UU WORLDWIDE YOUTH NETWORK
UUWYN & the world wins

For Immediate Release

March 19, 2025 (Hartford, CT USA)

UNITARIAN YOUTH FROM MAASAI & KIISI TRIBES IN KENYA JOIN INTERNATIONAL YOUTH NETWORK STARTED IN HARTFORD

Teenagers typically hang out with youth from their school, neighborhood, sports teams or extracurricular activities. One church youth group in Hartford, Connecticut moreover, has been making connections with youth further away - that is, from Europe and Asia. This week however nine youth, some of whom are members of the Kiisi and Maasai tribes in Kenya, have reached out to Hartford's youth seeking to join together in an international youth network. How did this come about?

INITIAL CONTACTS WITH OVERSEAS UNITARIAN YOUTH

Hartford Youth Making Soup for those in Need from Kitchen Where They Shared the Experience with German Youth

When youth at the Unitarian Society of Hartford (USH) hartforduu.org gathered for an overnight "Con" (a conference for youth run by youth) on January 11-12, their world view may have been broadened. On the 11th evening, the Hartford youth met (by Zoom video) Unitarian youth in the Philippines and Indonesia. The following morning, as the Hartford youth were preparing soup for a local kitchen, they shared the experience live from the church kitchen with Unitarian youth from Germany. Buoyed by the Con, the minister Rev. Bob Janis, in his sermon on the 12th, spoke about the gatherings. While the camaraderie of the Zoom meeting was positive, a question arose about how to keep the momentum going and continue to meet other international Unitarian youth.

UUWYN INTERNATIONAL NETWORK IS BORN

The answer, it turns out, is nothing less than the creation of a worldwide youth network - and thus UUWYN (phonetically "you win") was born! The founder, Shahan Islam, is the Director of Religious Education (DRE) at USH and is guided by an Advisory Group formed primarily of international Unitarian clergy covering each continent. UUWYN is the acronym for Unitarian Universalist Worldwide Youth Network.

A website was created to facilitate youth joining the network - see UUWYN – Look beyond our borders and toward young people who are our future) UUWYN's goals, explains Islam, are to "recruit young people (youth) to form a worldwide network of connections/friends, learn about other cultures, send youth abroad in exchange programs Programs – UUWYN, attend international conferences and assist with service projects."

The home page of the UUWYN website states:

UUWYN
c/o Unitarian Society of Hartford
50 Bloomfield Avenue
Hartford, CT 06105 USA
347-735-3599
uuwyn.org
shahan@uuwyn.org

UUWYN & the world wins

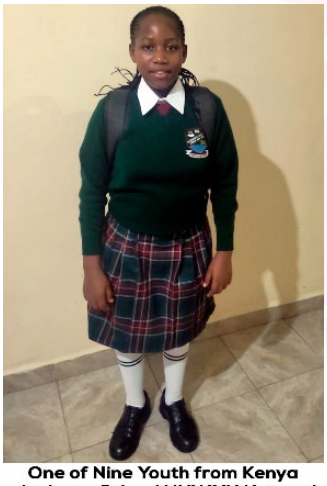
UNITARISCHE-BLAETTER-ARTICLES.pdf

UUWYN was founded by a passionate group of individuals concerned about the future of Unitarian Universalism and the need for fresh voices and perspectives. As our community ages, we see the importance of reaching out to young people—the leaders of tomorrow. By fostering

international connections, social service, and leadership development, we believe that UUWYN can make a meaningful impact on the future of our faith and our world.

Connecting Unitarian youth and families internationally is not new to Islam and Advisory Group member, Karsten Urban, professor for Mathematics at Ulm University (Germany) and co-President of the German Unitarian Association ("Unitarier - Religionsgemeinschaft freien Glaubens", URFG, www.unitarier.de) since 2015 and who remarks: "For many years, Germany has been sending Unitarian youth to the USA in a youth exchange program that many of the young participants have expressed to be 'life-changing.' https://uuwyn.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/UNITARISCHE-BLAETTER-ARTICLES.pdf That is why when asked to join the Advisory Group, I did not hesitate."

KENYAN YOUTH JOIN PRE-LAUNCH



One of Nine Youth from Kenya who have Joined UUWYN Network This Week

UUWYN is holding Zoom launch meetings. Meeting dates/times may be found here. News and Press Releases – UUWYN. Yet before any official launch, in one day, the nine Kenyan Unitarian youth joined the growing cadre of youth who are in the network! Rev. Justine Magara of Kenya, who sent the youth to the network, surmised "while they share a Unitarian bond, I am guessing that the youth know very little about each other's everyday life and culture - but what an amazing opportunity to reach out and learn and grow!"

FILLING A VOID

While Unitarians and Universalists (UUs) in the USA undertake much meaningful work, most of the focus is on domestic issues, with members typically not reaching outside the USA. "As there have recently been substantial negative sentiment worldwide about the USA," explains Islam, "there is need for fresh outreach from the USA that is positive and demonstrates to the world that we seek out connections and friendships and we are to be trusted."

"Additionally, with the disbanding of the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists (ICUU) in 2021, there remain no known worldwide UU organization," Islam continues. Further, in the USA, the Young UU Project (YUUP), which tried to keep young UUs connected during the pandemic, was sunset this year. "So…I believe UUWYN can fill some of the void," concludes Islam. Rev. Bob Janis adds "In a time when international connections are more important than ever, UUWYN is allowing youth to forge the future of Unitarian Universalism. The youth are necessarily the faith's future and so we must direct focus on them." And Hartford youth and Kenyan youth might just be a good starting point!

UUWYN service mark and logo are owned by Unitarian Universalist Worldwide Youth Network, LLC of Connecticut, whose mission is to empower young people to become leaders who drive positive change in the world. Through cultural exchange, service, and leadership development, UUWYN'S aim is to nurture the values of **love, peace**, and **social justice** that are at the heart of our organization.

Contact: shahan@uuwyn.org

UUWYN
c/o Unitarian Society of Hartford
50 Bloomfield Avenue
Hartford, CT 06105 USA
347-735-3599
uuwyn.org
shahan@uuwyn.org