

**Dr. Rusty Butler**

**68th session of the Commission on the Status of Women**

**Parallel event**

**“Advocating for mountain women and girls’ education through student-engaged learning.”**

**March 8, 2023**

Dear colleagues: My name is Rusty Butler, retired associate vice president of Utah Valley University (UVU), serving from 1992 to 2016. Also, I was the first Mountain Partnership focal point at UVU from 2006 to 2016. Thanks to an inclusive Student-Engaged Learning, or SEL model, I voice my strong support for the families and women who live in the mountain regions of the state of Utah and globally.

I congratulate my dear long-time friend, Dr. Baktybek Abdrisaev for developing the SEL model and integrating it into this class on United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. It encourages both traditional and non-traditional students to work together to resolve existing problems among local mountain communities under the mentorship of faculty members. I personally do this as a non-traditional student and lifelong learner enrolled in the class.

It was my special pleasure to contribute to the development of the SEL model in my previous official capacity. I wish to highlight my strong ties with both the Kyrgyz Republic and the MP, which started in 1999 when we hosted Ambassador Baktybek Abdrisaev with his wife Cholpon Akmatalieva at Utah Valley University. I was supported in my efforts by my late wife Danielle Butler who was also the Honorary Council of the Kyrgyz Republic to the State of Utah from 2003 to 2011.

Since 2005, when Dr. Baktybek Abdrisaev joined the UVU faculty, our university has partnered with the International University of Kyrgyzstan (IUK) and Osh Technological University. With them, we have jointly observed December 11th as International Mountain Day (IMD) every year since 2010; and in 2012 we celebrated it in Kyrgyzstan by hosting a “mountains and climate” conference.

UVU and IUK also co-hosted the International Women of the Mountains Conferences (WOMC) in 2007, 2011, 2013, and 2016 as forums to promote the gender agenda in North America and beyond. The Fourth WOMC was held in Utah, with UVU students organizing and hosting it through SEL. The 2016 UNSG’s report on SMD highlighted our students’ success in hosting WOMC.

Since 2018 it has been a tradition for students from UVU and the Kyrgyz Republic to contribute to the agenda of the sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women. Today we again jointly advocate for mountain women at CSW68. I am pleased to continue my efforts and contributions to this noble cause.

Thank you.