

STATEMENT
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69th session of the Commission on the Status of Women
Side Event
The Kyrgyz Republic – State of Utah advocacy to empower mountain women and girls through ethically good student-centric education
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Good morning, ladies and gentlemen,

I thank the Honorable Aida Kasymalieva for hosting today's side event about **the** partnership between the Kyrgyz Republic and the State of Utah to empower mountain women through education. It is also my pleasure and honor to speak along with other distinguished panelists, who **have** made their own invaluable contributions on this issue.

In 1999, I visited **the** State of Utah **for the first time** as a top envoy of the Kyrgyz Republic to the United States. Since that time, our team **has** strived to build relationships with **the** State of Utah which **shares** similarities with the Kyrgyz Republic, such as being a landlocked mountainous state with almost same **size** of population and territory. It also became an opportunity for us to pursue a policy of **paradiplomacy**, or the involvement of non-central governments in international relations. A partnership with **the** State of Utah combined bilateral activities with sustainable mountain development (SMD) initiatives, which are related to -multilateral diplomacy.

Official exchanges included visits **by** Askar Aimatov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic to the State of Utah and **the** appointment of Danielle Butler as the Honorary **consul** of the Kyrgyz Republic to the **State** of Utah in 2003. The visit of the Governor of the State of Utah, Olene Walker, to the Kyrgyz Republic took place in June 2003.

The visit of Askar Akaev, President of the Kyrgyz Republic, to Utah in September 2004 was focused on building bilateral ties with **a** focus on SMD as a follow up to the observations of the International Year of Mountains in 2002. The Kyrgyz Republic was one of the co-sponsors of the UN resolution on this matter. **Similarly**, President **Askar Akaev** visited **the** state of Montana in December 2003.

The change of regime in 2005 in the Kyrgyz Republic transformed relations between two sides from official exchanges to a partnership spearheaded by Utah Valley University (UVU) and the International University of Kyrgyzstan (IUK). One of the factors in this development was an invitation for me to teach at UVU after the end of my diplomatic career.

This allowed for UVU faculty and students to gain skills through the involvement in paradiplomacy. UVU hosted Ambassadors of the Kyrgyz Republic to the USA and to the UN; facilitated exchanges between the Utah State Legislature and the Jogorku Kenesh (Parliament) of the Kyrgyz Republic. The Open World program of the U.S. Library of Congress brought delegations from the Kyrgyz Republic to Utah to learn its SMD experiences.

In 2006, UVU became the first North American university to join the UN Mountain Partnership, which coordinates the SMD implementation globally. As its main contribution to the MP activities, UVU decided to host jointly with IUK the Women of the Mountains conferences. The first WOMC was hosted in March 2007 at the UVU campus. It was featured in the United Nations Secretary Generals (UMSG) reports on SMD in 2007 and 2009 as a regional gender-focused academic forum, creating a network between Central Asia and the Rocky Mountain States.

The second WOMC was hosted by UVU with IUK in Utah in 2011 with UVU students' involvement. Many of them were non-traditional students, who are older than 25 and combine education with work and family duties. Encouraged by the successful hosting WOMC, students created the Utah International Mountain Forum, a coalition of student clubs at UVU to pursue SMD implementation as a student-centric approach.

The third WOMC was co-hosted by a joint Kyrgyz-Utah team in Puno, Peru in 2012. It was featured in the 2013 UNSG report on SMD. It also became a contribution to the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (RIO+20).

The 2015 WOMC was hosted by the UIMF members through the student-engaged-learning (SEL) model. SEL encourages students to work as a group on resolving certain problem faced by the mountain community with their teacher mentoring them. For the first time, the 2016 UNSG report on SMD highlighted the UIMF instead of UVU for hosting the conference and adopting its final document.

Since 2017, UIMF has advocated for mountain women at the sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). The 2019 UNSG report on SMD featured UIMF advocacy for mountain women at the 2018 session of the CSW. The 2022 UNSG report on SMD featured SEL and the role of non-traditional students in it.

During CSW67, CSW68 and CSW69, UIMF members alongside students from Osh Technological University have continued their efforts to advocate for mountain women and ensure that appropriate language is included in the final document of any of those sessions. On October 24, 2024, UIMF members hosted Ambassador Michelle Sison, Assistant Secretary of State for International Organizations, at UVU. The VIP-guest praised students for their advocacy campaign at CSW67, recognizing the professionalism of the UVU students and effectiveness of the developed SEL model.

Our most recent academic paper has proven that the developed inclusive SEL model provides students necessary skills to be prepared for the Fourth Industrial Revolution. A partnership between UIMF and OshTU serves as a case study for this.

One of the important conclusions of our study is the need to maintain an inclusivity in educational programs to ensure the involvement of non-traditional students. Many learners in this category are educationally and financially disadvantaged, and such an attitude will create an ethically and socially good environment for all learners in line with the implementation of the SDG4.