

The Importance and Power of Civil Society Discussion with Ms. Alison Smale, Under-Secretary-General, United Nations



On Friday March 29, students at UVU had the fantastic opportunity to be involved in an open discussion with Alison Smale, the Under-Secretary General for Global Communications at the U.N. Her visit to UVU was part of her visit to Utah in preparation for the upcoming U.N. conference to be held in August. UVU has played a major role in bringing this conference to Salt Lake and thus the students at UVU benefit greatly by being able to participate in events such as this discussion with Under-Secretary Smale.

Although a number of topics concerning the U.N.'s sustainability goals were discussed, I felt that the most prevalent topic of these was the importance of youth involvement. Such a topic is very relevant for the audience that was involved since most of us were young students and in a position where we have a great number of tools to help us advance that which we find important. Under-Secretary Smale made it clear that active voices are critical in advancing the goals of the

U.N. As she put it “the squeaky wheel gets the grease.” She made a good point when saying that when it comes to these topics we ought not to bring speeches but rather dialogues. Continual community involvement is key to progression. As current leaders age, it is vitally important that the younger generations become educated in engaged in such a way that when the time comes they can continue the missions of the U.N. and create and even better global environment for mankind.



Austin Meline with USG Alison Smale

After the event I was able to personally meet with Under-Secretary Smale and discuss further the topics of the day. In addition to meeting with Under-Secretary Smale I was able to have a conversation with Jeffrey Brez, Chief NGO Relations at the U.N. We discussed Utah's global mindset and the importance this plays for the state as it seeks to make a name for itself internationally. We talked about the importance of making sure that we should make having a greater number of international representatives at the August conference as possible a priority. As Under-Secretary Smale said, dialogues and community involvement is important. For Mr. Brez he did not want an atmosphere where only those in a strong sustainable environment were "looking back" at those in a weaker position "wondering how we can help them." He wanted, and I agree, to have everyone from all regions of the globe present, creating a diverse audience in attendance.

I am extremely grateful to UVU and all those involved, such as Dr. Lago, in bringing guests such as Under-Secretary Smale to UVU. Such opportunities only help broaden my understanding of current events and allows me to have face to face relations with those at the forefront of global progress.

Austin Meline, UVU student