

A Dream Still Finding Fulfillment: United Nations Sunday
Sunday, October 16, 2022
Tri-County Unitarian Universalists
Summerfield, FL
Rev. Cynthia A. Snavelly

I would like to begin this morning with a little background on the United Nations taken from a religious education curriculum prepared by our Unitarian Universalist Office at the United Nations for youth.

“With the scourge of war heavy on hearts and minds following World War II, 51 countries met in San Francisco to create the United Nations, where they drafted and signed its Charter. When these 51 countries signed the Charter on October 24, 1945, they became Member States of the United Nations and committed their governments and peoples to ‘maintain international peace and security’ as well as to the Charter’s other purposes and principles. When states become members of the United Nations, they agree to accept the many obligations of the [UN Charter](#)...

“The United Nations has 4 Main Purposes

To keep peace throughout the world;

To develop friendly relations among nations;

To help nations work together to improve the lives of poor people, to conquer hunger, disease and illiteracy, and to encourage respect for each other’s rights and freedoms;

(and) To be a center for harmonizing the actions of nations to achieve these goals....

“There are 193 Member States in the United Nations (the newest Member State is the Republic of South Sudan, July 14, 2011). In addition, the Holy See and the State of Palestine have observer status, meaning that they have speaking rights, but no voting rights. Working with such a diversity of peoples requires a large full-time translation team; the UN works in six official languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, & Spanish.

“In the last five years, the United Nations' impact has been felt through its work providing accurate information on critical global issues through:

the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which gave the world a 12-year warning to get our act together before our planet is no longer liveable as we know it.

the World Health Organization (WHO), which brought countries together to address crises such as Ebola outbreaks in Africa and the current COVID-19 pandemic.

the International Organization for Migration (IOM), which helps us to make sense of the ongoing global migration crisis, separating the facts from disinformation.

and many, many more...

“A major aspect of the UN structure is Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Without NGOs, the United Nations would never be able to carry out the amount of work that it does.

“The Unitarian Universalist Office at the United Nations is one such non-governmental organization. The Unitarian Universalist Office at the United Nations promotes UU values, especially the goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all (our 6th principle). Through targeted education,

advocacy and outreach, (the office) engage(s) Unitarian Universalists in support of international cooperation and the work of the United Nations,” [Introducing the UN to UU Youth RE - Google Docs](#).

“For a non-governmental organization (NGO) to have any influence at the UN it must be accredited through the United Nations system. The UU@UN has three types of accreditation which allow us to do our work:

“The Unitarian Universalist Association has special consultative status with (the Economic and Social Council) ECOSOC. NGOs with ECOSOC status are those that are interested in policy issues within the UN system, and consultative status grants us the ability to contribute to the United Nations agenda, voicing issues that are of concern to Unitarian Universalists. The UU@UN’s advocacy at the UN on human rights, climate change, disarmament, peace, and security all fit into its ECOSOC status.

“The Unitarian Universalist Association is also formally associated with (the Department of Global Communications) DGC... As an NGO in association with DGC, we work to extend the UN Department of Global Communications’ mission to explain and gain support for the UN’s mission in the world. Our educational programs (Envoy program, Intergenerational Spring Seminar, UN Sunday, etc.) fit well into this mandate.

“The UU@UN’s affiliation with the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) allows us to send credentialed observers to represent Unitarian Universalist values at UN climate conferences. In recent years we have prioritized access for indigenous and frontline community representatives whose perspectives are often excluded from international conferences,” [How We Work at the UN | UU Office at the United Nations | International Justice and Action | UUA.org](#).

So far, I have been reading to you and not sharing any of my own thoughts. I read the newspapers and listen to the news just like all of you. I know about the various problems with the United Nations. I have read about sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations personnel. I know that the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council are: China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States and that China and/or Russia can block actions that the United States might wish to see enacted. I titled this sermon “A Dream Still Finding Fulfillment” for a reason. The United Nations has never fully lived up to words we read together in the preamble to its charter. But then the United States has never lived up to the ideals found in our Declaration of Independence and Constitution either. That does not mean that we disavow the ideals. It means that we need to keep learning and resolving to do better.

