

Quaker Action



Climate justice is social justice

Responding to the
crisis in Gaza

pg. 7

The right to water

pg. 13

Climate activists
in the Arab region

pg. 16



**American
Friends
Service
Committee**

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CONTENTS

2	LETTER FROM OUR GENERAL SECRETARY
3	ALUMNI NEWS
4	UPDATES FROM AFSC
6	Q&A: THE IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON MIGRATION Read an interview with AFSC's International Migration Director Eunice Ndonga.
7	CRISIS IN GAZA The AFSC community has helped tens of thousands of Palestinians in Gaza with food, water, and other critical supplies—as we call for a just, lasting peace.
11	THE SOLIDARITY ECONOMY In the U.S. and around the world, communities are exploring just, sustainable alternatives to capitalism. Here's how you can get involved.
13	THE RIGHT TO WATER Access to safe, clean, affordable water is a fundamental human right. It is also critical for building resilience to climate change. Learn how communities are working to reclaim that right.
16	WORKING FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA Hear from some of the leading voices in the Arab region who are committed to addressing climate change while advancing human rights and equity for all.

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WHO WE ARE

The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) promotes a world free of violence, inequality, and oppression.

Guided by the Quaker belief in the divine light within each person, we nurture the seeds of change and the respect for human life to fundamentally transform our societies and institutions.

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COVER PHOTO

A community garden in Nebaj, Quiché, Guatemala, where community members are growing ancestral medicinal plants, with support from AFSC and partners.

Photo: Luis Ochoa



LETTER FROM OUR GENERAL SECRETARY

These have been heart-wrenching months for me as a Palestinian-American and Quaker dedicated to building peace in the world.

As of this writing, tens of thousands of lives have been lost in Gaza. My heart aches for every individual killed, for those forcibly taken away from their loved ones, and for the thousands injured or displaced.

In these dark times, I find strength and hope in the extraordinary efforts of AFSC staff, our partners, and our supportive community. Their collective actions demonstrate true solidarity—transcending mere words through active and compassionate engagement. Across the globe, we've witnessed inspiring acts of solidarity: millions advocating for a cease-fire, holding policymakers accountable, participating in powerful protests, and generously giving to help those caught in the crisis. Our unified voice has been loud and clear, with a record-breaking number of letters to Congress calling for a cease-fire, humanitarian access, and lasting solutions to address the root causes of this decades-long injustice.

The valor and dedication of AFSC's staff in Gaza—you might hold Firas, Serena, and Adham in the Light—are nothing short of remarkable. Amid grave personal losses, they have been a source of extraordinary inspiration and resilience, providing meals and essential supplies to displaced individuals. I am honored to be part of their team.

While these months have exposed some of humanity's darkest moments, it is heartening to be part of a global community united in solidarity. Our efforts make an impact worldwide, whether supporting the people of Gaza, opposing "Cop City," or working together to face climate injustice.

Thank you for entrusting us with your support and for being part of our AFSC community. You are helping put our Quaker values into courageous action for a better future.



Joyce
Joyce Ajlouny
GENERAL SECRETARY



SUPPORT BOLD ACTION FOR PEOPLE AND THE PLANET

Our AFSC community makes positive change possible, even in the face of major challenges like the climate crisis.

Your gift to AFSC's Climate Emergency Fund today will support:

- ☒ EMERGENCY RESPONSE
- ☒ ORGANIZING FOR JUSTICE
- ☒ IMMIGRANT RIGHTS
- ☒ ADVOCACY EFFORTS

Visit afsc.org/climatefund to support this vital work today!

ALUMNI news



Asia Bennett. PHOTO: AFSC ARCHIVES

Asia Bennett spent over two decades working for AFSC, and in 1980, she became the first woman to serve as general secretary. Asia passed away on Dec. 11 in Seattle.

A new biopic, “Rustin,” chronicles the work of civil rights leader and Quaker **Bayard Rustin** as he planned the 1963 March on Washington. Bayard also had a long history with AFSC, which began when he took part in an AFSC-sponsored training in 1937.

While in high school, **Joan Baez** attended an AFSC conference where the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King spoke, galvanizing her pacifism. Last year, she released a documentary about her life called “Joan Baez: I Am a Noise.” Joan invited one winner to an exclusive screening of the film in New York City, and all proceeds from the contest benefitted AFSC.



