

**RUSDEN SCOTT**  
**UIMF MEMBER**  
**ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES (OAS) STATEMENT**  
**THURSDAY, MARCH 3RD, 2022**

Good morning Mr Ambassador. My name is Rusden Scott, and I'm a student of political science and global politics at UVU, an environmental activist, and an artist whose work is in part inspired by the mountain landscapes of Utah. In addition to studying sustainable development in the context of Utah's mountains, I will be in India this fall conducting independent research on sustainable mountain development in the Himalayas, and will represent the Utah international mountain forum at the Integrated Mountain Initiative Summit in Ladakh.

It is my great honor to speak today on the promise and importance of student and community-led efforts in developing effective adaptation and mitigation strategies for the challenges presented by climate change to mountain communities globally.

Mountain environments are some of the most fragile and vulnerable in the world, but these areas are often overlooked despite already experiencing profound effects due to climate change, an existential crisis that threatens to plunge these ecosystems into catastrophe.

For example, Utah is home to the largest Hyper-saline Lake in the world. At three times the surface area of the Dead Sea, the Great Salt Lake is the largest inland body of water on the Pacific flyway, and its billions of brine shrimp are critical to many millions of migratory birds. In winter, the snowstorms caused by the lake effect create what we call the "Greatest Snow on Earth", fueling a \$1.4 billion ski industry.

But the Great Salt Lake is drying up, exposing vast tracts of lakebed, over 750 square miles so far. As it dries, it exposes dangerous arsenic deposits, which are released as dust into the air we breathe. The dust also settles on the mountains, melting snow faster and threatening mountain ecosystems and the tourism so vital to the local economy.

Issues of water conservation like the ones we face in Utah are practically ubiquitous to mountain communities globally. At UVU, we are taking a unique approach to addressing these challenges through our Student-engaged learning model, where students work collaboratively as a group to engage with these issues with a faculty member serving as a mentor.

As a non-traditional student, I returned to school later in life out of a desire to make a greater impact in the lives of underrepresented people across the globe. As part of the

model of student engaged learning employed at UVU, I have taken an active role in raising awareness of mountain issues, from local grassroots efforts to engaging with national and even international activities like our upcoming opportunity to present to the UN about issues facing women in mountain regions. Through the student engaged learning model, my fellow students and I--many of whom are also non-traditional students--have been encouraged and empowered, not only to take advantage of existing opportunities to create change, but to create our own opportunities.

When I saw the potential to conduct research in India and form connections to other sustainable mountain development organizations internationally, I designed an independent solo research project and took it to my faculty mentor, who pointed me in the right direction, and now the project is becoming a reality.

The battle to give a voice to mountain peoples requires the kind of student-led engagement that the model used by UVU fosters. It requires the active participation and education of students of all ages and backgrounds, whose value as researchers, activists, and community leaders cannot be understated; in the mountain deserts of Utah, in the high Andes of Peru, across the Americas and in every country in the world. Thank you.