out of unsafe states to safer ones in the United States.

UUSC is providing regular funding and staff support to build mutual aid protection networks, establish safe haven centers, and support individuals as they seek accommodation in the eleven sanctuary states. Following the 2024 presidential election, we also distributed an additional emergency grant to Pink Haven.

**Laura Randall, Director of Development for Congregation Relations, and Heather Vickery, Coordinator for Congregational Activism, are UUSC staff members deeply involved in the Pink Haven Coalition. They shared more about the needs on the ground today and how our communities are responding.**

### When did UUSC begin partnering with Pink Haven? What prompted this new portfolio of work?

**LAURA** We started our partnership in January of 2023. This was from a trans-led organization that reached out to us to see if [we] were in a position to accompany people who are fleeing unsafe states trying to get to safer states. There has been an increase in legislative attacks from 2015—when

there were 8 pieces of anti-trans legislation proposed in State Houses—to today, when there are nearly 600 ... This is straight out of the authoritarian playbook of picking a small, often misunderstood minority, and convincing large swaths of the population that they are a threat and need to be eradicated.



## Can you describe what accompaniment looks like in the context of your work with Pink Haven?

**HEATHER** Accompaniment is being with people when you don't know how it's going to turn out. So, broad strokes, that's what we're getting people ready to do. With trans folks, we don't know what's coming next. We just know that they're not safe right now, and our values call us to provide whatever safety our community can and welcome them. It looks different for different people. It looks different when they go to different places because the resources are different, the risks are different. But basically, we ask folks what they need, we do our best to meet that need, or connect them with folks who can meet that need.

**LAURA** By resources, we mean that in a really broad way; so yes, money is a really important resource in this work, but so are people with knowledge of the community, especially the queer community; so are people who have interacted with local school districts and know the environment there; people who have access to housing in a variety of ways; people who can help with groceries, drive to appointments, who can literally be a friendly face to meet with or be on text with when someone is new to a community.

***"The only reason the world has ever improved is because people lived their values like they meant it, and they did something. And it certainly isn't on me to say, "oh, no thanks, that sounds hard." -Laura Randall***

## What is the situation on the ground today? Have you seen any differences since the new administration has taken place?

**LAURA** Folks are really, really scared. There are very tangible ways in which their lives are being curtailed or limited or put in danger. There are the very practical things that people are being prevented from doing now, like leaving the country and not being able to re-enter. I'm [also] hearing from families who say, "I'm going to have to detransition, on paper, my teenage child ... because we can't enroll them in school," and I see how much harm that

does to them. There are all these really practical things, and also deep sadness and fear that is coming from both trans people and their families. It's so very obvious that the administration wants to erase them from public life. Even if these things don't ultimately stand the test of lawsuits against them and they aren't ultimately upheld, the psychological trauma of your country would prefer that you don't exist is huge. That is going to carry scars for a very long time.

## What motivates you to continue in this work?

**LAURA** What other choice do we have right now? Our values are not something that we have when it's convenient. If we mean it, if we say that these values are important to us, then we have to act like it. I keep looking back to the movement leaders of the past as well as the movement leaders who are in coalition with us now, and I'm learning so much from them. The only reason the world has ever improved is because people lived their values like they meant it, and they did something. And it certainly isn't on me to say, "oh, no thanks, that sounds hard."

**HEATHER** I'll often say that it's selfish for me. I'm saving the world that I want. I'm doing my part to get to the world that I want with the people that I love. It's part of my faith. I can't watch people being dehumanized and attacked and not honored as the awesome beings that they are.

**This interview has been edited for length. To read the full Q&A, please visit [uusc.org/pinkhaven2025](https://uusc.org/pinkhaven2025).**

Photo credit: Jami Yandle (page 5), UU Fellowship of Charlotte County (page 7), Clinton Global Initiative (page 8)



counsel for their asylum case, providing appropriate housing, and coordinating with translators.

Once an asylum-seeker is placed, CAPAS host communities support them with daily necessities, including facilitating transportation, providing a living stipend, applying for work permits, securing medical care, helping register children for school, and going with the individual or family to appointments when encounters with ICE might be a concern.

