

# SPEAKING OF JUSTICE

faith in action



**GLOBAL**

**JUSTICE**

# Dear Friends,

Welcome to our 7th Edition of *Speaking of Justice: Faith in Action* dedicated to **Global Justice**. In this edition, we explore how First Unitarian Social Justice Action Groups and congregants are addressing Global Justice issues as an expression of faith.

In this issue, you'll read about the justice ministry of UUs for Justice in the Middle East and the role of US policies in creating the crisis of immigration in this country. An article about First Unitarian's long-time support of the UU/UNO highlights how we support the human rights efforts of the United Nations. You'll learn about the service projects that the Imani Project and Quilts for Empowerment are undertaking in Kenya, and gain a deeper understanding of the role of MercyCorps in international endeavors. And more!

This is our final edition for this church year, and we would like to ask for your feedback as we plan for next year. [Would you please take a few minutes to respond to these questions.](#) Thank you!

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# GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE

*Written by Linda Craig*



*Photo by Nikki Beezley*

The climate crisis news just keeps getting worse and worse. The most recent UN report tells us that one million species--ONE MILLION--will go extinct due to environmental problems, including climate change, within this century. And we have already begun to see devastating effects from changes in the atmosphere.

The most heavily affected countries are the poorest countries on earth. Central Africa, the large deltas of southeast Asia, and the island nations of the South Pacific are the most vulnerable and least able to respond. Flooding, water scarcity and crop failures are making human life unsustainable. It is predicted that 250 million people will be permanently displaced due to climate change between now and 2050. They will be forced to relocate due to floods, droughts, famine and catastrophic storms

How are UU's responding? Global work done in many programs in our church and the UUA help call attention to the needs and influences policy and action.

UU United Nations Office. The United Nations led the effort to bring the nations of the world together to fight the climate crisis. The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was ratified 25 years ago after an agreement was reached in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Followed by the Kyoto Protocol and then the Paris Agreement, nations have agreed on mutual action.

The UU United Nations Office(UU/UNO) is the voice of our faith at the UN, encouraging consideration of our Seventh Principal and our [message of environmental justice for all peoples](#). First Unitarian connects to the UU/UNO through our Peace Action group.

Immigrant Justice. The forces of violence and economic hardship from which migrants and refugees are fleeing are tightly interwoven with

climate change. For example, because Central America is experiencing intense effects of climate change, and because agriculture employs much of the labor force, the livelihoods of millions of people are at stake ("Central American Farmers Head to the U.S., Fleeing Climate Change," Semple, Kirk, New York Times, April 13, 2019.)

The Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC) has an initiative on [Climate Forced Displacement](#). The Immigrant Justice Action Group at First Unitarian works with the UUSC and locally to change the draconian treatment of migrants trying to cross our southern border.

UU Ministry for Earth (UUMFE) and First Unitarian Community for Earth (CFE). Climate justice is a central issue for UU Ministry for Earth and for First Unitarian's CFE. UUMFE invites congregations to establish Climate Action Teams to follow climate work that is happening in the [denomination nationally and internationally](#).

At First Unitarian, CFE monitors local, national and international issues, and works to influence policy at all levels to reduce greenhouse gases. Many of our CFE members are actively supporting the Clean Energy Jobs Bill being considered by the Oregon legislature to place a cap on greenhouse gas emissions.

Members of CFE are also helping to prepare for a demonstration on June 4 to support the plaintiffs in Juliana vs. US. This federal court case, initiated in Eugene, OR, was filed by young people against the U.S. Government for its failure to limit the effects of climate change on future generations.

Summary. Our faith calls us to action against the global threat of climate change. Visit any of the groups mentioned in Fuller Hall during coffee hour to learn more.

# UU/UNO

*Written by Barbara Lacombe*

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Across the street from the United Nations headquarters in New York City sits the much smaller Unitarian Universalist United Nations Office, an NGO that has long engaged in international advocacy work. And across the USA and Canada, UU churches are supporting the important work of this organization. In the words of Bruce Knotts, the Director, the UU/UNO is "an unflinching advocate for creating a world community that's accepting, just, and compassionate for all." As people of faith, we can certainly embrace these goals.

