

UVU Students Advocate for Mountain Women at the United Nations

Students at Utah Valley University (UVU) hosted a round table of five experts on sustainable mountain development (SMD) issues on October 2nd, 2017. All of them were members of a coalition of student clubs; the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF).



Participants of the round table discussion at UVU

While Dr. Baldomero Lago represented UVU as the Vice-director for global engagement, four other dignitaries represented their non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which have consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). These dignitaries consisted of Dr. Andrew Taber and Dr. Jed Shilling from the Mountain Institute in Washington, D.C., Dr. Rusty Butler from the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences (RANS), and

Ms. Jyang from the Utah-China Friendship Improvement Sharing Hands, Development and Commerce (Utah-China F.I.S.H.&D.&C.) in Salt Lake City, Utah. During the roundtable discussion, VIP-guests brainstormed how to help UVU students advocate for causes to help the mountain women at the United Nations.

This issue is important for many of our students, who are involved in the student engaged learning initiative at UVU by advocating the gender and SMD agendas of the UN in Utah and North America. I was able to contribute to those activities when my peers and I hosted the fourth international Women of the Mountains Conference (WOMC) under the umbrella of the United Nations Mountain Partnership in October 2015. WOMC was successfully hosted by students, including myself. They were then praised by the United Nations Secretary General's report on SMD in 2016 as a contributors to the implementation of the UN sustainable development goals (SDGs). My activities at UVU then helped me to gain more professional portfolio and engaged learning experiences which I utilized during my internship last summer at the Office of the President Pro Tempore (Utah Senator Orrin Hatch) in Washington, D.C.

This time, I was glad to see how a new team of students continued our efforts and made preparations for the UIMF members' visit to the United Nations in March 2018, where they will report about results of the WOMC2015. Their contribution to the advocacy of the mountain women cause will be presented at an important gender-focused forum at the United Nations called the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW62). Therefore, as part of their preparations, they raised funds to gather a roundtable with experts and discussed how to work together on that goal during CSW62. I saw several familiar faces among VIP-guests, but was drawn to the presentation of Dr. Butler in particular.



Dr. Rusty Butler, the main representative of the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences at the United Nations

Dr. Rusty Butler was an Associate Vice President at UVU and head of the Utah-Russia Institute that existed previously at UVU. He contributed to our efforts during the WOMC in October 2015 by providing funds and mentoring when we needed it most. Now, he is the main representative at the UN of RANS. Rusty said that this is one of the most powerful councils within the UN. He joked that during several days, the UN would celebrate the International Day of Retired People, which was relevant to three panelists, including him. The RANS serves as a nonpolitical NGO. UVU joined the United Nations Mountain Partnership, which facilitates SMD agenda globally, in 2006 and has hosted four international Women of the Mountains Conferences. He referenced that students organized and conducted the 2015 conference, which earned them praise in the UN Secretary General's report on SMD. Dr. Butler also emphasized that the Permanent

Representative of Hungary to the UN (as a co-chair of the UN Open Working Group on SDGs) actually invited Jesler Molina, a UVU student to present at a session of the OWG in December 2013, and that he was the only higher education student represented there.

UVU and RANS, in partnership work at the UN, are currently advocating for multiple SDG's. In May of 2016, several prominent diplomats hosted an event in New York to celebrate the collaboration with UVU. This happened at the Hungarian residence in New York with participation of Permanent Representatives (PRs) to the UN from Hungary, Fiji, and Russia. The difference between Ambassadors accredited to the US and PRs to the UN is that former ones represent their nation at the United States and work through the State Department, and the latter ones represent their national interests at the United Nations.

I was impressed when, at the end of presentation, Dr. Butler stated without hesitation: “It is enough for old white people to talk at these events - we need more young people vocalizing this issue for the cause of mountain women.”

The engaged learning model that UVU and President Matthew Holland have encouraged is unique and has the potential to benefit the rest of the world - which the President of UVU presented with passion over the summer to the United Kingdom's Parliament during his fellowship at Oxford University. Ultimately, the round table hosted by students was a successful event: It was definitely an interesting discussion between the panelists and the audience.

Andre Jones, UVU Student, Ambassador, UVU Foundation