

Tristen Smith
UVU Rotaract President
ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES (OAS) STATEMENT
THURSDAY, MARCH 3RD, 2022

Hello, Your Excellency. My name is Tristin Juarez-Smith. I am studying Global Politics and I am the President of the Utah Valley University Rotaract, a student club that works under the Orem-Lindon Rotary club, a chapter of the International Rotary Club. Through working with the Rotary Club, I hope to strengthen the voice of the mountain communities in Guatemala and Mexico, the two countries of my heritage.

The mountain communities, families, and women of Guatemala and Mexico are some of the most neglected and impoverished in the world. Currently, in Guatemala, they are suffering from emerging disasters due to climate change, in particular catastrophic crop failure over the past 7 years, leaving millions on the brink of starvation. In Mexico, climate change is exacerbating inequalities in employment, health and access to food and water, especially for women and girls within mountain regions. Moreover, not only do these communities often **face violence and oppression from drug cartels and crime**, but due to their isolation, these mountain regions often don't have access to political leaders nor an opportunity to voice their unique needs. Access to quality education, especially secondary education, is a rare commodity for many of these rural villages. Due to their geopolitical isolation and lack of funds, many children don't have access to education beyond the 5th grade. They must give up their schooling in order to assist in the survival and care of the family, or worse yet, some are forcibly **recruited into organized criminal groups**.

I am proud to come from a heritage that has fought for the rights to education for all ages. In the small town of Cunen, Guatemala, my grandfather, William Penrod, was able to establish a secondary school to provide education to the grades 7th through 12th. From **1971** to 2013, this school grew from 20 students and 5 teachers to over 200 students with over 40 teachers. Many of the students that have attended this school have come back to teach or take this opportunity to teach in other rural communities throughout Guatemala. Some were able to bring a voice to their communities by taking their education to fight for the rights of the mountain communities in their local and national government.

With my fellow Rotaractors, I would like to provide the same quality education I receive to these communities, especially the student engaged learning model, which empowers these rural students, especially women and girls, to take control of these challenges to provide a better living to these rural mountain communities. We would appreciate it if you could help connect us to the Ambassador of Guatemala to the OAS so we can reach out to educational institutions in the country who might benefit from this model and local Rotary clubs to help them mitigate these challenges.