Our UU/UNO works in several ways to promote UU values on the global stage. The UU/UNO has official United Nations NGO consultative status on three levels: with the Economic and Social Council, the Department of Global Communications, and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. Bruce Knotts attended the 2019 Climate Change conference in Katowice, Poland, along with other official UU delegates. The UU/UNO is collaborating with the UUA Green Sanctuary Program and the UU Ministry for Earth on "Create Climate Justice. Net," a portal for UU climate and environmental activist and partners.

The UU/UNO is also active on several other committees, including Disarmament, Peace, and Security and it works in other ways to gain support for the UN's mission in the world.

Here at First Church, we have three Envoys to the UU/UNO, who work through the Peace Action Group: Roger Meyer, M.D.; Barbara LaCombe, and Silas Dermer, Youth Envoy. In the words of Bruce Knotts, the mission of the envoys is to "collaborate within their congregations to amplify the UU/UNO's global initiatives." That sounds like a lofty goal, but the New York office has given us a specific way to work toward it. If we meet certain requirements annually, we become a "Blue Ribbon" Congregation. First Church has achieved Blue Ribbon status -- one of only 20 congregations in the U.S. and Canada to do so this year! The plaque recognizing this achievement hangs on the wall outside Eliot Chapel.

We know there are many ways to express our spiritual values and to work for a better world. Supporting the United Nations through the work of our UU/UNO is one of them.



# WHY PALESTINE MATTERS

*Written by Curtis Bell  
President, Unitarian Universalists  
for Justice in the Middle East.*

“Why Palestine Matters” is the title of an excellent booklet produced by the Israel Palestine Mission Network of the Presbyterian Church.\* It is a useful title because it confronts the fact that for too many people, Palestine doesn’t matter or doesn’t matter enough.

But Palestinians and their human rights do matter. They matter if we want to live in a world that is governed by respect for human rights, in which oppression, racism, ethnic cleansing and colonialism are not acceptable. Human rights by definition are universal. They cannot be given to one group of humans and denied to another. The struggle for human rights is also universal. Their denial to one people can be used to justify their denial to another. For example, some defenders of the Israeli state respond to American criticism of Israeli oppression by saying, “Who are you to talk?! Look at your actions with regard to Native Americans and African Americans.”

The systematic denial of Palestinian human rights in Gaza, the West Bank and Israel proper is undeniable and extensively documented (references in “Why Palestine Matters”). Gaza is an open-air prison with two million inmates that the United Nations has declared will be unlivable in 2020. Israel’s brutal blockade and periodic military attacks have resulted in food insecurity, undrinkable water, unemployment, lack of electricity and destroyed infrastructure. Largely peaceful protests against these conditions by the people of Gaza are met with Israeli sniper fire.

Palestinians in the West Bank have no civil or political rights and are subject to complete control by the Israeli military. Home demolitions; land confiscations; arbitrary detention with mistreatment of both adults and children; and discriminations of all kinds are endemic.

The Palestinians in Israel proper are better off than Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank but are subject to 65 discriminatory laws and discrimination with regard to government services. This second-class status of Palestinian citizens of Israel has been recently codified by passage of the “Jewish Nation State Law.”

Palestinians matter if we want to live in a world governed by international law and a world at peace. Israel has repeatedly violated international laws in pursuit of security and territory. Israel has violated international strictures against aggressive war, annexation of territory by force, movement of citizens into occupied territories, and denial of the rights of the people in occupied territories.

There is no single cause of all the wars that have plagued the Middle East for decades. But there is little doubt that the denial of Palestinian human rights in the establishment and maintenance of the state of Israel, the resistance and animosity generated by that denial among Palestinians and the people of neighboring states, and Israel’s aggressive search for security in the face of such resistance are among the most important sources of the many wars. One can also be certain that justice for Palestinians would do much to create a climate for peace in the region.

One hundred and forty Palestinian civil societies have called on the international community to use the non-violent tools of boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) to place economic and political pressure on Israel to respect the human rights of Palestinians. As UUs and as United States citizens we should support the Palestinian call.

