

STATEMENT

Dr. Alexander Stecker

Utah Valley University

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

It is my pleasure and privilege to speak at this Side Event dedicated to the partnership between the Kyrgyz Republic and State of Utah in education. I thank the Honorable Aida Kasymalieva for hosting this event and inviting us to contribute to it.

For me as a political science coordinator at Utah Valley University in 2005 it was an opportunity to engage our faculty and students in emerging partnership between UVU and International University of Kyrgyzstan with focus on mountain development. It has happened because of the appearance in our department as a faculty of Dr. Baktybek Abdrisaev after the end of his tenure as the Ambassador of the Kyrgyz Republic to the United States and Canada. He was invited to teach to UVU by Dr. Rusty Butler, Associate VP for International Affairs and Diplomacy at UVU and it was my responsibility to find a position for him in our department.

This was a time of our close partnership with the International University of Kyrgyzstan, led by Dr. Aidaraliev. Similarly, our department worked closely with the Office of International Affairs and Diplomacy led by Rusty Butler. All of us were very eager to enrich each other by our experiences and practices of assisting local mountain communities to improve their livelihoods.

We proudly hosted International Conferences about different aspects of lives of women and families in the State of Utah and globally, including in the Kyrgyz Republic. We hosted three such conferences under the umbrella of the United Nations Mountain Partnership. The first one was hosted in 2007 at our campus in Orem. I remember its success in bringing to Utah experts and officials from more than 20 mountain states and almost all Rocky Mountain States as well. We were proud also to have a Kyrgyz dwelling Yurt to be assembled in the middle of our campus.

One of the Women of the Mountains conferences our faculty and students hosted in Puno, Peru in 2012 and it was done jointly with our colleagues from the International University of Kyrgyzstan. The 2015 conference Women of the Mountains was hosted by UVU students through a student-engaged learning model. This was a UVU's signature model engaging students in group effort to solve certain practical problem for local communities when their teacher mentors them. More than 70 students and majority of them from our department contributed to this initiative by working on its logistics, agenda, protocol during 4 semesters.

Dr. Rusty Butler said already about visits exchanges on a high level. I have to say that the main beneficiaries from such exchanges were our students, who hosted through student-engaged learning Ambassadors, members of the Kyrgyz Parliament, scholars, and many others. Our department contributed its own part in this effort.

The important part of our partnership was the involvement of local communities in our joint projects. Orem Public Library became a headquarters for them. We jointly celebrated International Mountain Days with inviting mayors of Orem City and elected officials. The

Library also successfully hosted the Kyrgyz Folk Group “Kut” in 2009 during their tour to several state of the Rocky Mountains.

I was glad to greet Ambassador Baktybek Amanbaev during his visit to UVU in February 2023 and Ambassador Kasymalieva in December 2023. And I am so glad to be with you all today when we are jointly celebrating our 20th anniversary of the partnership.

Thank you very much.