

**Statement**  
**Dastan Abikov**  
**President**  
**Sustainable Mountain Development Foundation**

**68th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women**  
***“Empowering Mountain Women Economically Through an Inclusive Student-Engaged Learning”***  
**Parallel Event**  
**March 20, 2024**

Dear participants of the 68th UN Commission on the Status of Women, dear President of the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), a coalition of clubs at Utah Valley University (UVU), Stephan Atkinson. My name is Dastan Abikov and I am the President of the Sustainable Mountain Development Foundation and ex-President of the Rotaract Nomad Club of Bishkek. It is an honor to address you today and I thank the UIMF for allowing me to speak during this parallel event in support of women and girls from mountain communities.

A significant problem that many girls around the world especially in the mountain areas face is the inaccessibility to education. These communities should be included in the final resolution of the current session of the Commission on the Status of Women due to the many challenges to achieving sustainable development.

In February 2023, I had the privilege of visiting mountainous Utah with the Ambassador of the Kyrgyz Republic to the United States, Baktybek Amanbaev, and met with UIMF members for the first time. It was a pleasure to work with you through a Student-Engaged Learning (SEL) model and speak at the 2023 UVU's International Mountain Day Observation as well as the World Polio Day Celebration. This allowed me to get connected with you all and the local community in Utah County on important issues for all of us as mountain people. I've also been involved in discussions of our businessman from the IT industry with Utah Silicon Slopes businesses last September and I was happy to see the relationship between the Kyrgyz Republic and Utah strengthening in various ways.

We are excited to participate in establishing Rotaract and Rotary Clubs in Osh, the southern capital of the Kyrgyz Republic, to advocate jointly for the sustainable development of our mountain communities. I am encouraged by the longstanding partnership between UVU and Osh Technological University. As an entrepreneur and a representative of my generation, I have been inspired by the development and opportunities in Utah. This inspiration led me to establish the Sustainable Mountain Development Foundation. Through this foundation, we aim to empower youth, foster education and connections, and promote self-sustainability within communities not only in the Kyrgyz Republic but also in Utah.

I am hopeful for collaboration with Honorable Congressman Joe Pitts, with whom I spoke during IMD 2023, and who has been advocating for the relationship between the Kyrgyz Republic and United States for over 30 years. With the establishment of the Joe Pitts Center for Public Policy at

Asbury University in Kentucky, I hope that we can partner in promoting sustainable mountain development with communities from the Appalachian Mountains.

I am confident that our growing trilateral partnership between UVU, Asbury University, and academic institutions in Kyrgyzstan based in the SEL will make a difference not only for our communities but also for the rest of the mountain world. Thank you for your time and attention!