[\\*Find more information here](#)

# WELCOMING IMMIGRANTS WITH COMPASSION & HUMANITY

*Submitted by Immigrant Justice Action Group (IJAG)*

Excerpted and adapted from an [article](#) by [Kathryn Johnson, American Friends Service Committee.](#)

There are many reasons why people make the difficult decision to leave their homes and migrate to the U.S. Most migrants have several reasons, if you ask. They may say they came because it was impossible to support their family. They may have been forced to close their family business because of extortion, which is not uncommon. They may have feared for their lives because they faced violence, at the hands of military, gangs, or even the people closest to them.

Young people in Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala face both economic insecurity and violence; they are targeted by local gangs for recruitment because they lack other opportunities. These intersecting realities are driven in part by [U.S. policy, which has systematically destabilized the region over decades](#) to protect economic interests in our country.

From the CIA organizing a military coup to overthrow Guatemala's democratically elected government in the 50s, to U.S. backing a Nicaraguan dictatorship in the late 70s, to Nixon's "war on drugs" driving drug cartels into Central America, U.S. foreign policy has repeatedly meddled in government and military affairs in Central America's "Northern Triangle", resulting in deaths of hundreds of thousands and displacement of even more people.

As we push back against xenophobic policies designed to keep people out of the U.S., it's crucial to recognize our own government's part in forcing people to flee. This understanding should strengthen our resolve to respond with compassion to those who arrive in the U.S., and it gives us one more reason to stop the detention and deportation machine that tears apart families and communities.



# QUILTS FOR EMPOWERMENT & UU PRINCIPLES

*Written by Mary Ann McCammon, First Unitarian's Africa Connections*

I founded Quilts for Empowerment (QFE) before joining First Unitarian because of my belief that I should do something to empower obstetric fistula survivors. As a retired nurse, I initially considered volunteering in a fistula hospital. However, I recognized that would be a short-term commitment and decided instead to focus on the reintegration of women after fistula surgery. Thus, QFE's mission is to improve the lives of women and girls in Kenya through economic empowerment and education.

Since my first trip to Kenya in 2015, and subsequent establishment of a 501(c)(3) nonprofit in 2017, we have taught quilting and commissioned more than 100 women to make products which are sold in the US. Half of our annual income is from these sales and the other half comes from donations.

For women with children, their first priority is to pay for school fees, thus impacting the lives of a future generation. Their other priorities include food, medicine, and basic upkeep. All of our current quilters benefit from an income-

generating support group where their individual wages are matched dollar for dollar into their support group account. They use this money for income-generating projects such as buying livestock, renting garden space, and buying and selling goods for a profit.

We began housing, supporting, and educating four young survivors of sexual assault early this year. Each girl has US sponsors who pay their school fees and basic support. QFE pays the rent for their apartment and salaries for their house matron and tutor. Our commitment is to support them through high school and hopefully, beyond.

I believe QFE embodies the 1st, 2nd and 6th UU Principles: #1) The inherent worth & dignity of every person; #2) Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations; and #6) The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all. Joining First Unitarian after establishing QFE meant aligning my spiritual path with my passion for empowering women and girls in Kenya.

# THE IMANI PROJECT

*Written by Marlene Anderson, First Unitarian's Africa Connections*

The Imani Project is simply “in my heart.” It is an honor to work with the villagers on the coast of Kenya, and help them work together to become a more self-sustaining and healthy community.

The scene that I will always remember is going to Kenya in the early 2003, and entering a home where a woman was dying of AIDS. Sitting on the floor all around her were village women, each with a lighted candle. They were praying for a peaceful death. This is when I knew I would continue my work in the coastal villages of Kenya, eventually founding the Imani Project. Imani in Kiswahili means “faith” - the faith people have in one another and in God.

Our main focus is on education and prevention of HIV/AIDS. In villages where we have had a consistent presence, the death rate from AIDS had been reduced by 90%. We not only sponsor over 80 AIDS orphans, but have branched out into Maternal and Child Health, helping train people to teach classes on HIV education and prevention, diarrhea prevention and birthing classes. We teach people how to teach, and they become educators, advocates, caregivers and HIV/AIDS activists in their own communities.