The United Nations was in the news this week. On Wednesday, “The United Nations General Assembly ... voted overwhelmingly to condemn Russia’s annexation of four territories seized from Ukraine after Russia’s military invaded in February. One hundred forty-three countries voted Wednesday to reaffirm Ukraine’s sovereignty within its internationally recognized borders. Just four countries sided with Russia: Belarus, Nicaragua, North Korea and Syria. India and China abstained from Wednesday’s vote,” [U.N. General Assembly Condemns Russia’s Annexation of Ukrainian Territories | Democracy Now!](#) You might say that this week’s vote won’t end the war, but if I were Ukrainian I think I would be buoyed to know that most of the world was with me.

Also, this week John Hudson and Widlore Mérancourt reported in “The Washington Post” that, “the United States ... drafted a United Nations Security Council resolution encouraging ‘the immediate

deployment of a multinational rapid action force' to Haiti in response to the rapidly deteriorating security and humanitarian situation there."

How well such a force might be received is open to question though. In 2016, Aaron Sidder reported for "The National Geographic" that "The United Nations ... admitted that it played a role in introducing cholera to Haiti after a deadly earthquake hit the nation in 2010... The UN (did) not explicitly (say) it caused the cholera outbreak; however, the Secretary-General's office says peacekeepers who arrived in Haiti after the earthquake may have helped trigger the epidemic," [How Cholera Spread So Quickly Through Haiti \(nationalgeographic.com\)](#). Still perhaps Haiti has hopes that the United Nations can more fully live out and live up to its mission for "Haiti is a founding member of the United Nations (UN), which the country joined in 1945. In 1948, Haiti played a key role in the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, notably thanks to Haitian Senator Emile Saint-Lot, Rapporteur of the Drafting Committee of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights," [UNSDG | UN in Action - Haiti](#).

To move back to our Unitarian Universalist involvement with the United Nations Bruce Knotts, who has been Director of the Unitarian Universalist Office at the United Nations for 15 years retired this September 30. In his farewell letter he recalled something that happened at the beginning of his time with the office. He wrote, "I began my time at the UU@UN by meeting Rev. Bill Sinkford (then the UUA President) in Boston. I said, 'I hope you don't mind, but I intend to follow a very aggressive LGBTIQ+ program at the UN.' Bill said, 'If you don't follow such a program, then I will mind.'" (Knotts continued) I felt the wind in my sails. It's that kind of support from the top that empowers dedication and concerted action.

"The UN was planning a conference in Paris to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human rights. I was given the first ever workshop on LGBTIQ+ issues in any conference like the one we were planning in Paris. I was invited to speak to a much larger breakout session by Sister Joan Kirby, a Catholic/Buddhist nun.

"When I returned to New York, I worked with many others at the Norwegian Mission to the UN to ensure the UN General Assembly draft resolution (on lgbtq+ rights) would succeed. It did," [Reflections on 15 Years | International Unitarian Universalism | UUA.org](#).

Today two program areas of concentration by our UU Office at the United Nations are climate justice and demilitarization. On climate justice "Our aim is to protect the lives and rights of those most at risk from the environmental hazards that have caused and are caused by climate change. We strongly advocate against government subsidies for the production of fossil fuels and in favor of swift support for sustainable forms of energy, as well as supporting other initiatives that further climate change mitigation and adaptation.

"As a member of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the UU@UN is proud to send delegate observers to UN climate conferences to advocate on behalf of Unitarian Universalists for global climate policies that affirm indigenous sovereignty and that hold polluters accountable for the destruction they cause to people and planet," [UU Office at the UN Program Areas | UU Office at the United Nations | International Justice and Action | UUA.org](#)

On demilitarization "Our aim is to protect the human rights of those whose lives and rights are most at risk from police violence and other state-sponsored violence. This goal includes addressing the

criminalization of people and activities that the state violently suppresses. These areas can include race, substance use/abuse, sexual orientation, gender identity, protest activity, voting, immigration, ethnicity, religion, etc. All these can and should be addressed by means other than criminalization and state-sponsored violence," [UU Office at the UN Program Areas | UU Office at the United Nations | International Justice and Action | UUA.org](#).

We are a small denomination but that does not mean that we cannot have a large impact in the world, especially when we stand together with others who share our values. Our sixth Unitarian Universalist principle says we affirm and promote "the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all." Working together with others through our UU office at the United Nations is one avenue we have to live that principle into being.