



Rights Now

The newsletter of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee



PUTTING FRONTLINE COMMUNITIES FIRST

"We particularly appreciate your understanding of the importance of the local context, not imposing actions on us and treating us as experts."

"[Thank you] for always being aware of how the organizations are progressing and how we feel."

- UUSC's partners

SPOTLIGHT ON UUSC'S PARTICIPATORY ACTION PROGRAM

UUSC partners with grassroots human rights organizations in a variety of ways, including through flexible funding, advocacy and mobilization, communications and technical support, and collaborative research.

As part of our research program, UUSC offers a Participatory Action Research (PAR) Fellowship, which provides year-long grants to fellows who conduct community-led research alongside our research team and grassroots partners to advance social justice and human rights.

WHAT IS PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH?

When research is conducted by the people who are often considered to be the subjects of research, it transforms into a collaborative process with impactful and insightful outcomes. Participatory Action Research still involves data analysis, collection, and reporting; however, it is designed and led by people directly impacted by the issues being researched, and is intended to be used for action and creating change.

“I [have] really enjoyed my time as a fellow. I [am] able to learn so much about treating partners well and see an organization focused on supporting social justice from every angle. This experience gives me hope for the future of ethical collaboration.” — Maya

TRADITIONAL RESEARCH

- Maintains unjust power structures
- Separates "researcher" and "subject"
- Extractive

PARTICIPATORY ACTION

- Dismantles systems of oppression
- Community members are the researchers
- Collaborative

WHO ARE THIS YEAR'S PAR FELLOWS?

Maya Malik is a doctoral student at the McGill School of Social Work in a program that utilizes arts-based research to co-create programs with queer Black youth from areas impacted by community violence.

Through the PAR Fellowship, Maya is working with UUSC partner Groupe d'Appui aux Rapatriés et Réfugiés to study the treatment of Haitian migrant workers in the Dominican Republic with the aim of improving working conditions and policy reform.

Nyabisi Onsongo is a human rights advocate and licensed attorney in Kenya. She has volunteered and held leadership positions in organizations including One African Child Foundation, Legal Sister, and Young Women Leaders Connect.

As a PAR Fellow, Nyabisi assists UUSC partner the Lowlander Center in researching the social and environmental impacts of climate change on Indigenous Louisiana tribes, as well as alternatives for insurance as it relates to climate displacement.

OUR IMPACT

With the generous support of our members, UUSC's participatory action research has led to these achievements:

Successfully advocated for The U.N. General Assembly to vote yes on a resolution requesting an advisory opinion by the International Court of Justice to take concrete action for climate justice.

Pressured the United States to impose sanctions on Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprises, the main source of foreign revenue for the military junta.

Facilitated a Special Rapporteur visit with our partners in Louisiana and Alaska to document the impacts of climate change and governmental response.

A member of the Haiti Coalition, UUSC helped release its first public statement making clear asks of the U.S. government around security, sanctions, and governance in Haiti.



STRENGTHENING FEMINIST LEADERSHIP IN UKRAINE

Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, UUSC has prioritized supporting feminist leadership as women and girls face grave and unique challenges while navigating the war. Sex trafficking is on the rise, disappearances and sexual exploitation have become an immediate threat, and the already limited reproductive rights in the region are now under further attack.

In addition to the atrocities committed during the war, women and women's rights organizations also receive less funding to respond to the impacts of the war. As men have been conscripted into the

Ukraine army, women are left with the responsibility of leading protection and humanitarian aid efforts in their communities. According to our partners, however, the vast majority of their relief work is unpaid. In fact, 90% of those engaged are volunteering their time, and 10% are not paid enough to cover their cost of living.

UUSC is partnering with women-led organizations in Ukraine and surrounding areas to address these funding gaps in addition to advancing an equitable response to the war.

MEET SOME OF OUR PARTNERS

Martynka connects women to reproductive health services and supports women experiencing sexual violence in Ukraine and Poland. They operate a women's shelter in Krakow and a 24/7 hotline in Kyiv.

Marsh Zhinok established a humanitarian hub in Eastern Ukraine to provide shelter, medicine, food, supplies, psychological support, and legal aid to women and girls.



Chiricli is the first organization in Ukraine to focus on Roma women, providing them with emergency aid, war-specific assistance, and translation services for those fleeing war.

Our holistic and comprehensive approach supports services ranging from trauma support and crisis housing to legal aid and asylum care — all delivered through a feminist lens. In addition to focusing our relief efforts on women and girls, we are also supporting other communities typically left out of mainstream relief services, including people living

with disabilities, people of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, and the Roma community.