Over the past fifteen years, I have been to Kenya and the coastal villages more than 25 times. They have dealt with so much - HIV/AIDS, drought leading to starvation, lack of water, extreme poverty, no jobs, famine, flooding and the resulting devastation of entire village communities. I am continually awed and amazed by the strength of the people I have come to know, their kindness, graciousness and love of God. And I am grateful for the opportunity to have built these relationships.

# WHY “GLOBAL” SOCIAL JUSTICE?

*Written by Ann Pickar*

**Because we believe in our 6<sup>th</sup> principle:  
“the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all.”**

We live in an imperfect world, and there will be tradeoffs whatever we do. For me it is important to do what I can to ensure economic equality for everyone. That means everyone in the world.

The idea of universal equality was brought home to me when, as a naïve Scottish newcomer, I attended the UUA General Assembly in Quebec in 2002. I heard Stephen Lewis, the 2002 Ware Lecturer, speak movingly about the millions of people dying of AIDS in Africa. I knew nothing about AIDS and very little about Africa or the history of white colonialism, but I did know that as a UU I could not feel right about living in a wealthy society where everyone with HIV/AIDS was eligible for treatment, while literally millions in other parts of the world were dying because they could not afford life-saving drugs.

That was almost 20 years ago, and the world was a very different place. I returned to Portland, enlisted others and together we founded the UU Global AIDS Coalition. We returned to General Assembly in Boston the following year, developed a national network, and passed an Action of Immediate Witness, committing UUs to work to address the global impact of AIDS.

We put on events, published a national newsletter, and developed contacts with local and national politicians. But the exciting thing was to be part of a movement that accelerated the development of antiretroviral drugs, enabling people with HIV to lead normal lives, and later persuaded the Bush administration to commit billions of dollars to make treatment and prevention available in developing countries. This, together with access to generic drugs made by manufacturers in India, means literally millions of lives have been saved. And by making testing and treatment available to pregnant women, millions of children were born free of disease.

While what we did here in Portland was a tiny part, it has helped us understand that by working together, we can accomplish miracles. Whether by contributing to the work on the ground of the Imani Project to save individual lives, supporting the work of large NGOs such as Mercy Corps on addressing the impact of violence and climate change, or participating in advocacy saving millions, we can be part of making a difference.

## EDUCATION: EQUITY & JUSTICE

*Written by Patricia O'Shea*

Education is a universal human right and I believe it is the key to the future for not only an individual, but also for the nation in which they are born.. And yet, there are presently a staggering number of 264 million children out of school. Nearly 40% of primary-school-age youth are not acquiring basic literacy and numeracy skills.

If I had a magic wand, I would ensure every child on earth had an opportunity for a good education. I've committed to making education accessible and of good quality in three ways.

I've been an educator for over 40 years, teaching thousands of students from pre-K to graduate school, in four states, primarily in Oregon, in private and public settings. I've been involved in schools in the developing world providing material support. I've also spent 12 years lobbying Congress for foreign aid funds earmarked for education, specifically bolstering the Global Partnership for Education.

I have had close involvement with the Imani Project, founded by Marlene Anderson in eastern Kenya, for more than 10 years. I have had the opportunity to sponsor two AIDS orphans. Bahati Kitibwa was 7 when I first began providing money for his food, housing and education. I paid his tuition at polytechnic when he trained to be a plumber, and supplied him with tools for his work as a graduation gift. Unfortunately, Bahati was killed recently on a motorbike coming back from work.

He was 17 years old. I then began sponsoring his younger brother age 12, since Bahati had been providing for him. Jumaa has a lively intellect and I look forward to sponsoring his education through high school and beyond.

I have also been fortunate to support The Komboboma Primary School in Malindi which needed major investment to make it viable with a metal roof. The work began in November 2018 and is complete. I've 20 desks for 40 students, but more are needed in the school of 433 students.

I have also focused on advocacy as part of RESULTS, a lobbying group of citizens working in Congress. RESULTS fosters generous appropriation of US foreign aid for the Global Partnership for Education, a public/private partnership of more than 65 nations. It provides a push for equity in education, inclusive education for children with disabilities, increasing support for girls' secondary schooling, and increasing access for early childhood development programs. It focuses on the most marginalized children, particularly in the hardest to reach places and areas in conflict. We know that girls in school do not turn up trafficked and getting HIV, nor do boys in school get recruited into child armies. Investing in the education of children is the single most important pathway to a brighter national future of peace and justice.



