

Report: Engaged learning between UIMF and Mountain Partnership NGOs

I was privileged, along with Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF) President Matthew Rands, to play the host for the morning's activities for Dr. Andrew Taber, Executive Director of The Mountain Institute, and Dr. Jed Schilling, member of the Board of Trustees of the same, two fine gentlemen who have worked to make a positive impact in our world and mountain nations in particular. The opportunity to meet and talk with these global leaders was humbling and enlightening. Beside the cordial conversation and genuine interest these men expressed in getting to know us, they shared personal experiences and wisdom to our benefit. They were invited by UIMF leaders to take part in brainstorming sessions at UVU with several local NGOs on October 2nd, 2017 on how to promote the cause of mountain communities and women at the United Nations and in particular during the 62nd session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, which student plan to attend in March 2018.



Morning meeting to discuss further cooperation between our organizations

Before the main even, the Roundtable of NGOs, I sat in attendance at an important information sharing and brainstorming session between these two gentlemen and Utah Valley University's (UVU) own Dr. Baldomero Lago, Chief Information Officer and Vice-Rector for Global Engagement, Honorary Consul of Spain to the state of Utah, and Dr. Baktybek Abdrisaev, former Ambassador of the Kyrgyz Republic to the US and Canada and lecturer in the Department of Political Science. They spoke of ways whereby UVU might contribute to the furtherance of the important goals of The Mountain Partnership, UVU, and the United Nations. I'm pleased to report that Dr. Lago has filed for UVU to be admitted as an associate member of the UN, the only university in the region which will hold such a position, and will be

coordinating a UN event, hosted by UVU, for 2019 in Salt Lake City with an anticipated 1500 NGOs and 5000 guests in attendance. Such an event will be an exceptional opportunity to raise awareness and garner support for our organizations and their shared goals and inspire others to take action as well. I believe this event will also greatly benefit UVU's reputation as a mature university which can offer students an opportunity to go beyond mere academic education. Additionally, an idea to organize a regional partnership of mountain states in the US as a potential avenue for further participation by governments where these particular issues have a direct impact was discussed by the participants, similarly to how several states have vowed to implement the Paris Climate Agreement, independent from national action.



Distinguished guests gave presentations during the Roundtable discussion

The Roundtable itself consisted of a series of presentations by each of our guests, which included an introduction to issues surrounding sustainable mountain development (SMD) and mountain women, ways in which advocacy is carried out and policy implemented, the importance of bilateral and multilateral relationships between our organizations, and the value of individual contributions and energetic engagement and pursuit of the common good. The two other participants who have not yet been introduced in this report were Dr. Rusty Butler, a representative of the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences, former Vice-President for International Affairs and Diplomacy at UVU, and Wendy Jyang, President of the Utah-China Friendship Improvement Sharing Hands Development and Commerce. Both of these NGOs have consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council.

After the Roundtable the participants shared a lunch with several students involved in the event, myself included. I sat with Dr. Taber and, between mouthfuls, ask him several questions relating to a subject of recent personal study, the cooperation between indigenous peoples and national governments in mountain development, my subjects being the Sami and Sweden. How to further indigenous land usage rights for semi-nomadic peoples while ensuring sustainable development, for instance, was an issue which we discussed.

The opportunity to have such experiences is fundamental to gaining an education which is centered on real-world application. The UIMF's continued organization of such events is an important vector for promoting SMD. I am extremely grateful to UVU for supporting students in hosting such events and to our distinguished guests for seeing the value in our education and participation in global affairs.

Derek Garfield, Vice President, UIMF