

Dr. Rusty Butler
Mountain Partnership focal point at Utah Valley University (2006-2016),
The Honorary Professor of the Kyrgyz National State University
67th session of the Commission on the Status of Women
Side event
“Advocating for mountain women and girls’ education through student-engaged learning.”
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Today is International Women’s Day and the 4th anniversary of the passing of my wife, Dr. Danielle Butler. This statement is in her honor.

I thank the Permanent Representative of the Kyrgyz Republic to the UN, Ambassador Aida Kasymalieva and my long-time friend Rosalaura Romeo, from the Mountain Partnership (MP) for inviting me to speak today. I wish to highlight my strong ties with both the Kyrgyz Republic and the MP, which we started in 1999, when we hosted Ambassador Baktybek Abdrisaev at Utah Valley University (UVU). My late wife and I were pleased to visit Kyrgyzstan in 2003 to celebrate the 2200 anniversary of its statehood in the company of Utah Governor Olene Walker and her husband. We also hosted the President of Kyrgyzstan to a visit in Utah in 2004. My late wife, Dr. Danielle Butler served as the Honorary Consul General of the Kyrgyz Republic in Utah from 2003 to 2011. She was supported in her activities by Dr. Cholpon Akmatalieva, who has a PhD in gender studies from the Moscow State University. Cholpon is with us here today.

Since 2005, when Dr. Baktybek Abdrisaev joined the UVU faculty, our university has partnered with the International University of Kyrgyzstan (IUK). In 2006, UVU also joined the MP. While we have observed December 11th as International Mountain Day (IMD) every year since 2010, in 2012 we celebrated it in Kyrgyzstan by hosting a “mountains and climate conference.” In 2018 and 2019, two of our students spoke at the IMD hosted by the Kyrgyz Mission to the UN.

When UVU and IUK co-hosted the International Women of the Mountains Conferences (WOMC) in Orem, UT in March 2007, they had strong support from the MP. My wife was one of the Honorary Co-Chairs of the conference together with Utah Governor Walker and Montana Governor Judy Martz. The 2007 WOMC was highlighted in the United Nations Secretary General's (UNSG) report on SMD as a forum facilitating “...creation of a regional network on gender and SMD.” The Fourth WOMC was held in Utah, in October 2015, with UVU students planning and implementing it over four semesters. Due to continued support from the MP, UNSG’s report on SMD [A/71/256] on 29 July 2016 highlighted our students in hosting WOMC. At the same time, our students, together with peers from Osh and Bishkek, gathered more than 1,500 signatures of the required 5,000 for a petition to include mountain issues in the agenda of the UN Climate Change Conference (COP21) in Paris.

During 2009, we held conferences in Utah, Washington, D.C., and Bishkek entitled "Traditions of Rule of Law, Good Governance and Consultative Government in the Turkic World." This allowed our students to explore governance traditions in Turkic-speaking regions including Kyrgyzstan as laid out in a famous 11th century manuscript titled "Wisdom of Royal Glory (Kutadgu Bilig)." As part of the conference activities, we reprinted its English translation, originally published by the University of Chicago Press in 1983.

Today we again jointly advocate for mountain women as we have since 2018 at every session of the Commission on the Status of Women.