

UIMF Workshop during 68th UN Civil Society Conference



UIMF members, Mr. William Gum and Ms. Viktoriia Bahrii hosting UIMF table during 68th United Nations Civil Society Conference in Salt Lake City

On August 28th, as a part of the 68th United Nations Civil Society Conference in Salt Lake City, the distinguished speakers, including a number of Utah Valley University students, talked about the sustainable mountain development agenda and the efforts of Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF) – a coalition of student clubs in UVU – in promotion of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The President of UIMF, Samuel Elzinga, was the moderator of the panel, where he started off by briefing the audience on the UIMF’s objectives and history of UIMF engagement with United Nations (including UIMF’s delegation participation in CSW62 and CSW63) by showing the video of UVU’s delegation speaking at UN’s High-Level Political Forum in 2018. He then proceeded to introduce Mr. Kurmanbek Dyikanbaev, Deputy Chief of Staff and Representative of the President to the Parliament of the Kyrgyz Republic. Mr. Dyikanbaev delivered the remarks of the President of Kyrgyzstan regarding the UN Civil Society Conference, and then proceeded to talk about hosting UVU’s delegation in Kyrgyzstan this summer, as well as gave credit to the Utah efforts in advocating mountainous issues. Finally, Mr. Dyikanbaev emphasized the importance of the mountain sustainability issue for Kyrgyzstan, so much so that Kyrgyz President declared 2018 the Year of Development of the Regions and 2019 the Year of Development and Digitization of the Regions.

Then, Professor Baktybek Abdrisaev – Former Kyrgyz Ambassador to United States, UVU Professor and coordinator of UIMF club, proceeded to talk about the student engaged learning (SEL) model which allows students to organize SDG-related events and contribute to sustainability cause without the direct reliance on academic faculty. Professor Abdrisaev also thanked Russian Academy of Natural Sciences for its assistance to UIMF, as well as talked about the student's contribution towards the Women of the Mountains Conference which took place in UVU in 2015. The next speaker, Dr. Sara Ulloa – UVU's Department Chair for Languages and Cultures Department – collaborated more on the UIMF's input towards the conference and praised student initiative, after that discussing other efforts of UVU towards the community support, in particular when it comes to women and children.



UIMF President, Mr. Samuel Elzinga, talking about UIMF engagement with UN

Next, UVU professor Dr. Alexander Stecker discussed the efforts of UVU's Political Science department towards sustainable development agenda, collaborating on the partnership of Utah Valley University with the International University of Kyrgyzstan. Alongside the previous speakers, he praised UVU's efforts in organization of Women of the Mountain Conference, in particular giving credit to all the women who contributed towards the conference.

Next speaker, Mr. Jesler Molina, UVU MBA Graduate and 1st president of UIMF, shared his experience of speaking at UN Open Group on SDGs as the first individual ever representing UIMF on such high level, as well as discussed the beginning steps UIMF and UVU took to engage with United Nations.

Following Mr. Molina, Mr. Michael Hinatsu, current Vice President of UIMF, briefed the audience on the challenges mountain communities face, as well as discussed how UIMF under SEL advocates for the inclusion of language on mountain targets in the final draft of CSWs document. Moreover it is worth pointing out that, as a result of this UN Civil Society Conference, UIMF-advocated mountain language for the 1st time ever was included in 68th UNCSC Outcome Document, which was made possible by the efforts of Utah International Mountain Forum, as well as number of dignitaries, representatives and civil society members who assisted to our organization in advocacy of mountain issues.

Another UIMF member, Mr. William Gum, praised UIMF efforts in advocacy of SDGs and talked about his experience of work with Utah State Legislature, addressing his research on the challenges of Indigenous Women of the Mountain Communities, emphasizing the extremely high levels of sexual assault non-white non-Hispanic women face and how this issue should be addressed under SDG 5 on Gender Equality.

Next, UIMF member and Editor-in-Chief of *Youth and the Mountains Journal*, Ms. Rebecca Bindraban, discussed student publications on mountain sustainable development and the scale of research done on the topic by UVU students over the years. Finally, Mr. Carlos Alarco, Associate Director of Global Academic Programming at UVU, talked about the participation of UVU in the global programs under the slogan “make global local” and how those programs under the SEL model contribute towards the development of the inclusive and sustainable communities.



Ms. Kofoed (at the center), UIMF members and distinguished speakers during workshop on Mountain Sustainable Development at 68th UN Civil Society Conference

Earlier that day, a number of UIMF members attended an official breakfast with Ms. Julie Garfieldt Kofoed, Senior Manager for Human Rights at United Nations Global Compact, who shared with us helpful recommendation on how UIMF can engage with the high-level UN officials and state’s representatives in order to make palpable contribution towards the mountain sustainable development under the umbrella of 2030’s UN SDGs agenda. Ms. Kofoed was very helpful in providing recommendations on the methods of establishments of cooperation with UN-related entities, as well as was delighted to answer my question on which states UIMF as organization should seek out in promotion of its mountain development goals, while pointing out what are the challenges of cooperation with 2nd and 3rd UN committee as separate entities which lack communication in their dealings on sustainable development issues.

Finally, during the 68th UN Civil Society Conference UIMF I had an amazing opportunity to host a UIMF booth, where I got to introduce the conference attendants with UIMF activities and agenda, as well as to promote awareness on mountain sustainable development issues under the umbrella of Sustainable Development Goals. On the personal level, I got a chance to engage with a number of civil society representatives and NGOs, including WomanStats and Model UN, who shared their personal contribution to the SDGs, as well as reflected on how their cooperation with UIMF can help to promote the joined goals of both entities. Besides, I also was fortunate to talk with a variety of current and former UIMF members, including the founding President of UIMF Mr. Jesler Molina, who elaborated on the opportunities UIMF members can receive in the future employment field, as well as talked about the take-aways of student engaged learning model as in regard to the expanded professional skillset, and more independence in the future employment. In the end, I enjoyed the process of networking with a variety of individuals and organizations (including productive dialog with Ms. Kofoed and WomanStats representatives), as well as learning about the inner dealings of UN and the ways we can promote our goals under the UN agenda.

Ms. Viktoriia Bahrii, Vice-President of Logistics, UIMF