Joan Baez (left) pictured with contest winner, May Ye. Photo: Prizeo

Jerry Elmer worked as an AFSC field secretary in Rhode Island and was a Vietnam War draft resister. Recently he published the book “Conscription, Conscientious Objection, and Draft Resistance in American History,” which documents over a century of U.S. opposition to war and the military draft.

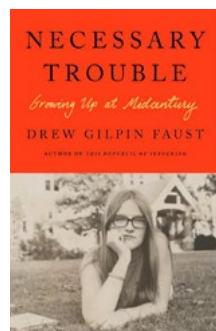
Get Alumni Network updates and join our Facebook group!

AFSC.ORG/ALUMNI

Do you have news or stories to share? Email us at alumni@afsc.org



Tonya Hstand
DIRECTOR OF
PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT



Drew Gilpin Faust, the first woman president of Harvard, recently published the book “Necessary Trouble.” In it, she credits AFSC with her moment of greatest enlightenment. In 1963, she enrolled in the East-West Travel Seminar, a program of AFSC that took American students “to meet with their counterparts behind the Iron Curtain to discuss foreign affairs and the means to avoid world war.” The summer solidified Drew’s commitment to the pursuit of justice.

Updates

FROM AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE



“Drawing Hope” exhibit in Los Angeles. Photo: Courtesy of Drawing Hope/Gloria Huang

LOS ANGELES

DRAWING HOPE FOR THE KOREAN PENINSULA

The Korean War never ended but was merely suspended by an armistice agreement in 1953. Today, the peninsula remains divided. Families and loved ones are still separated. And there has been almost no opportunity for people from each side of the border to meet each other.

Last fall, AFSC co-sponsored an art exhibit to show how young people are trying to bridge those divides. The “Drawing Hope” art exhibit was born out of more

than two decades of exchange between North and South Korean children. It features self-portraits and self-introductions created by children in workshops. And it brings to life their hopes, dreams, and visions for a more peaceful future on the Korean Peninsula.

The exhibit was made possible through AFSC’s partnership with Oke-dongmu Children in Korea and Recon-ciliAsian. It debuted at the Shatto Gallery

in Los Angeles and has since traveled to Ulster University in Northern Ireland. ■

To see photos from the exhibit, visit AFSC.ORG/DRAWINGHOPE



Jennifer Deibert
PROGRAM DIRECTOR,
DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE’S
REPUBLIC OF KOREA



A Stop Cop City protest in front of Home Depot in Emeryville, California. Photo: Brooke Anderson

UNITED STATES

DIVESTING FROM MILITARIZED POLICING

Since 2021, the Stop Cop City coalition in Atlanta, which includes AFSC, has worked to halt the construction of a massive, militarized police training facility, known as “Cop City.” If built, Cop City would train law enforcement from all over the world in repressive tactics, often used on protesters and communities of color.

Last year, our Stop Cop City coalition successfully gathered enough voter signatures to put this project on the ballot. We also brought attention to another source of funding for Cop City—contributions by corporations to the Atlanta Police Foundation, the private police foundation seeking to build the facility.

AFSC published a list of corporations complicit in the project. It includes household names like Home Depot, UPS, Bank of America, and Delta Airlines. Thousands of people signed our letter to CEOs, urging them to cut ties with Cop City and stay out of similar projects that have been proposed in



Tim Franzen
ATLANTA ECONOMIC
JUSTICE PROGRAM
DIRECTOR

other communities. It’s one of the many ways AFSC is working for community safety beyond policing and prisons. ■

LEARN MORE
AFSC.ORG/STOPCOPCITY

VICTORY

FREE SCHOOL MEALS FOR KIDS



Great news! Last fall, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced a policy change that would allow 3,000 more school districts to provide free school meals to all their students. That means as many as 5 million more students could access free lunch and breakfast.

AFSC has long worked to expand school meals in places across the United States. As the USDA considered the change, we mobilized hundreds of people to submit public comments to show strong support.

Universal free school meals have lots of benefits. They ensure kids get the nutrition they need. They give working parents a break from having to pay for those meals. They save staff from having to deal with the paperwork of school meal applications. And they keep low-income children from having to face the stigma some associate with free meals since everyone can get them.

Thank you to everyone who spoke out on this issue! As we celebrate this victory, we know we must keep working to make sure kids get the food they need both in and out of school. ■

FIND OUT MORE
AFSC.ORG/NOHUNGERSUMMER



Rick Wilson
U.S. ECONOMIC
JUSTICE DIRECTOR

The impacts of climate change on migration

An interview with

EUNICE NDONGA
AFSC’S INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION DIRECTOR



Q | How does climate change affect migration?

