

Thanking Ambassador Bakhtiyor Ibragimov for advocacy of the mountain women



Ambassador Bakhtiyor Ibragimov (L) during meeting with students

On February 5th, 2018 Utah Valley University (UVU) students had the opportunity to learn about the great country of Uzbekistan when the UN ambassador from the country visited the University. As part of established tradition at UVU to provide students an opportunity to gain experiences, and networking skills by engaging in variety of activities with visiting dignitaries, Mr. Bakhtiyor Ibragimov spent time with selected group of UVU faculty and students from various clubs, associated in the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF) during a luncheon, and shared valuable insight into his road to becoming a UN ambassador. Serving as the UN ambassador from Uzbekistan is Mr. Ibragimov's fifth foreign affairs position in the Uzbek government. He spent time in both the United States and Korea as an employee of the Uzbek foreign ministry, who he has been with for many years. Mr. Ibragimov was very adamant about UVU building relationships with universities in Uzbekistan and hoped our university will entice more Uzbek students in the future. During lunch students and faculty also expressed appreciation to the VIP guest for co-sponsoring a side event advocating mountain woman during coming 62nd session of the United

Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW62) in New York on March 19, 2018. This was exciting news for UVU and an example of strengthening ties between the university and the Permanent Mission of Uzbekistan as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina, which became another co-sponsor of the side event at the UN highlighting the UVU model of student engaged learning.

After the lunch, Mr. Ibragimov conducted a lecture at the UVU Center for Global and Intercultural Engagement. Here are some of the main concepts Mr. Ibragimov discussed. Under their previous president, Uzbekistan was quite closed off and inward looking, developing frosty relations with all of its neighbors. Since the election of their new president in 2016, however, Uzbekistan has become more and more open to foreign interaction and is primed to become a powerhouse of Central Asia. Uzbekistan has begun flights from Tajikistan's capital, Dushanbe, to their capital of Tashkent. The opening of these flights is a signifier of improving relations with their neighbor because of their historically strained relations. Though the relations between these countries is far from friendly, it is a step in the right direction.

Uzbekistan is also nearing the final agreements on its border with Kyrgyzstan, which has been a sticking point between the countries for years. Currently, the two countries have demarcated 95 percent of their border. Finalizing this border will greatly improve relations between the two countries, and since Uzbekistan is looking to build strong relationships with its neighbors, a final resolution can be expected soon. Uzbekistan's sudden desire for cooperation under their new president is not irrationally planned. Uzbekistan is an extremely resource-rich country, and desires to build strong relationships with its neighboring countries to help bolster their economy. Uzbekistan currently has the strongest economy in Central Asia, and since its new president was elected, the country has increased its trade with Kyrgyzstan by 50 percent and its trade with Kazakhstan by 25 percent. These numbers are astounding, even from one year ago. At this rate, Uzbekistan is predicted to be one of the fastest-growing economies in the world, according to an HSBC survey.

One of newly elected Uzbekistan's President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's primary goals, is to facilitate lasting peace in Afghanistan. During the lecture the ambassador highlighted the plans, and progress made to achieve that goal. Since the 2016 election the governments of Uzbekistan and Afghanistan have worked together alongside the rest of the C5 + 1 (five Central Asia States, and the United States) to reach mutually desirable goals. As a result of these discussions, the Government of Uzbekistan will host a conference in March of 2018 titled "Afghanistan's path to a peaceful future". The conference will be an opportunity to discuss progress in Afghanistan, such as new transportation opportunities between Afghanistan and Central Asia. The conference also hopes to show to the global community that "it is high time to address the conflicts in that country [Afghanistan]".

The final point made by Ambassador Ibragimov was focused more on the culture of Uzbekistan. The country proudly touts its comparatively liberal religious tolerance in the region, with freedom to worship however citizens see fit. With a rich Islamic history, and a currently secular government, the country is a prime example of a successful separation of church and state within Islam. The Uzbekistan's President would like to encourage similar freedom elsewhere in

Central Asia and other predominantly Islamic states. To accomplish this the Government of Uzbekistan is in the process of putting together another convention to promote religious tolerance and harmony.

The meetings with the Ambassador Ibragimov were incredibly informative and brought Uzbekistan into a new light for the students involved. Uzbekistan's progress economically and on the global stage is exciting and will be watched closely by students at UVU. In addition to that, co-sponsorship of a UVU side event at CSW62 by Permanent Mission of Uzbekistan to the UN, highlighted a new step in our joint cooperation and partnership.

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