

# UUJME Newsletter

August 2011



**Unitarian Universalists for Justice in the Middle East**  
An Independent Organization of Unitarian Universalists  
Incorporated as a 501(c)(3) non-profit entity as UUJMECorp

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## President's Letter



UUJME'S experience at General Assembly was very encouraging. Our booth was located in a busy traffic area and had good visibility.

We had a high volume of visitors looking for information, including a great deal of interest in our sermon contest dinner and in the showing of *Budrus*. Many expressed appreciation for our work, including representatives of other UU organizations. Quite a few ministers were looking for resources on the Israel-Palestine conflict and were eager to talk. One of our supporters from the Boston area, Diana Digges, was very successful in gathering signatures for the petition urging TIAA-CREF (now the manager of UUA retirement funds) to divest from companies profiting from the occupation of Palestine.

The Program Planning Committee leadership and Right Relationship Team were very helpful in our proactive efforts toward constructive engagement with those who might take issue with the human rights work of UUJME.

The success of this year's GA program was the result of your hard-working Board of Directors and several UUJME supporters, all volunteers, people who have contributed many hours and dollars of their own over the course of the year. Thanks to the technological savvy of our newest Board Member, Dana Fisher Ashrawi, the sermon contest was live streamed. Next year I expect we will advertise live streaming in advance.

The success of this year's GA is attributable also to the array of materials acquired and distributed, including the film, *Budrus*.

UUJME subsidized the cost of making copies of *Budrus* available to UUs and

incurred costs from sermon contest awards, sermon contest dinner subsidies, and of course the usual fees for the program and presenter.

Many of our supporters have been impacted by the slow economy over the last couple of years. As a result, our income (excluding a generous anonymous donation received last year to be used for outreach and education) has not kept up with our expenses. So, we ask our supporters to please contribute as much as possible. Ten dollars is not too small. \$1000 is not too large. (See the donation form on page 3.)

Three weeks after we left GA, 40 activists from around the country attended the TIAA-CREF annual meeting in Charlotte to reinforce the message that they need to expand their socially responsible investment program to include divestment from companies profiting from the occupation. T-C had a change of heart from one year ago, when they said they would be willing to divest from companies profiting from the occupation if enough of their shareholders agreed. T-C's resistance to accommodate those wishes is the obvious result of pressure from supporters of profiting from the occupation. The widespread support for the campaign to divest from the occupation was demonstrated by simultaneous supporting events at 20 locations throughout the country. For up-to-date information, go to [www.WeDivest.org](http://www.WeDivest.org). If you are a UU supporter of this campaign, please let me ([larrycooper@wowway.com](mailto:larrycooper@wowway.com)) or one of our UUJME board members know.

In the meantime, the international peace with justice community is supporting the Palestinian drive for statehood recognition at the United Nations in September.

Our fall newsletter will cover the July trip to Israel-Palestine by a group of UUs, led by Don McInnes.

Peace, Shalom, Salaam

Larry A. Cooper

## Second Annual Sermon Contest Award Dinner



Susan and Cathy handling registrations at the sermon contest dinner

The 2<sup>nd</sup> annual UUJME Sermon Contest Award Dinner was held at the Hilton Garden Inn in Charlotte, North Carolina, on Thursday, June 23. Contest winner Hanan Watson of All Souls Church of New York City presented her sermon, "Waking up to Shatter the Silence," and received a rousing standing ovation. UUJME managed to broadcast the presentation live on the Internet. Hanan is a Palestinian American who was born in Jerusalem. She offered a unique perspective on our contest theme, "Why are UU congregations reluctant to discuss the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and how can they overcome this reluctance to help our faith community contribute more

meaningfully to the cause of peace and justice for Israelis and Palestinians?"



UUJME Board President Larry Cooper welcomes dinner attendees

The video of Hanan presenting her sermon is on our website Home page and can also be found on YouTube. Her key points related to the concept of bystanding versus standing up for what is right.