Climate change is a driver of violence and human displacement. Droughts, cyclones, wildfires, flooding, and other climate emergencies have devastated communities, destroying their economies, agriculture, and infrastructure. This compounds issues many communities already face, such as war, inequalities, human rights violations, and gender disparities.

As a result, climate change causes and exacerbates massive displacement. People leave their homes in search of survival, protection, and better opportunities. They also want to live dignified lives.

Globally, human displacement and migration are increasing conflicts over competition for natural resources. We see this in the Horn of Africa region for instance, where drought has been ravaging the region for the past two years.

Q | How has the international community responded to migrants displaced by climate change?

Migration is an inherent right of all people. But we’re continuing to see more challenges for migrants and refugees.

When it comes to people displaced by climate change, the greatest challenge

is that the international community doesn’t officially recognize “climate refugees.” Even if people move to a country because of flooding or famine due to climate change, the state will not treat that as a reason to allow migrants to stay. The U.N. Global Compact for Migration calls on states to develop solutions for migrants forced to leave their homes because of climate change. While this helps in calling governments to account, it is not a binding legal framework.

Instead, states are responding with more barrier walls, more stringent entry policies and practices, and more detention. This further inhibits migrants’ rights and liberties.

Q | What must be done to support people displaced by climate change?

Low-income countries and communities—particularly Indigenous communities—have made the fewest contributions to greenhouse gas emissions, but they bear the brunt of climate injustices. That’s where the conversation must begin. We

must emphasize the responsibilities and accountability of countries that contribute the most to climate change. We must focus on protecting the human rights of people who are most adversely affected.

Organizations, such as AFSC, are working on this. We are calling on governments to move money from military spending, national security, and controlling borders. Instead, governments must invest in meeting migrant needs, defending human rights, and preventing climate injustices in the long term to promote peace.

AFSC works with migrants and refugees in places around the world. We provide humanitarian assistance, trauma healing, and spaces to promote dialogue and understanding. We also help them know their rights and advocate. Key to this approach is putting the needs, agency, and power of impacted communities at the center to build thriving, resilient communities.

We ensure migrants’ voices and leadership determine whatever support AFSC provides. ■

AFSC staff member Firas distributes bags of food at a former school that now serves as a shelter in Rafah. PHOTO: AMJAD FAYOMI

CRISIS IN GAZA

How the AFSC community is supporting Palestinians facing violence, displacement, and destruction.

As of this writing, Israeli attacks on Gaza have killed tens of thousands of Palestinians.

Nearly all of Gaza's population has been forcibly displaced by Israeli actions that the International Court of Justice ruled may constitute genocide.

Israel's attacks on Gaza began after a Hamas attack that killed at least 1,200 Israelis, injured thousands more, and took an estimated 240 hostages. Thousands of Palestinians have also been taken captive by Israel.

AFSC mourns all who have been killed and calls for the peaceful release of all civilians held captive. As we have throughout our history, we stand in opposition to violence in all its forms.

Military responses have brought untold suffering and made the entire region less secure. Most protected areas and declared "safe zones" by the Israeli army—residential homes, schools, shelters, and hospitals—have been damaged or destroyed. AFSC's own Gaza office, which was a declared international safe space, was destroyed on the second day of Israeli bombing. Fortunately, our staff are alive, though all are mourning the deaths of numerous relatives and the destruction of their homes. They have also been forcibly displaced multiple times. Without access to clean water, food, shelter, health and emergency services, the people of Gaza face more death because of starvation and disease.

AFSC has worked in Palestine and Israel since 1948, delivering humanitarian assistance to Palestinian refugees and working to build conditions for peace. Together with the AFSC community, we have mobilized in vital ways in recent months—to deliver humanitarian aid and to push for U.S. policies that support lasting peace.

PROVIDING HUMANITARIAN RELIEF IN GAZA AND THE WEST BANK

Amid this escalating crisis, thousands of people have generously responded to our appeals for donations. As of Feb. 29, these funds had enabled us to deliver emergency relief to more than 250,605 people.

Our team has delivered drinking water, food parcels, meals, and hygiene kits to Palestinians living in tents, shelters, and on the streets. These efforts were made even more difficult as Israeli authorities tightly controlled all humanitarian aid entering Gaza. They have delayed deliveries by weeks and even months—restricting aid to only a fraction of what is required to meet the massive need.