Many of our partners have expressed how difficult it is to plan for the future due to the tumultuous landscape they are working in — and the unpredictability of funding. UUSC strives to make it as easy as



Mudita is a women-led organization that provides support for people with disabilities and their caretakers impacted by war by connecting them with therapeutic centers, medical specialists, and psychological care.

Queer Svit is a Black and queer-led organization that provides accompaniment support and delivers urgent humanitarian aid to BIPOC and LGBTQ+ people impacted by war.

possible for them to prepare for whatever they encounter next. Unlike most international aid agencies, which distribute one-time emergency grants with rigid project restrictions, UUSC offers multi-year general operating support to ensure that staff are paid, offices stay open, and humanitarian services are sustained.

Our flexibility allows civil society organizations to rapidly respond and adjust their programming as needed, which is critical during a time of such volatile crisis.

Thank you to our members who remain steadfast in support of equitable, flexible, and sustainable aid. We deeply appreciate you for making it all possible.

FRONTLINE COMMUNITIES LEADING CLIMATE JUSTICE IN FIJI

“We never decide anything. Everything has been done by [the] government. And see the planning of the houses: When it’s hurricane...we can feel the house shaking like this [motions with her hands].”

This is the account of an elder in Fiji whose tribe was forced to relocate due to climate-related impacts. The third community in the country that has been forcibly displaced by the climate crisis since 2012, she and the other community members were instructed to evacuate their ancestral land after intense and unrelenting rain caused by a landslide that buried a family in their sleep.

After leaving their homes, residents were not given alternate living arrangements, leaving them with no choice but to build temporary housing on the sides of roads. While living in these makeshift structures for five years, the community was struck by two cyclones — forcing many to seek shelter in a nearby cave.



They have since relocated to Tukuraki, a remote village on Fiji’s main island of Viti Levu. The village was planned and developed entirely by the Fijian government; however, the new location has proven to have its own safety issues and hazards.

“That is our evacuation center,” shares the village elder as she gestures in its direction. “And that ... too, is not safe. Because we are living on a landslide place.” She expresses concern for the children in the village, who use the

evacuation center as a recreational hall, as well as the government's general disregard for stable infrastructure. "When we sleep over there, we should think, sometimes, that the ceiling will come down."

Situations like these are not uncommon when members of the community are left out of the relocation planning process, as was the case for Tukuraki residents. While the Fiji government consulted the Scottish government, which helped fund the village, residents were not invited to the table. Now, despite voicing concerns about the village's inadequate disaster preparedness, residents are met with slow government response or no response at all.

UUSC's partner, Climate Tok, is filling in where the government falls short. Climate Tok is the only non-governmental organization in Fiji that collaborates with residents to address relocation issues as well as financial matters around loss and damage. They are working with Tukuraki Village, along with nearly

a dozen other communities in Fiji, to develop tangible policy solutions through community-informed approaches. With the generosity of our members, Climate Tok is supporting Tukuraki residents to conduct psychosocial and trauma research related to relocation, create scoping reports to address drainage issues, and learn about connections between culture, gender, and climate change.

"When you hear community reps talking about how they've been living in tents for more than one year because their village — their homes — were washed away overnight, it's heartbreaking," says Makereta Waqavonovono, leader of Climate Tok.

All of us need to be in solidarity with Indigenous Fijians who have come together to demand action on addressing the loss and damage caused by climate change, and to give them resources to respond to crisis and rebuild their lives, hopes, and futures.

Climate Tok will be joining UUSC's Pacific Island partners for a convening in Fiji, which will be a continuation of an initial gathering we held in the country on climate-forced displacement. Our second regional event will provide an opportunity for community representatives to learn from one another, share successes and challenges, and strategize together on adaptations, mitigation efforts, and relocations.



Joseph Sikulu (below) from Pacific Climate Warriors attended UUSC's first convening in Fiji and spoke to the need for community involvement in climate change policy and decision making. **He said:**

"Those within the negotiations and those who are making those decisions just need to come down and listen to the ones who are affected everyday by this, to sit down and listen to the villagers, and to the people who carry the real burden of this — because that is where they're going to get everything they need in order to be able to move this forward. And that is where our communities are going to feel like they're being really represented in these conversations."



CELEBRATE 50 YEARS OF **GUEST** AT YOUR TABLE!



Join us for a celebration of justice, partnership, and global solidarity as we mark the 50th anniversary of **Guest at Your Table** with a theme of **Expanding the Welcome Table**. Learn from our UUSC partners working for justice around the world and be a part of the community of supporters who continue to come together to help create the loving world we all dream about.

LEARN MORE BY VISITING:
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FRONT COVER: UUSC President, Mary Katherine Morn, and UUSC Senior Partnership Officer, Myra Dahgaypaw, with Nomada staff member, Agni; Wroklaw, Poland.