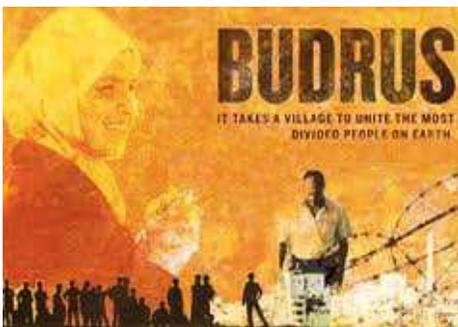
Hanan receiving her \$400 prize

UUJME saw growth in the support and organization of the sermon contest dinner. Compared to the first award dinner, attendance nearly tripled, with 75 attendees. Board members worked hard to ensure the most accommodating arrangements for attendees. Deposits to hold a place at the dinner were accepted in advance, with a discount sponsored by UUJME, and complimentary refreshments were available before the buffet opened. Having the dinner on Thursday evening just before the Service of the Living Tradition seemed to be a good fit as General Assembly attendees try to get dinner in the short time before an afternoon session and the start of the service.

This year, in addition to the sermon contest winner, we also had a runner-up, the Reverend Jason Lydon of Community Church of Boston. Reverend Lydon attended the dinner and was presented with a check for \$100.

A transcript of both sermons is available on the website. Our third annual sermon contest theme will be published on our website in late August. Watch for an ad in the *UU World* magazine. UUJME also plans to have our contest listed on the UU Ministers Association website.

## GA Workshop - *Budrus*, Creating Peace on the Ground in Palestine-Israel



UUJME's workshop, titled "Budrus: Creating Justice on the Ground in Palestine-Israel," was held Friday, June 24 at the Charlotte Convention Center, where a packed crowd of around 150 watched our screening of Just Vision's highly-acclaimed documentary film,

*Budrus*. The film follows a successful nonviolent protest movement organized by Palestinians in the West Bank village of Budrus in response to Israel's construction of the Separation Barrier through their village and olive groves. Israeli Jews, international activists, and Hamas and Fatah members all joined the peaceful protests in common cause for justice. After 56 days of protests during which the Israeli military often used considerable violence, including live ammunition, against the unarmed demonstrators, the Israelis finally agreed to reroute the wall to minimize Budrus' loss of land.

Not only does the film prove that ordinary Israelis and Palestinians can and do cooperate peacefully to help resolve the conflict, but it also dispels myths and stereotypes, common in the US, that

portray Palestinians as irrational and violent, hostile to all Israelis. It also shows their use of nonviolent resistance techniques in the struggle against oppression.

A question and answer session followed the screening, led by Nadav Greenberg, Just Vision's Outreach and Programming Coordinator.

The workshop generated a good amount of interest among the attendees for showing *Budrus* in local congregations and communities, and several people took advantage of a special UUA discount and UUJME subsidies to purchase *Budrus* public screening packages, which enable them to legally screen the film in public (including churches).

### UUJME Booth at General Assembly

UUJME carried on its tradition of having a booth that was inviting, of good size, attracted many visitors, and promoted discussion and involvement. The convenient location near the Food Court was especially helpful. Four Board members were present: Larry Cooper, President, Cathy Pfister, Dana Ashrawi, and Susan Nye, Secretary/Treasurer. We were pleased that Diana Digges joined us. She is a UUJME supporter from Jamaica Plain, MA, and is also one of our liaisons from Jewish Voice for Peace. Nadav Greenberg, who came to GA to represent JustVision and lead the discussion following the screening of *Budrus*, was present on Friday to promote the sales of the *Budrus* DVD and screening license. Other UUJME supporters who were especially helpful in the booth were Donner Lohnes from Asheville, NC, and Diane Cooper from First UU Congregation in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

We encouraged visitors to join our mailing list. Many of you will be receiving this newsletter for the first time as a result. Materials and literature were offered free of charge, but donations were welcome. We gave away current copies of the *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, published by the American Educational Trust in Washington, DC. We are very grateful that they supply us with the sample copies and we strongly recommend that you become a subscriber. Visit [www.wrmea.com](http://www.wrmea.com) for more information.

We offered a good variety of buttons with themes of peace and justice. Literature from *If Americans Knew* ([www.ifamericansknew.org](http://www.ifamericansknew.org)) was also well received. Another interesting piece was a 66-page booklet titled *By Hook and By Crook – Israeli Settlement Policy in the West Bank*, published by B'Tselem, an Israeli human rights organization. See [www.btselem.org](http://www.btselem.org) for contact information and information on other publications. UUJME supporters will be sent copies as long as they last, for the cost of shipping. Please send your request to [uujme@uujme.org](mailto:uujme@uujme.org), or use the donation form below.