Our staff in Gaza have coordinated closely with local, regional, and international partners to locate and deliver aid, primarily in Khan Younis, Deir El-Balah, and Rafah areas in the south of Gaza. They made extraordinary efforts to adapt to changing circumstances and help those most in need—despite having lost loved ones and being displaced themselves.

Beginning in January, AFSC and partners began serving hot meals from open-air kitchens to people sleeping outside of shelters, reaching about 2,000 people a day. We also worked with partners to host recreational activities to help thousands of children living through the war. In the West Bank, we assisted 192 Gazan patients who were forced to relocate, providing them with assistance for their medical needs, hot meals, and winter clothing and blankets.

We are also looking to the months and years ahead, preparing to support displaced people in meeting essential needs, healing from the traumas of war, and rebuilding their lives.

“The dire humanitarian situation in Gaza is unprecedented,” says Serena, program officer in Gaza. “Bombs, cold, and hunger are in every corner of the city. Our everyday has become only about survival. Being part of AFSC’s team working on the ground, next to and with our people, gives me—and them—so much hope. We’re grateful for the unwavering support of the AFSC community in making our efforts possible.”



(Top): AFSC efforts to provide drinking water to displaced people in Rafah. (Bottom): Children enjoying recreational activities organized by AFSC and partners. *Photos: AFSC/Gaza*

“Our everyday has become only about survival. Being part of AFSC’s team working on the ground, next to and with our people, gives me—and them—so much hope.” —SERENA, PROGRAM OFFICER IN GAZA

EXPOSING WAR PROFITEERS

Based on our Quaker beliefs, AFSC supports a full arms embargo on all parties in the conflict. Palestinian militant groups are already sanctioned. However, the U.S. government has transferred massive amounts of weapons to Israel since Oct. 7.

Within just the first month and a half, Israel received more than 15,000 bombs and 50,000 artillery shells, made by Boeing, General Dynamics, and other weapon manufacturers. These transfers were deliberately shrouded in secrecy to avoid public scrutiny and prevent Congress from exercising any meaningful oversight. AFSC has been tracking companies supplying these weapons. In December, we published a list of dozens that have benefited from human suffering and gross human rights violations.

“The scale of destruction and war crimes in Gaza would not be possible without massive weapon transfers from the U.S.,” says Noam Perry, strategic research coordinator for AFSC’s Action Center for Corporate Accountability. “As global resistance to war and apartheid grows, it is important that the public know exactly who is making this violence possible.”

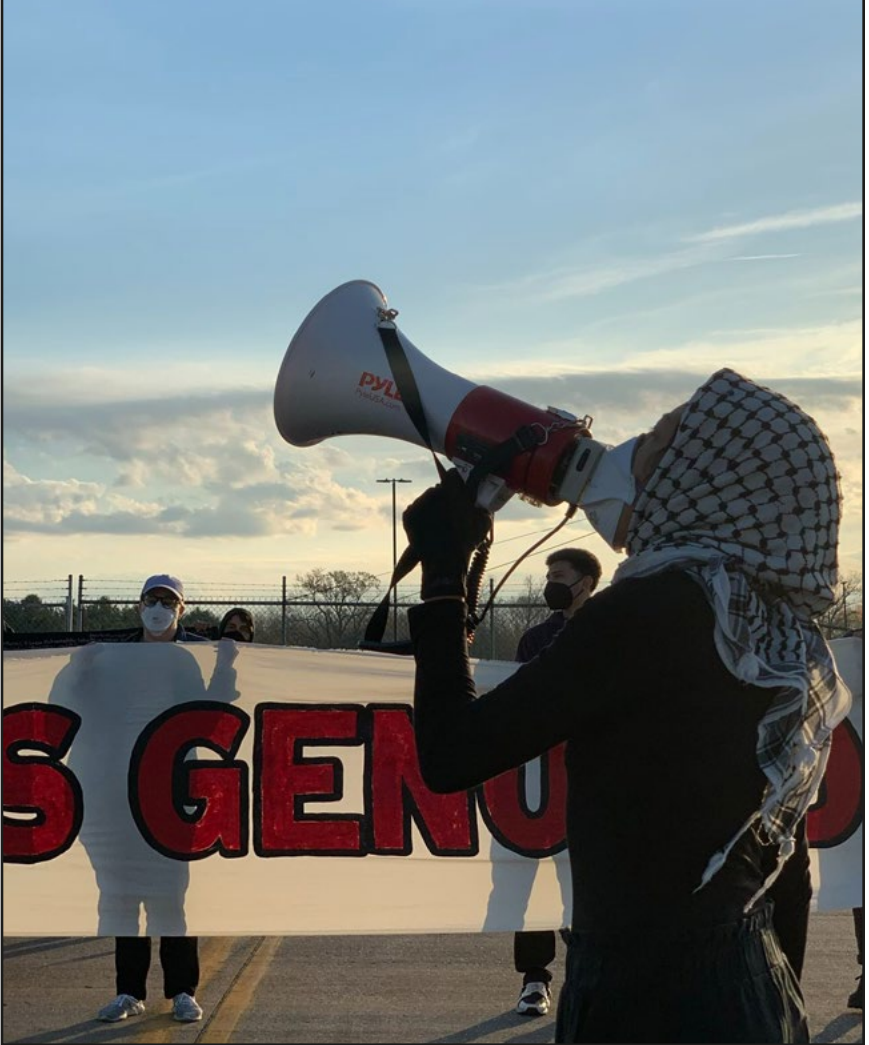
ORGANIZING AND ADVOCATING IN THE U.S.

