

Statement on Acceptance of Human Rights Award from the Unitarian Universalist United Nations Office

Ambassador Susan E. Rice
October 21, 2017

Thank you Director Knotts, Deputy Director Hartley, UN Office staff, and representatives of the Unitarian Universalist Association for this generous honor. I am sorry not to be with you to accept this award, but I am grateful to my friend Kathy Sreedhar, for representing me.

The inherent worth and dignity of every person. Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations. The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all.

I am sure most of you recognize these as among the seven principles of Unitarian Universalism. But these go beyond any one organization, faith, or person. They are reflective of universal, human values. Values that also lie at the foundation of this country, that are enshrined within the United Nations Charter, and which have motivated my service in the US government and to the international community.

That is why I am deeply honored to accept the Human Rights Award from the Unitarian Universalist United Nations Office. Throughout my time in public service, the Unitarian Universalist UN Office has been at the forefront of the critical, and often frustrating, work of defending and advancing human rights around the world.

As US Permanent Representative to the United Nations, I appreciated the groundbreaking work of the UN Office in leading faith-based advocacy within the UN for sexual orientation and gender identity human rights. When later, as National Security Advisor, I called a meeting at the White House on LGBT human rights, I made sure that UUA's UN Office was represented. Additional programs such as the Women's Initiative, Racial Justice Initiative, and Climate Justice Initiative continue to keep a spotlight on universal human rights at the UN.

But even as the work of the UN Office has helped promote human rights around the world, defending this progress and advancing it has become more difficult. Both new and familiar challenges are putting fresh pressure on human rights — including violent extremism, climate change, hunger, refugee and migrant flows, growing economic inequality, and new waves of populist nationalism. Now, add to the mix, fickle and flawed U.S. leadership.

If at this crucial moment we choose to ignore these global challenges, then we place our security and our values in jeopardy. If we give comfort to authoritarian or violent regimes, we are abdicating our responsibilities as a world leader -- to our own citizens and people of the world. And, if we succumb to nationalist temptations, we risk our collective progress. That is because respect for universal human respects, shared economic prosperity, and global peace and stability are manifestly in the national interest of this country and every country on earth.

Together, we must refuse to allow decades of progress to be rolled back. In that struggle, I am proud to stand with the good people of the Unitarian Universalist Association to uphold the inherent worth and dignity of each human being, everywhere. Thank you.