

Tristin Juarez-Smith - Discussing Sustainable Mountain Development with His Excellency, Ambassador Harold Forsyth, Permanent Representative of Peru to the OAS

On March 3, 2022, myself and other students at Utah Valley University (UVU) had the privilege to meet and listen to His Excellency, Ambassador Harold Forsyth, Permanent Representative of Peru to the OAS.



Ambassador Harold Forsyth, Permanent Representative of Peru to the OAS during the meeting with UIMF members.

During a meeting with *Mr. Ambassador* and student delegates of Utah International Mountain Forum (UMIF), we presented the goals and topics we will be sharing at the 66th session of the Commission on the Status of Women on March 21, 2022, with His Excellency. Our student delegation encouraged the need to amplify the voices of mountain communities throughout the

world, especially women and youth voices in these mountain regions, and emphasized the need for sustainable mountain development around the world. Whether it be issues emerging from climate change, geopolitical isolation, or poverty, mountain communities share many of the same unique challenges. In hopes to encourage His Excellency to share the importance of sustainable mountain development and the need for amplifying mountain communities' voices with his colleagues in OAS, we highlighted and discussed unique challenges women and children face throughout the mountain regions of Latin and South America. Through these discussions, we illustrated how models in Utah have the potential to assist in providing successful sustainable mountain development to these areas.



Tristin Juarez-Smith speaks during the meeting with Ambassador Harold Forsyth

During our presentation, I had the opportunity to discuss the impact of quality education has on youth and women in the mountain communities of the two countries of my heritage, Mexico and Guatemala. Due to their communities' 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. Inspired by my grandparents, James Penrod and Aroua Juarez, establishment of a secondary school in Cunen, Guatemala, I shared my aspirations 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. I asked if His Excellency could help us connect with the OAS ambassadors of Guatemala and Mexico so we can reach out to educational institutions who might benefit from this model. As president of the UVU Rotaract, a student club that works under the Orem-Lindon Rotary club, a chapter of the International Rotary Club, I also expressed our appreciation of these connections to assist local Rotary clubs to help them alleviate the challenges they face.

After our presentation, *Mr. Ambassador* expressed his gratitude for us sharing and teaching him about sustainable mountain development. His Excellency expressed how did not know much about sustainable mountain development, yet immediately saw the need as most of the countries in the OAS are mountain communities. He discussed his desire to begin a new core chapter in the OAS centered around mountain development. He told us that he was more than willing to connect us with the OAS ambassadors of Guatemala and Mexico, along with the ambassador of Columbia, and his hope to have these countries as founding members, along with Peru, of this new chapter in the OAS. I look forward to reconnecting with *Mr. Ambassador* in the future as he uses our models

to help create a future core chapter in the OAS, along with him connecting us to the ambassadors of Guatemala and Mexico.



Tristin Juarez-Smith with Ambassador Harold Forsyth

This opportunity to discuss these topics and goals with ***Mr. Ambassador*** and learn more about the OAS and role in international relations throughout the western hemisphere, is just one way I have been able to utilize UVU's Student Engaged Learning model and create real, impactful

change in mountain communities. Fellow students and I were able to inspire someone who has influence on a global level to bring forth changes to help mountain communities throughout the world. Therefore, I hope to share the UVU's Student Engaged Learning model with other educational institutions in Guatemala and Mexico. The impact their students can have on their communities and countries when given the chance is immense. I look forward to sharing our findings of this model and other sustainable mountain development models in the future.

Tristin Juarez-Smith, Rotaract President and UIMF Member.