To end this complicity, many people across the U.S. have been mobilizing with AFSC to call on Congress to demand a cease-fire and humanitarian access for Gaza. In late October, AFSC began hosting an online action hour every Friday. More than 3,600 people have registered to receive up-to-date information and tips for their advocacy. Participants have joined in writing and calling their elected officials, attending town halls, and sending letters to the editor. They also joined a national day of action, protests, and more.

Collectively, we have sent more than 200,000 letters to our representatives and senators.

“We are grateful to everyone who has stepped up to support Palestinians in this crisis,” says Jennifer Bing, director of AFSC’s U.S.-based Palestine Activism Program. ■

In St. Louis, community members protest at a Boeing facility to demand the company stop manufacturing weapons for the Israeli military. PHOTO: SARA BANNOURA



CALL FOR A JUST AND LASTING PEACE FOR PALESTINE AND ISRAEL

FIND RESOURCES AT:

[AFSC.ORG/GAZA](https://afsc.org/gaza)

DONATE TODAY ————— **AFSC.ORG/GIVE2GAZA**

(Top two photos) AFSC programs in Atlanta and (bottom) New Orleans. PHOTOS: ELLIOT LISS, AFSC/ATLANTA, PETER NAHKID.



The solidarity economy

In the U.S. and around the world, communities are exploring just, sustainable alternatives to capitalism.

Here's how you can get involved.

BY RICK WILSON

Working for economic justice often reminds me of the myth of Sisyphus, who was condemned by the gods to eternally roll a rock up a mountain only for it to roll back down again. Sometimes you can win lasting victories, defend past gains, or at least reduce the harm that would otherwise have been done. But engaging in similar struggles—like state and federal budget issues—over and over, however necessary, can get tiresome.

Fortunately, these struggles aren't the only option. We can also build positive

alternatives. The newish term for this approach is "solidarity economy," although examples of it are as old as humanity. The New Economy Coalition defines it as "a global movement to build a just and sustainable economy where we prioritize people and the planet over endless profit and growth."

Examples include Indigenous approaches to survival and sustainability, cooperatives, community land trusts, credit unions, peer lending, mutual aid, community-led economic development, barter, community-supported agriculture,

and fair trade products. Or the informal ways in which family, friends, and neighbors come together all the time to help each other.

Concrete example: I live on a dead-end one-lane country road. When a tree falls across it, the first one who is able to will bring the chainsaw. If someone has a wood stove, they catch a break. When bad weather hits, people check on each other. When a garden is abundant or chickens lay a lot of eggs or a hunter has good luck, these things are shared.

Think of solidarity economy as an alternative both to capitalism and to authoritarian state control. While some programs might produce goods for the market, the main goal is community benefits over private gain. Unlike authoritarian state models, bureaucracy is minimized, democracy is maximized, and pluralism is encouraged.

Because these initiatives aren't based on contesting for state power, they can sometimes thrive even in adverse political conditions. Probably the world's most successful example is the Mondragon system of cooperatives in Spain that was formed in Basque country after the victory of Franco's fascists. Today, Mondragon is a network of 95 separate and self-governing cooperatives that employ around 80,000 people.

Without necessarily using the term, AFSC has been engaged in solidarity economy work in the U.S. and around the world for over 100 years. This work began with distressed Appalachian coal communities in the 1920s and continues to this day.