As has been the case for several years, Janice Hayden of Folk Art Mavens joined us to display and sell her fair-trade Palestinian crafts. Among the beautiful articles were embroidered clothing, accessories, and decorations, pottery, Phoenician-style glass, olive wood carvings and articles, and jewelry. As always, visitors found the crafts enticing and illustrative of the artistry and creativity of Palestinian craftspeople. Jan will be delighted to have you visit her website, [www.Folkartmavens.org](http://www.Folkartmavens.org), to see what is available, especially for holiday gifts.

Donations to UUJME are tax deductible. Please make checks payable to UUJME and send in the envelope enclosed in this newsletter or donate online at [www.uujme.org](http://www.uujme.org). Cut out and include this form with your check if you wish to be added to our mailing list.

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Help UUJME go green and reduce our costs. Check here [ ] to receive future newsletters via email only, and receive it sooner than the snail-mail version.

If you have formed, are forming, or intend to form a chapter/local group please identify:

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Church, Fellowship, or other organization

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Name of the contact person

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If you no longer wish to receive mailings, either by email or U.S. mail, please check here [ ].

## Freedom Flotilla 2: Success or Failure?

*This report is from Ridgley Fuller, a UU living in Waltham MA. She has spent extensive time in the West Bank and Gaza and was a passenger on The Audacity of Hope. She welcomes invitations to share her experiences with any audience. Contact info: [ridgleyfuller@gmail.com](mailto:ridgleyfuller@gmail.com).*

In late June about 300 citizens from 22 countries began gathering in Athens to board some 10 ships comprising the Freedom Flotilla 2 with the plan to break the illegal seven-year Israeli blockade of Gaza. Among them were 33 Americans from all walks of life including ex-government and military officials, social workers, teachers, journalists, and students, ranging in age from 22-81.

These Americans anticipated sailing to Gaza on the US boat *The Audacity of Hope* in much the same way the Freedom Riders of the 60s rode buses south to demand equality and justice for all. The voyage was full of uncertainty, as last year the Israeli military attacked the Freedom Flotilla in international waters and killed nine passengers.

In the face of bureaucratic delays, which we believed were partially inspired by U.S. pressure, and in fear of sabotage, the Americans decided to sail on July 2. The boat was soon surrounded by Greek commandos and taken to a military pier. Our Captain John was jailed in a cell with only a bench and was without water or food until a sympathetic Greek parliamentarian intervened.

Mindful of these events, the other boats did not leave port. A small French-flagged pleasure boat, the *Dignite al Karama*, sailed from Crete with 16 passengers. It managed to sail close to Gaza and proclaimed its proud representation of the entire

flotilla. On July 19, this boat experienced a direct confrontation with the Israeli blockade when military personnel from 4 Israeli naval vessels boarded her in international waters. She was subsequently taken to Ashdod in Israel.

However, this ultimate outcome does not conclude the Freedom Flotilla 2. It represents 100s of thousands of the world's citizens whose commitment to justice for Palestine has only deepened. Other signs of its success come to mind: *The Audacity of Hope* carried press from the New York Times, CNN, CBS, Democracy Now! and Al Jazeera. This presence and that of other international news services means that the rights denied to the Palestinians in Gaza as well as the international effort to break this illegal "collective punishment" of 1.5 million people got mainstream attention for several weeks.

Even the Israeli press called the government to task for its suppression of political rights and loud hysteria over the peaceful flotilla. Israel on several occasions was forced to retract pronouncements of passengers as "terrorists", and of denying journalists who accompanied the Flotilla future entry into Israel.

Most important and inspiring to me is that our small boats with some 300 peaceful passengers managed to fully command the attention and resources of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> most powerful military forces in the world. The response of Israel and the United States to a peaceful action in the Mediterranean and to a few peaceful hunger strikers outside the U.S. Embassy in Athens has demonstrated the power of nonviolence and has raised questions about the true nature of these self-styled major "western democracies."

