

UNITED NATIONS SUNDAY

In the aftermath of the 2nd World War, the United Nations was organized as a successor to the earlier League of Nations, with the express purpose of working to insure that the world would never again suffer the devastation of worldwide war. *51 countries met in San Francisco to create the United Nations, where they drafted and signed its Charter on October 24th, 1945, becoming member states of the United Nations and committing their governments and peoples to “maintain international peace and security” as well as the Charter’s other purposes and principles.* Seven decades later, the opportunities for resolving conflicts afforded by the United Nations are more needed than ever. Even though the UN has been hosted by the United States, first in San Francisco, and then in New York City, and though the US as the wealthiest nation, has contributed 20-25% of the UN budget, the US has not supported all the work of the UN. The US has voted to veto a number of security council resolutions over the years, especially ones that would censure or punish the US or allies, and the US has never agreed to many provisions of the International Criminal Court as they might be applied to US citizens, officials, employees or combatants. Under Republicans the US has also resisted broader support of treaties or programs that might negatively impact US corporations and interests such as climate and arms control.

Unitarian Universalists have supported the United Nations from the beginning and continue to join with other religious communities to celebrate United Nations Sunday. The Unitarian Universalist Association maintains a presence at the UN as an NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) through the UU-UN Office which invites individual and congregational support through annual donations.

The following material comes from the UU-UNO UN Sun. Packet: The 2017 UN Sunday theme is, Arm in Arm: Interfaith Action to Disarm Our Planet.

BROAD IMPLICATIONS AND CONSEQUENCES OF THE PROLIFERATION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND SMALL ARMS:

Our world is plagued by so many interconnected issues that appear in the news and in conversation daily, from climate change to racism, refugees, islamophobia, transgender discrimination, economic inequality, violation of indigenous rights, homophobia, reproductive injustice... All of these issues in some way either have resulted in or have been perpetuated by armed conflict, whether in the form of civil war, police brutality, gang violence, or a more personal conflict.

The proliferation of weapons both large and small is responsible for thousands of deaths every day. National governments are implicated in this devastation when military-grade weapons and even illegal chemical weapons are used by the state or agents of the state against civilian populations. If nuclear weapons were used in today's world, it would not take many to not only cause absolute devastation of the areas where the bombs are dropped, but also result in widespread famine and displacement across the globe. With accidental shootings causing 3,800 deaths between 2005-2010 in the United States according to the Centers for Disease Control, and many of these victims under 25 years of age, there is so much we can and should be doing to make firearms safer and less accessible to people who should not have access to them.

The United Nations defines "disarmament" as the complete elimination of weapons of mass destruction and the strict regulation of conventional arms. Disarmament has the potential to play an incredibly important role in conflict resolution and peacebuilding both locally and globally. However, in order for anything to happen, it is up to us as civil society to be active and keep this topic at the forefront of people's minds.

The 2015 UN General Assembly adopted seventeen Sustainable Development Goals. The 16th UN Sustainable Development Goal highlights the importance of disarmament for sustainable development - target 16.4 states: "By 2030, significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organized crime."

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISM & DISARMAMENT AT THE UNITED NATIONS

The Unitarian Universalist United Nations Office holds a prominent position within the United Nations community of non-governmental organizations. UU-UNO Director Bruce Knotts serves as the chair of the NGO Committee on Disarmament, Peace, and Security. That committee was founded in the 1970s by Unitarian Universalist minister Rev. Homer Jack. The committee is critical for coordinating the efforts of civil society organizations and their advocacy at the United Nations. Due to that position as chair of the Committee, Bruce Knotts also is a member of the NGO Security Council Working Group through which he has access to private meetings of the working group with ambassadors representing members of the UN Security Council.

CURRENT ACTION TOWARDS DISARMAMENT

As of mid-2016, the United Nations General Assembly has been taking major steps towards the establishment of a treaty to ban nuclear weapons. Those Member States that do not have nuclear weapons are joining in close collaboration with civil society to convene a gathering to make nuclear weapons illegal under international law. The rhetoric is focused on the humanitarian and environmental consequences of nuclear weapons use and testing, rather than on deterrence which has dominated the rhetoric surrounding nuclear weapons for the last several decades. The conference of Member States interested in negotiating such a treaty includes 133 states and convened in March 2017 to begin the negotiations. A draft treaty was presented to the General Assembly by the President of the Conference on May 22nd, 2017 with the aim of finalizing the ambitious text during the convening over the summer.