Several U.S. AFSC programs demonstrate how solidarity economy looks in different places. Here are just a few examples:

The Atlanta Economic Justice Program recently helped organize a community land trust, which aims to promote affordable housing and avoid displacement and gentrification.

The Roots for Peace Program in Los Angeles and the Peace by Piece Program in New Orleans use community gardens to bring people together to meet basic needs, encourage learning, and organize for systemic change.

The New Hampshire Program works with networks of community groups to provide immigrants with hospitality, financial support, and community engagement.

In **West Virginia**, AFSC is part of a statewide Food for All coalition to improve food access while supporting local farms.

In addition to place-based efforts, AFSC is also building bridges with national and international solidarity economy coalitions to share our global experience and learn from partners around the world.

Maybe if these succeed, we won't have to push as many rocks up the hill. ■

Five guiding principles of the solidarity economy

(according to The U.S. Solidarity Economy Network*)

SOLIDARITY, COOPERATION, MUTUALISM.

EQUITY IN ALL DIMENSIONS.

PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY.

SUSTAINABILITY.

PLURALISM.

**The U.S. Solidarity Economy Network grew out of the U.S. Social Forum in 2007 and is affiliated with a larger international movement*

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

DE-COMMODIFY WHAT YOU CAN. Not everything has to be subject to money. Experiment with formal or informal mutual aid practices. These can include bartering; sharing time, resources, and skills; and receiving help yourself.

CONSIDER SELF-PROVISIONING. Are there things you can do, make, or grow for yourself and others? Possibilities include arts and crafts, music, gardening, preserving food, making beverages, raising chickens, do-it-yourself projects, and knitting.

THINK ABOUT WHERE YOUR MONEY GOES. Consider moving it from big predatory financial banks to credit unions or locally owned financial institutions. When possible, spend yours on locally and sustainably produced goods and services and fair-trade items. Buy from worker-friendly businesses.

SUPPORT COOPERATIVE OR ALTERNATIVE ENTERPRISES

—OR CONSIDER STARTING ONE. Community land trusts and similar efforts can be a way to preserve affordable housing and even support the local production of basic needs.

RESEARCH MORE POSSIBILITIES. There are a huge number of resources and organizations that can help you learn more and find a niche to support this growing movement. Check out the websites of the U.S. Solidarity Economy Network and RIPESS, the Intercontinental Social Solidarity Economy Network.

THE RIGHT TO WATER

Access to safe, clean, affordable water is a human right. Water is crucial to healthy ecosystems. It is also critical for building resilience to climate change.

But in the U.S. and around the world, people are denied this most basic of rights. Low-income people, communities of color, and Indigenous people are disproportionately impacted.

Here are some ways that communities are working to reclaim the right to water, with support from AFSC.



For years, AFSC's Wabanaki Program has supported community members in their struggle for water rights.
Photo: AFSC Wabanaki Program



"OUR COALITION IS WORKING HARD TO BRING PUBLIC AWARENESS AND BRING MORE PEOPLE INTO OUR CAMPAIGN, SO WE HAVE POWER IN NUMBERS TO WIN."

—Foluke Nunn, **ATLANTA COMMUNITY ORGANIZER**

MAINE

The people of the Passamaquoddy Tribe in Sipayik, Maine have not had safe drinking water in over 40 years. Community members live with brown liquid coming from their faucets. Some have gotten rashes from bathing and other unexplained health issues.

The tribe's water comes from Boyden's Lake. Because of sedimentation and fecal matter from birds, the local municipality treats the lake water with chlorine. But the process has resulted in dangerously high levels of trihalomethanes in the water. This potential carcinogen can cause problems with the liver, kidney, and central nervous system.

AFSC has a long history of accompanying the Wabanaki communities of Maine in their struggles for justice, including the Passamaquoddy people in Sipayik. Over the past two years, we have supported the tribal government's call for more authority over its own drinking water. In that time,

we also delivered thousands of bottles of water to a local food pantry and Boys & Girls Club. This has helped to relieve the financial burden for community members.

GEORGIA

Since 2014, residents in DeKalb County, Georgia have received outrageously high water bills—sometimes amounting to thousands of dollars. The county blamed faulty water meters. A moratorium was placed on water shutoffs while the county worked to address the issue.

Last year, the county lifted that moratorium, stating the problem had been resolved. But residents continued to get wildly inaccurate water bills. Since then, nearly 2,000 households have had their water shut off. What's more, some residents—tired of contesting these bills—said they were coerced into payment plans to

repay debts they didn't incur. Now some are unable to make those payments and risk losing their homes.

