

10/17/10 Sermon

“UU-UNO”

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– *This sermon contains excerpts from the [Unitarian Universalist United Nations Office \(UU-UNO\)](#) web site.*

I suspect we don't think much about the UN these days, unless some hate mongering despot such as Iran's Ahmadinejad comes calling. Even the political right – the “No, No, No crowd” – has backed off its criticism and are silent for the moment, choosing to skewer other fish, blocking climate change policies and the new nuclear test ban treaty.

But the UN and our office there, UU-UNO, have continued over the decades to quietly fight for equality and justice for all people of the world. With little money and less publicity, they have built coalitions with the 4,000 other NGOs at the UN. In 2009, the other NGOs honored the UU-UNO for successfully getting the UN to focus on eliminating laws that criminalize and discriminate based on sexual orientation and gender identity in such places as the Sudan.

They also work in many areas of justice we should celebrate and take note of, especially on this anniversary of the founding of the UN on Oct. 24, 1945. The UU-UNO is currently working on sustainability, water issues and climate change before it becomes a disaster.

This fantasy thinking has led to the failure of “cap and trade” and a global climate treaty. In spite of these setbacks, they continue to work with a fierce determination to mitigate the harmful effects of man-made climate change. I am talking about the UU-UNO today because it represents an international effort directly linked to our Seven Principles. Our denomination recognizes that we must act creatively, globally and locally as our sustainability and social justice committees are doing if we are to save the planet. I have switched printing my sermons from Arial font to Century Gothic because research has showed that it can require 30 percent less ink. A small step to be sure, but we all can do our part. When added together they become a giant step for humankind. These small things are not trivial.

UUs support the UN because its stated purposes are in alignment with our Seven Principles. While the UN has often been ineffectual it is still one place where global issues gain attention and traction. The UN charter mirrors our values:

(1) To maintain international peace and security – to take effective, collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace.

(2) To develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace.

(3) To achieve international cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion; and

(4) To be a center for harmonizing the actions of nations in the attainment of these common ends.

In a similar way, UUs are called to affirm and promote “respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.” We envision a world in which all people are assured a secure and meaningful life that is ecologically responsible and sustainable, where every form of life has intrinsic value. Our faith calls us to pay attention to and:

- Defer to a balance between our individual needs and those of all other organisms.
- To understand entire cultures, nations and life forms are at risk of extinction while basic human rights to adequate supplies of food, fresh water, health as well as sustainable livelihoods are being undermined.

To live a balanced life, we must acknowledge that we consume and dispose in manners that overly burden the web of life. To sustain our existence, we will have to learn to use fewer resources and recycle more.

The planet is in peril, the flood tides of disaster are crashing on our dikes and levees. We are the enemy of the earth to be feared. Within the next century, New Orleans, the Maldives, most of Bangladesh, Shanghai, New York and other great cities will be substantially underwater. Hurricanes such as Katrina and Rita serve as a painful omen of how fragile our eco-system is and how quickly racism, sexism, and poverty worsen the effects of natural disasters.

The world is calling us to respond to this crisis with moral and spiritual courage; to transform our lives into acts of moral witness by discarding our harmful, destructive habits that plunder our environment. In doing so, we must remain vigilant against the injustice of making the poor pay a

disproportionate share of the cost of fixing this problem, created largely by the industrialized nations.

If we do less, it will be at our own and our children's peril. We can commit ourselves to creating meaningful change with a renewed reverence for the earth. This can start by intentionally living our proposed mission statement: **"We come together to create an environment that celebrates our differences, nurtures transformative growth, and promotes an open minded search for truth and justice both within our walls and beyond."** Our principles call to us to action and mandate a strong environmental stewardship. Humanity cannot ignore the science of global warming which is endangering the quality of all life on the earth, particularly for those who lack the resources to adapt. The growing impact of global warming is having dire consequences, from rising sea levels to mass extinction of species.

This is not an alarmist view, it is real hard science. Inaction will lead to destruction. We must immediately change our profligate ways, become conscientious consumers and learn to distinguish between need and want. We can educate ourselves and communities with the most accurate information available to counter disinformation, and to use the Internet and the arts as tools of communication.

We can take simple economic steps in our own backyard; planting native trees and plants, shopping locally, advocating for pro-environment legislation and research on a larger scale. We can support local political candidates and officials who acknowledge the climate crisis and demand that they take action.

We go to the polls next month. Vote for the candidates that best reflect your values. Don't sit this election out just because all your hopes for change have not happened. Don't stop supporting the UU-UNO because they have not achieved all possible success. Their work is vital if we are to have a functional and enjoyable planet.

We do not want succeeding generations to say of us, "They either refused to learn about these issues or they knew of the danger and did nothing." I don't want to tell my grandchildren that. What will you say to your children, grandchildren and future generations? If we do not act, there may not be a future generation.