UU WORLDWIDE YOUTH NETWORK

UUWYN & the world wins

For Immediate Release

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THE UNITARIAN GENERAL ASSEMBLY LEADS TO UUWYN BEEFING UP ITS ASIAN & INTERNATIONAL CAPACITY

An annual General Assembly (G.A.) meeting of the Unitarian Church in the USA has led quickly to the beefing up of the Asian and international capacity of the Unitarian Universalist Worldwide Youth Exchange **(UUWYN)** (phonetically "you win"). Founded by a passionate group concerned about the future of Unitarian Universalism worldwide UUWYN, empowers youth around the globe through leadership development, cultural exchanges, international conferences and service. UUWYN Connects USA & International Youth - YouTubeUU The organization is run by founder **Shahan Islam**, who also works as Director of Religious Education at the Unitarian Society of Hartford, in the state of Connecticut, USA, along with an Advisory Group (AG) comprised primarily of international Unitarian clergy. UUWYN Advisory Group – UUWYN.

BEEFING UP THE ASIAN AND INTERNATIONAL/UN CAPACITY

UUWYN AG MEMBERS ALYSSA MCDONALD AND DIEGO GARRIDO BARRETO AND FOUNDER SHAHAN ISLAM AND NEW AG MEMBER RUMNI SAHA ENGAGED IN DISCUSSIONS OUTSIDE THE UUWYN BOOTH AT THE UNITARIAN G.A.

"Young people can provide the vision; 20-somethings are going to know better what is needed for UU's future than a 60-something like me," Islam point out. "But we need experienced people to provide the support, "he emphasizes, "and the international know-how to get some things done."

It seems, to **UUWYN's** good fortune, that the **UUWYN** AG has now beefed up its capacity as well. "At the G.A., the response at our booth was just overwhelming," Islam enthusiastically points out.

https://photos.app.goo.gl/MaNPYiTQdG1X7i556 "We are grateful to the UUA for holding a General Assembly - otherwise I am not sure we would have been able to build up our Asia and international capacity and particularly our UN and overall international strength so quickly. We got lucky – but we will take it!!"

KNOTTS' INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE IS UNPARALLELED

BRUCE KNOTTS

One of the things Islam is alluding to is the addition of Bruce Knotts to the Advisory Group. As a child," Knotts reminisces, "I started learning about the world from a stamp collection and postcards from foreign lands received from my uncle, a Pan American airline pilot. As a young adult, I had the good fortune to study in Heidelberg, Germany, which led me to joining the U.S. Peace Corps in Ethiopia. From there I taught in Saudi Arabia and then Somalia. While in Somalia, I learned that I had been accepted into the U.S. Foreign Service which launched my career as a diplomat from 1984 and continued through 2007. In 2008, I became Executive Director of the Unitarian Universalist United Nations Office (UU-UNO) and organized the first United Nations sponsored workshops on LGBTIQ+ human rights in Paris at the UN Human Rights Conference at UNESCO Headquarters. I am proud to say that this was instrumental to mainstreaming LGBTIQ+ human rights at the United Nations headquarters. We convinced then UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon to tell the press that LGBTIQ+ rights are Human Rights. One year later, Hilary Clinton said the same thing. I was able to lobby political and religious leaders in Taiwan to enact same-sex marriage, making Taiwan the First Nation in Asia to do so. Islam is eager to show case some of Knotts management skills: "Bruce has a proven track record of driving fundraising growth, forging strategic partnerships, influencing policy at national and international levels and delivering organizational turnarounds. He has lived in many countries and knows so many people and knows the UN inside and out!! Brue has also extensively worked with UU youth and has been recognized for advancing human rights, peace, and social justice."