With support from AFSC, community members organized DeKalb Water Watch to stop this injustice. Our coalition is demanding the county reinstate the moratorium on shutoffs. We also want them to establish a clear process for people to dispute their bills and to cancel the debt of people forced into payment plans. Over the past year, we have started an online petition, held protests, and advocated with county commissioners.

"So many people in the county are dealing with this issue," says Foluke Nunn, community organizer with AFSC's Atlanta Economic Justice Program community organizer. "Our coalition is working hard to bring public awareness and bring more people into our campaign, so we have power in numbers to win."



NEW MEXICO

Acequias are communal irrigation canals that bring water from rivers to homes and farms. In New Mexico, acequias have long served as a lifeline in the desert climate. They nourish gardens, crops, and wildlife. They also support traditional, sustainable growing practices. The system is democratically controlled by community-elected commissions made up of irrigators. These are residents who own land along the acequias and thus have the right to use them.

But this water democracy faces big challenges. Developers put pressure on available water supplies by building golf courses and suburban sprawl. Climate change driven drought has made the water supply less reliable in some years. And underfunding from the state has made it difficult for communities to maintain these vital canals.

Since the 1970s, AFSC's New Mexico Program has supported communities in defending their right to water—and has coordinated events to celebrate the cultural and spiritual traditions honoring this vital resource. Recently, we assisted a group of

irrigators pursuing a court case seeking accountability for damage to an acequia. In New Mexico's South Valley, many people have been irrigating their properties for generations. Yet they may not have official papers documenting their right to use water from the acequia. AFSC is helping them navigate the complicated process of filing their declarations with the state. This gives them legal standing should a developer or others try to usurp those rights.

GUATEMALA

For generations, the Putul River was a source of life for the Ixil Mayan people in the highlands of Guatemala. It gave them much of what they needed—a thriving ecosystem, fish to eat, and sand and gravel to build houses.

That all changed in 2009 when a foreign corporation, ENEL, diverted the river to build a hydraulic dam. Today, the community no longer has fish to eat. Their wells, once filled with drinking water, now hold sand from construction. And hillsides have been flooded, drowning

maize, coffee, and other crops.

Over the years, the Ixil Mayan people have sought accountability and compensation from ENEL for the harm done. They have demanded meetings and organized protests. But the corporation has only met sporadically with community members. It has broken its promises to provide financial compensation, hydroelectric power from the dam, and materials to repair homes. And the government has sided with the corporation, even sending the military to quash community resistance.

Today, AFSC is helping community members strengthen their skills to advocate for their rights and freedoms. We are providing training on community organizing and advocacy to the Ixil people—and other Indigenous communities—in their efforts to stop the dispossession of their lands.

Because AFSC works internationally, we have also connected community leaders with others facing similar challenges to exchange knowledge and strengthen their strategies. Together, we will keep amplifying the story of the Ixil people until their rights are respected. ■

Working for climate justice in the Middle East and North Africa

Participants at an AFSC-sponsored gathering on climate justice plant trees in the Jordan Valley.
Photo: AFSC/Middle East



OVER THE PAST DECADE, we've seen a massive increase in climate-related crises. This has been especially true in the Middle East and North Africa, also known as the Arab or MENA region.

Although the Arab region contributes less than 5% of world greenhouse gas emissions, it is considered one of the most climate-vulnerable regions. Increasing temperatures, changes in precipitation, rising sea levels, and dwindling water supply could be catastrophic for a region already suffering from water scarcity.

But there is hope. Last year, AFSC brought together climate justice activists, academic experts, government officials, and civil society organizations in Amman, Jordan. The gathering was part of AFSC's Dialogue and Exchange Program, which provides a safe space for people to share their knowledge and experiences, learn from each other, and

collaborate on issues of peace and justice.

As civil society faces more restrictions from repressive governments, it has become even more important to provide such spaces for people to come together.

At the Amman gathering, participants represented Palestine, Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, Tunisia, and Morocco.

Each participant works on climate and environmental issues in a different way. But they share a common commitment to addressing climate change with innovative solutions while also advancing human rights and equity for all.



Connecting human rights and climate action

NEDAL KATBEH-BADER has played a key role in shaping Palestine’s climate policies. He served as the Minister’s Advisor for Climate Change at the Environment Quality Authority within the Palestinian Authority from 2010 until he retired in 2023. There he led national efforts to guide the region toward a more sustainable future.

