

Utah's International Mountain Forum: 10 Years of Greatness



Samuel Elzinga, President of UIMF speaks during the event at UVU

I had the privilege of witnessing a celebration of one of Utah Valley Universities (UVU) most celebrated and influential coalition of clubs on December the 2nd, 2019. A gathering was held to discuss the past, present and future successes of this impactful collection of student organizations striving to make Utah and other mountainous communities around the world more successful. It was part of the International Mountain Day observation under the umbrella of the United Nations. I learned many things from the students and speakers gathered at this event, interesting commentators that brought along insight and praise for UIMF's philosophy and actions.

I had formerly only known a few things about UIMF, admittedly only having taken one class under the umbrella of 'Political Science' you could say I am a bit of a rookie regarding knowledge of the political climate in the present day. I'd never even heard the term, 'mountainous communities' before enrolling Dr. Baktybek D. Abdrisaev 'Comparative Politics' class. Much less that the state I had grown up in my whole life, Utah, was one of these communities. I also learned

about the club's goals and found myself aligning with nearly every single one. I had an opinion and a desire to better something I hadn't even known existed before coming to this 10-year celebration of this club's formation.



Samuel Elzinga presents certificate of appreciation of the United Nations Mountain Partnership to Dr. Rusty Butler, main representative of Russian Academy of Natural Sciences to the United Nations

I heard from many speakers that had a history with the organization, either as a direct associate of UIMF or from those that had worked with and seen the power and long-lasting effects of this institution. One story that stuck with me after I had heard Dr. Ross “Rusty” Butler recount was that of an Afghanistan born women that was well-educated, something all together unusual for a woman born in her country. She talked about 7 ways in which people from her community had suffered, notable that of poverty and education, emphasizing the gender disparities and inequality that existed for the women and girls she was representing. A story so prominent that you could almost hear her words coming from the mouth of a man reiterating. That’s what made this cause real to me, she was a real woman and there are countless of other voices not being heard in

communities that resemble my own. Only, here our voices can be microphones to their plights and encourage those in power to hear and help.

Another notable insight I gained from the observation of this event was that of the power of photo. Not only those photos of ambassadors that have visited UVU due to the draw and allure of the UIMF but also those of the people that have enriched our schools cultural reach by enlightening us with their stories. Pictures of women and children drawing up pathos clear as day to bring support to the cause paired with the notoriety of influential people from the UN and students from our very own UVU community representing us at the aforementioned organization.

I have learned more about these 'mountainous communities' due to this event. Bridging the gap between places like Utah and Iran with one simple fact- we are both apart of these communities and as members of this subgenres of civilization we must look out for one another. In Utah, we have a voice that could help those in developing mountainous communities and because of this it is our duty to use that voice and use it to broadcast those voices to the UN and other organizations like it.

Emily Burke, UVU student