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SAHA BRINGS INTERFAITH EXPERIENCE & VAST KNOWLEDGE OF ASIAN UNITARIAN COMMUNITIES

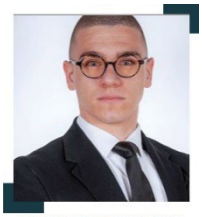
RUMNI SAHA

In addition to Knotts, Islam connected at the G.A. with **Rumni Saha**, through an introduction from AG member **Diego Garrido Barreto.** Hailing for Calcutta India, Rev. Saha is an active member of the Unitarian Church of Sharon, Connecticut, USA where she has lived with her family since 2001. Reverend Saha considers herself to be a proud Hindu and a fierce Unitarian Universalist. She has been a long-time public-school educator, a newspaper columnist and a regular contributor to the Huffington Post. Rev. Saha currently serves as the Hindu and Unitarian Universalist Chaplain at Wellesley College in Massachusetts, U.S.A. She also cherishes her time as the Interfaith Chaplain for a non-profit organization, undertaking community ministry, hospital chaplaincy and interfaith work. She considers India her home country, as having given her roots and her adopted country, her wings. "We are extremely proud to have **Reverend Saha** join us. She carries a wealth of experience in Interfaith work and is excited to partner with communities in South Asia, particularly the many youth and young adults, whose hearts UUWYN can help enrich and who, undoubtedly will enhance our souls. Rev. Saha adds "I am very excited to join this remarkable group! Having witnessed UUWYNs passion and energy at the G.A., I feel deeply inspired and hopeful for our Unitarian Universalist future. My faith in the power of interfaith work, especially among the youth, grounds my belief that together we can create real change and build a more compassionate future. I can't wait to, learn, grow and serve alongside the other UUWYN colleagues" With the addition of Bruce Knotts and Reverend Saha, we are clearly beefing up the UUWYN AG with increased Asian and international capacities," concludes Islam.

Indeed in a matter of months, the AG has expanded to represent every continent "except for Australia" Islam is careful to point out, as finding an Australian representative has been one of his obsessions. Another obsession is to beef up the Advisory Group, with the right combination of experienced members who can provide the support, with younger members who can provide the vision.

THE PRIOR THREE MEMBERS OF THE UUWYN ADVISORY GROUP ARE IN THEIR 20S!!!

"The addition of Bruce Knotts and Rev. Saha will dovetail nicely with the prior three members joining the **UUWYN** Advisory Group, who all happen to be 20 somethings, namely **Rev. Norbert Nagy, Finn Prem and Alyssa McDonald!** UUWYN Advisory Group – UUWYN.


REV. NORBERT NAGY

Reverend Norbert Nagy is a minister of the Hungarian Unitarian Church and serves as Presidential Advisor to the Dávid Ferenc Unitarian Youth Association, where he previously held the position of Vice President for two terms, focusing on international relations. He completed a BA and Master's degrees in Theology at the Protestant Theological Institute in Kolozsvár, Transylvania, (Region within Romania.) as well as a Master's degree in Theology at the Protestant Theological University in the Netherlands. He is set to begin a PhD program in the United Kingdom in autumn 2025, focusing on Historical Jesus research.

FINN PREM

Finn Prem is a graduate student of Physics at Heidelberg University in Germany and a board member of the Bund eigenständiger unitarischer Jugend (BeuJ) (the German Unitarian youth organization). He is part of the Development Committee (Geistiger Rat) of the German Unitarian Association (URFG), a board of advisors to preserve and further develop the spiritual- religious foundations and objectives of the organization. In 2024 he participated in the **UU Youth Exchange program**, visiting the US. He likes to spend his free time mountain biking, reading or kayaking.

ALYSSA MCDONALD

Alyssa McDonald, twenty-three-year-old and a recent convert to Unitarian Universalism, attends the Unitarian Society of Hartford in Hartford, Connecticut, USA and holds a bachelor's degree in Politics, Philosophy, and Economics (PPE), with a concentration in political philosophy from Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts. She hopes to continue her education in philosophy or another related field.

The three members have been actively working on an Interfaith UUWYN Conference to be held in Transylvania in June, 2026. "With the two new experienced members, combined with the talented previous newcomers, I think we are striking the right balance," Islam sums up.

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