Palestine, as part of the east Mediterranean, is a hotspot for climate change, seeing average temperature increases nearly double the global average. But mitigation as well as adaptation efforts face enormous obstacles under the Israeli occupation. This was true even before the escalation of violence in the region in recent months.

One glaring example is Israel’s control over all water resources. In illegal Israeli colonies in the West Bank, Jewish settlers have continuous access to water through Israel’s water grid. Palestinians do not. Their water is severely restricted, and taps can run dry for weeks. This deprives Palestinians of adequate water for drinking, sanitation, household needs, and growing food. The

Israeli government has systematically destroyed water cisterns and even restricts the collection of rainwater.

Throughout his career, Nedal has said that addressing climate change requires addressing the occupation and connected human rights violations. These issues initially found no place at high-level climate change talks, like the U.N. Climate Change Conference (COP). But that is changing, thanks largely to the younger generation of climate justice leaders who have pushed these issues to the forefront.

“When we’re talking about access to water, food security, and the minimum standards for dignity, you cannot disconnect this from basic human rights,” Nedal says.



Promoting cooperation among civil society and government

HAGER ELSAYED worries that her home—the port city of Alexandria, Egypt—may disappear because of rising sea levels, displacing millions of residents. She knows that hotter temperatures, air pollution, and other environmental factors have posed major public issues for her country, as well.

“Due to the high temperatures we face, I was affected negatively in my own health,” she says. Her personal experience compelled her to get involved in working for climate justice at the age of 21. She felt “it was my responsibility to take action because climate change affects our health, our livelihoods, and all aspects of our lives.”

In the three years since, Hager has worked for environmental organizations focused on climate change. She researched and authored a paper on the impacts of climate change on international migration. At COP28, she served as one of the first young negotiators with Egypt’s official delegation. Now, she is focused on climate finance—funding locally led initiatives to mitigate or adapt to a changing climate.

Hager is calling for more collaboration among civil society organizations and governments. “We need to learn how can we fill the gap between the civil society and government to have a comprehensive approach in our calling for climate justice,” she says. She says AFSC’s dialogue in Amman “helped us define the challenges and opportunities we face—and the means for civil society to integrate their voices in the government’s policy.”



Centering the real needs of communities

MARIAM AL JAAJAA heads the nonprofit organization Arab Group for the Protection of Nature (APN), which is dedicated to protecting the environment and the natural resources of Arab countries against all hazards, including war and foreign occupation. It also advocates for policies to promote food sovereignty.

Over decades, Israeli occupation forces have uprooted millions of olive and fruit trees from Palestinian farms, displacing Palestinians from their lands and depriving them of their source of livelihood. APN was founded in 2003 to replant those trees and ensure farmers remain rooted to the land. Since then, it has planted more than 2 million trees, working with over 30,000 farmers. The organization has also planted more than 200,000 trees in Jordan, bringing social, environmental, and economic value to rural communities that struggle with high rates of unemployment, poverty, and food insecurity.

Any actions to address climate change must be shaped by the communities they’re purporting to serve, Mariam says. She points to a recent foreign aid project in Jordan, where donors wanted civil society organizations to plant specific species of trees to offset carbon emissions—with the condition that these trees would not provide food to the communities or be productive in any way. APN refused to take part in the project.

“When you don’t dig deep on why different communities are impacted differently by climate change, you can implement climate change interventions that could actually make some people’s lives worse,” she says.



Building capacity for civil society members and organizations

NIDAL ATALLAH works for the Heinrich Böll Foundation’s Palestine & Jordan office, serving as coordinator of the Environmental Justice Program. The foundation carries out a range of activities with local partner organizations tackling environmental issues in the MENA region—facilitating debates, developing the capacity of civil society organizations, documenting environmental violations, coordinating awareness and advocacy campaigns, and supporting environmental journalism.

Nidal has seen how civil society members and organizations are beginning to make the connections between climate justice, human rights, and gender equality. Many aspire to develop their knowledge and capacity to engage in climate justice work both locally and globally.

To help fill this need, the Heinrich Böll Foundation provides training workshops for youth activists and other civil society members to explore these issues and get more involved in climate justice efforts. That includes trainings on how to take part in global climate negotiations. Through these workshops and other gatherings, members of civil society are also building a network to collectively advocate for environmental policies through a human rights and justice-based approach.

“We are working to reach this middle ground where you have a civil society that understands the scientific aspects of climate change and the technical aspect of negotiations, but is also fighting for justice, Indigenous rights, and so on. And are capable of building alliances globally,” Nidal says. ■



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