

## New Year. New You. New Wardrobe?

Do you like to start out your new year with a clean slate; out with the old, in with the new? Does that include your clothing? Have you been spending your holiday break cleaning out your closets and getting organized? If so, what are you going with the items that you no longer want? Of course, you are environmentally and socially conscious so you're not simply going to throw those items away. Donating them so that they end up in the hands of someone who needs them seems like the right thing to do, right? You are right. Donating your clothing items helps to keep them out of landfills where some 12 million tons of clothing ends up each year (only about 5% of donations end up landfills). But have you ever wondered what happens to your unsold donated items?

In January of 2021 UUMAN Earth Ministries member Terry Alexander brought this very topic to our attention. While many of us were at least vaguely familiar with the problem, we did not have a good understanding of the enormity of the issue. As we each began to research, learn more, and share our findings we became more and more alarmed. We learned that only about half of what is collected is deemed saleable and, of that, only about 50% of those items actually sell. After about 4 weeks on the sales floor, the leftovers are sold to "re-purposers" who then sell the items to East Africa.

While the East African countries do derive some benefit from our unwanted clothing and shoes (they are able to run small businesses reselling these items and clothe their own families), we are sending them far more than they can use. Additionally, because they have so much of our old clothing, their local fashion industry is depressed. In response, in 2015, East African countries tried to ban the practice of receiving our unwanted clothing, but our then President imposed pressure via import duties which caused the bans to fail.

Several of the Earth Ministry members (and a few non-Earth Ministry peeps) became very engaged in this issue and formed a new sub-ministry called Keepers of the Earth. Keepers of the Earth is a task force within the Earth Ministry that works to lessen the impact of textiles and clothing on the environment and to seek justice for textile workers in underdeveloped countries and for those living in third world countries whose lives suffer from the pollution of their lands from our castoffs.

Keepers of the Earth hosted a few events last year and we are optimistic about many more in 2022. We've shared videos and information, we made dog toys out of old t-shirts and beeswax wraps from unwanted reams of cloth. We attempted to host a clothing swap, but.....COVID. We have grand hopes of involving the youth in an upcycled fashion show – any volunteers to lead this charge?

If you're interested in learning more or participating in our group, please drop us a note at [earthministry@uuman.org](mailto:earthministry@uuman.org) or attend one of our meetings. We typically meet at 7pm on the first Monday of each month. In January we will be meeting on the second Monday.