

STATEMENT
Her Excellency Aida Kasymalieva,
Permanent Representative of the Kyrgyz Republic to the United Nations
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”
March 11, 2025

Good morning, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentleman. I welcome you all to our side event about the partnership established between the Kyrgyz Republic and the State of Utah allowing us to advocate for the sustainable mountain development and gender equality through the educational initiatives focusing on students.

Kyrgyzstan, as a mountainous country, has been advocating for the needs and interests of mountain countries. Our country was among the main co-sponsors of the United Nations resolution in 1998 to observe 2002 as the International Year of Mountains (IYM). In 2002 Kyrgyzstan hosted the First Global Mountain Summit that adopted an outcome document known as Bishkek Mountain Platform.

When I visited the State of Utah in 2023, I felt at home, seeing the magnificent mountains as part of a Wasatch Front. Forty-five percent of Utah is covered by mountain ranges, with a mean elevation of 6,100 feet, the third highest in the U.S. Mountain ranges dominate over 90% of my native Kyrgyzstan, with almost 35 percent of its territory higher than 9,842 feet. Therefore, since 1999, both sides have built special ties with each other as mountain communities.

Why are mountains important for world communities? As per the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Thirteen percent of the world's population lives in the mountains, which is 915 million - and 1 in 3 of which are food insecure. Mountains host 25% of the world's biodiversity on land and are the water towers of the world. This water is also vital in the production of hydropower. Today, climate change has placed mountain regions in a particularly vulnerable position. Mountain glaciers are rapidly melting, water resources are decreasing.

Kyrgyzstan keeps the interests of all mountain countries high on a global agenda. The declaration by the General Assembly 2023-2027 as a Five Years of Action for the Development of Mountain Regions to foster broader and inclusive international cooperation was initiated by Kyrgyz Republic. It invites the international community to enhance the awareness of the problems faced by mountain countries and to give new impetus to international efforts to address these challenges.

We value the contribution in this endeavor of the UVU History and Political Science Department, the UVU College of Humanities and Social Sciences, the UVU Office for Global Engagement in addition to the Utah Rotary District, and the Orem-Lindon Rotary Club. UVU was the first academic institution in North America to join a United Nations Mountain Partnership (MP) in 2006. This happened because of the partnership established between the UVU and the International University of Kyrgyzstan (IUK) in Bishkek to advocate jointly for sustainable mountain development (SMD) elsewhere.

UVU jointly with IUK and Osh Technological University hosted international Women of the Mountains Conferences (WOMC) under the umbrella of the MP in 2007. It was highlighted by the United Nations Secretary General's (UNSG) reports on SMD 2007 and 2009 for promoting gender agenda and building regional networks between Central Asia and Rocky Mountain states.

Since 2011, students advocate for Sustainable Mountain Development thanks to the inclusive student-engaged learning (SEL) model. SEL encourages both traditional and non-traditional students to jointly solve mountain communities problems with their teachers mentoring them. Non-traditional students are older than 25 years, and balance education with family and job duties.

Since 2011, the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), a coalition of student clubs at UVU has been a core of the model. Since then, a joint team has observed annually the UN International Mountain Days on December 11th in the State of Utah, in the Kyrgyz Republic and at the UN. In October 2015, 70 UVU students successfully hosted the fourth international WOMC in Orem, UT. The UNSG report on SMD 2016 praised the UIMF for hosting the conference and adopting its final document. Two sides advocated for the adoption of three targets at the Open Working Group during 2013-2015. President of the General Assembly, Ambassador Csaba Korosi told me how he was pleased to work with UVU students at that time.

Our Permanent Mission contributed to the model by making side events during the 67th, 68th and the ongoing 69th sessions of the sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) as service-learning activities integrated in the curriculum. During the events, students through SEL act as entry-level diplomats and report about their services to local communities.

The CSW67 side event composed of 17 presenters was moderated by Alitha Thompson, a non-traditional student. The CSW68 side event composed of 16 presenters was moderated by two non-traditional students from the Kyrgyz Republic and from UVU. Current event is moderated by Janessa-Michelle Purcell, who is also a non-traditional student and UIMF President. All of this is evidence of student-centric and student-driven features of the developed educational initiatives.

This model has demonstrated students as full-fledged contributors to the Five Years of Action for the Development of Mountain Regions. It implements the SDG 4 requirement to

ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. It could be a good contribution to the Second Global Mountain Summit in 2027.

Thank you for your attention.