# EMBEDDING SOCIAL JUSTICE AT MERCY CORPS

*Written by Janice Yadin*

As a First Unitarian congregant, I was inspired to share the ways my work and my faith interweave with our second principle: justice, equity and compassion in human relations, and our sixth principle: the goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all.

During the course of my nearly twenty-year career with Mercy Corps, I managed a range of projects, including: Olive oil marketing in Lebanon; a school in Afghanistan; a cooking oil business in the Central African Republic; and a cow project in Sri Lanka. Embedded in each were values of equality, respect, fairness, inclusivity, and collaboration.

Part of Mercy Corps' global strategy is to live its mission through its actions. Even when the first step is a seemingly uncomplicated handout in the aftermath of a tsunami or conflict, principles of fairness inform the process.

Who is first in line? The local warlord or the disabled grandmother, the wealthy Sinhala or the impoverished Tamil? Who designs the new school? The village elders (read male) or the mothers of the students? Who chooses the rehabilitation project? The wealthy businessman or the villagers?

These initial processes set the tone for the upcoming second step of a disaster: recovery. Recovery can often be even more difficult to maintain fairness. In the immediate aftermath of a disaster, desperate people are usually so traumatized that they will accept any process. But later as recovery sets in, societal power imbalances often return. Women are silenced. Warlords push to rule. Marginalized communities are, once again, suppressed.

It is at this juncture that social justice takes more of a prominent role. At Mercy Corps, projects are designed with goals of inclusion, equality, respect, fairness and cooperation. We believe our mission, "To alleviate suffering, poverty and oppression by helping people build secure, productive and just communities," requires these values.

It is not enough to devise grand plans for local action if the community is not on board. Without true community engagement to develop the plan, it will either be ignored or trashed as soon as we outsiders leave, or occasionally turned into what the community wanted in the first place. Only when we engage with those we hope to help with justice, equity and compassion can we build a world community with peace and justice for all.

## ■ GLOBAL SERVICE IN CAMBODIA

*Written by Rick Lathrop*

When my wife, Maxine and I launched [Global Service Corps \(GSC\)](#) in 1993, our goal was to provide service and learning opportunities for volunteers to actively support the Unitarian Universalist goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all. Since then, GSC has provided volunteer services to individuals and communities in seven countries. It would be difficult to find another people and country that has experienced more ongoing tragedies and challenges than Cambodia.

Throughout the country's history, Cambodia has experienced domination by foreign governments, neighboring states and home grown elements. One of Cambodia's saddest chapters was written by an indigenous radical communist movement called the Khmer Rouge. From 1975 to 1979, Khmer Rouge soldiers tortured and murdered anyone deemed to be a threat to their movement, including intellectuals, doctors, teachers and monks. Almost all of Cambodia's 3,600 Buddhist temples were destroyed by this regime. Two to three million Cambodians died of starvation, disease, overwork, torture, and execution. At the same time, much of civil society infrastructure

was decimated, a tragedy from which Cambodia is still trying to recuperate.

Another sad chapter in the history of Cambodia occurred during the Vietnam War. In 1969, the US began bombing the Cambodian countryside to destroy North Vietnamese military installations and supply lines of the Ho Chi Minh trail. The U.S. dropped upwards of 2.7 million tons of bombs on Cambodia, exceeding the amount it had dropped on Japan during by almost a million tons. During this time, about 30 percent of the country's population was internally displaced, wreaking havoc on the country's rural population and agrarian economy. It is estimated that more than 250,000 Cambodians were killed by the US.

Long-lasting results of the Khmer Rouge regime and genocide and the Vietnam War are still evident in Cambodia today. GSC and our volunteer participants offer what service and assistance we can to help Cambodian individuals and communities acquire training and skills to improve their lives, rebuild their civil society, and overcome these tragic chapters in its history.

# CONNECT WITH FIRST UNITARIAN PORTLAND

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# SOCIAL JUSTICE ACTION GROUPS

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### **UU's for Justice in the Middle East (UUJME)**

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