By adopting this convention, the United Nations will not be able to take nuclear weapons away from Member States who possess them (and who have decided to boycott the treaty negotiations). However, by making nuclear weapons illegal under international law, there is much greater potential for political, economic, and social pressure to be placed on those Member States. This treaty will set the groundwork for future advocacy and for a planet free of all nuclear weapons.

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS – DISARMAMENT

The following articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are particularly relevant to disarmament:

- Article 1: All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and **should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.**
- Article 2: Everyone is entitled to all the rights set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status...
- Article 3: Everyone has the right to **life, liberty, and security of person.**
- Article 5: No one shall be subjected to torture or to **cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment** or punishment.
- Article 7: **All are equal before the law** and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.
- Article 25: Everyone has the right to a **standard of living adequate for the health and well-being** of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control...
- Article 28: Everyone is entitled to a **social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.**

Disarmament and the Seven Principles of Unitarian Universalism

Here is a brief breakdown of UU principles and their connection to disarmament:

The inherent worth and dignity of every person:

Recognizing the value of each individual life is an essential step towards achieving disarmament. Armed conflict globally and locally perpetuates dehumanization of the Other. Particularly the utilization of unmanned drone strikes as a war tactic normalizes the act of killing, and disregards the value of the lives being cut short.

Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations:

Disarmament commits the world community to a more compassionate and peaceful approach to conflict resolution. This will ensure more just outcomes to conflict. Justice, equity, and compassion are important tools to encourage peaceful and successful resolutions as opposed to violent confrontations. Disarmament depends on upholding these facets of human relations.

Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations:

Conflicts arise from lack of understanding and acceptance of one another. By increasing acceptance, violent conflicts decrease. Disarmament can thrive under an accepting society. Spiritual growth is necessary to practice acceptance of all people.

A free and responsible search for truth and meaning:

In order to achieve just, peaceful, and inclusive societies (United Nations Sustainable Development Goal #16) we must educate our communities and ourselves on the consequences of nuclear war and the global proliferation of small arms, as well as what the global powers at the United Nations are and can be doing to create and maintain peace.

The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in societies at large:

Every person has the right to voice their own opinions, and for those opinions to have as much weight as another person's. The threat of violence should never be a determinant for how decisions are made. The democratic process is not functioning properly when armed violence and threats can influence political power and global action.

The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all:

The prevalence of armed violence in local towns and cities worldwide, as well as the continuous threat of nuclear war, prevents the achievement of a peaceful world community as millions of people live in constant fear for their lives. Disarmament removes the threat on individual life thus promoting peace, liberty, and justice for all. The goal of disarmament is to maintain peace in our world communities.

Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part:

All people are interconnected and dependent upon one another. An attack on the citizens of one country harms all other countries. Additionally, ceasing armed violence protects the environment on which we all depend. It is critical to remember that all issues are interdependent, but also that to solve them, all people must recognize our common humanity and band together. We must rely on each other.

Again, the preceding material is from the UU-UN Office packet for UN Sunday 2017. They also have lots of other material, but I thought that this was so helpful I wanted to share it with you!

As we look at the world following the massacre in Las Vegas, and listen to the continuing threats between Trump and North Korea, it is more clear than ever that our world stands in the renewed shadow of potential Nuclear obliteration while our nation remains within the grip of the NRA, small weapons makers and the Military Industrial complex generally. For years since worldwide nuclear tensions had lessened after the end of the Cold War, I had become convinced that it was global climate change due to pollution that was the biggest threat to the world. Now, we have to consider again the nuclear threats being thrown around so casually by Trump and Kim Jong-un.

Three devastating recent hurricanes hitting the US, the earthquakes in Mexico, and the fires across the west but especially here in Northern California, all demand that we work on issues around climate change, but the threat of Nuclear War and the obscene and murderous use of light weapons turned into automatic machine guns by a simple sleeve cannot be ignored. All these issues are under discussion at the United Nations, but the US holds a permanent veto in the Security Council, along with Russia and China, France and the United Kingdom, a reality that will likely prevent any disruption to the current status quo.

The United Nations holds amazing potential for bringing the world closer to a real and meaningful peace as well as to mitigating and hopefully helping to reverse the effects of climate change, but those 5 vetoes and especially the 3 from the US, Russia, and China are often the barrier to greater action. The United Nations is the only forum where the nations of the world gather together to consider global issues and try to resolve international conflicts. It may not be perfect from the perspective of an individual nation, especially those rich and powerful, but it is the best we have and the best we are likely to see in the foreseeable future.

I hope that as Unitarian Universalists we shall continue to support *the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all* through our support for the United Nations. So May it Be!

Shalom, Salaam, Blessed Be, Namaste, and Amen!