With the new administration targeting people in migration, our work continues to expand to meet the current political moment. Since parole programs have been halted and people are no longer able to apply for asylum in the U.S., CAPAS has pivoted to focus on meeting the needs of those who are already in the country and whose rights are under threat. Jessica Sapalio, the CAPAS coordinator at UUSC, explains, "Being nimble is so important in this work because it's always changing...the laws, the policies...no matter who the administration is."

In addition, many of the institutions we collaborate with have lost federal funding, which



has led UUSC and CAPAS hosts to take on new responsibilities to fill the gaps and provide up-to-date information to asylum-seekers and their support systems.

For example, CAPAS is helping families set up plans for their children in case their parents get detained, facilitating Know Your Rights trainings, and collecting rapid response funds so that financial support is readily available for urgent needs. We are also collaborating with UU and other allied organizations to develop coordinated mobilization and actions for immigration justice.

At a time when federal funding is being pulled, policies are shifting, and fear is prevalent, the dedicated solidarity and support CAPAS offers is critical.

Learn more about the CAPAS program and how you and your community can get involved at **[uusc.org/capas](https://uusc.org/capas)**.

# BUILDING MUTUAL AID IN SUDAN:

## Creating Local Solutions Amid Foreign Aid Freeze

**“Resourcing local mutual aid work is not just about getting resources to communities—it is also about recognizing their dignity and power to rebuild their lives in the ways that they know best. This is a moment to ensure that funding can reach these communities in the most direct manner possible. This is why we are supporting the Sudan Mutual Aid Coalition.”**

**— Rachel Gore Freed, VP Programs**

With so much attention on the injustices and harms of the Trump administration, focus is shifting away from severe human rights disasters around the world.

And while UUSC is building up our work to resist this new administration, we are holding firm in our commitments to communities all around the world whose lives are under threat. For

example, in Sudan, where political violence between two conflicting military factions has turned into genocide, as declared by the U.S. government on January 7.

To date, the civil war between the Sudanese Armed Forces and Rapid Support Forces has killed 150,000 people and forced an estimated 11 million others from their homes, creating the largest





human displacement crisis in the world. According to a United Nations report, more than half of those displaced are children. Already battling major food insecurity, climate disasters, and existing political instability, Sudan now experiences a campaign of ethnic cleansing that has brought the number of people in need of humanitarian support to 30.4 million people—or half the country's population.

On President Trump's first day in office, he signed an executive order to freeze foreign aid, abruptly ending all of USAID's work in Sudan—making the situation on the ground exponentially worse and the need for outside support even more urgent. Medical staff faced an impossible choice between continuing critical care without funding or discontinuing services that keep vulnerable children alive. While humanitarian aid workers are doing their best to support the children in need, the administration's position means that aid groups will no longer receive the funds they previously relied on to cover salaries and pay for medical supplies.

To meet the extraordinary needs created by this crisis, UUSC has joined the Coalition for Mutual Aid in Sudan—an initiative with 12 fellow international organizations

who have jointly committed to \$6.5M in aid to Sudan over the next three years. Coming together in support of Sudanese civilians who are distributing aid in their own communities, the group aims to build mutual aid to shift power and resources to the grassroots level in an effort to sustain trusted, local, and long-term solutions.

The Coalition will send 100% of its support directly to frontline entities responding on the ground. It will prioritize aid that meets the needs of populations that have been historically marginalized because of their identity, including tribal or religious affiliation, gender, age, and disability. This strategy allows mutual aid groups to respond nimbly and flexibly as needs change day to day. For example, funding will be used for locally-led "pop-up" facilities in Sudan that provide food, healthcare, and other resources to those in need.

The generous support of UUSC members like you allows us to move quickly to respond to urgent needs like the situation in Sudan. Thank you for trusting us to put your values into action all around the world.

# UUSC Justice Sunday

## Defiance and Determination: 85 Years of UUSC

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An annual spring program, **UUSC Justice Sunday** is a day of learning, commitment, and support for human rights. This year highlights UUSC's legacy of defiance in the face of authoritarian threats to human rights and the ways in which our global partners advance justice and possibility in the midst of similar threats today.

*Learn more at*  
**[uuscsunday.org/uuscsunday](https://uuscsunday.org)**

FRONT COVER: UUSC staff at CSW69 at the UN in New York.