

Statement
Janessa-Michelle Purcell
President of the Utah International Mountain Forum
69th session of the Commission on the Status of Women
Parallel Event
“Advocating for Mountain Women and Girls’ Education Through
Student-Engaged Learning.”
March 10, 2025

Aloha and Good morning. My name is Janessa- Michelle Purcell, and I am the President of Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), a coalition of student clubs at Utah Valley University. I have the wonderful privilege to moderate this panel titled “An Inclusive Student-Engaged Learning Model to Empower Mountain Women and Girls” I want to emphasize that women and girls play an important and strategic role in conservation, sustainability, and education initiatives and in this manner they must participate in the decision making process. I must reiterate, that in investing in the women and girls of the mountains, we are investing in future generations to come.

I express gratitude to the NGO CSW69 Forum for allowing us through the Student Engaged Learning (SEL) model to advocate for mountain women and girls, who must be included in the focus of this historic session in revising the implementation of the Beijing Declaration.

The SEL model encourages students to work as a group on resolving the practical issue affecting mountain communities with teachers mentoring them in achieving this task. SEL will be heavily demonstrated through today’s event, as we are hosting it as part of our “Globalization and Sustainable Development” class. As UIMF President, I have held the responsibility in assisting in the teaching of this class with our mentors Dr. Baktybek Abdrisaev, and Ambassador Aida Kasymalieva, Permanent Representative of the Kyrgyz Republic to the United Nations. It is based on the textbook “Understanding Sustainable Development,” by John Blewitt. So class, don’t mess this up. Today we will highlight UVU’s inclusive student-centric and student-led learning initiatives to address mountain communities and women issues under faculty guidance. In successfully hosting this event, we will ensure we have passed our midterm examination for this course.

Since 2011, in collaboration with our peers from the Kyrgyz Republic, we have been advocating for sustainable development for mountain communities in the state of Utah and globally. I have developed close ties in advocating for Sustainable Mountain Development with Rotaractors from Bishkek, and students from Osh Technological University, in the Kyrgyz Republic. This has helped me recognize the importance of proactive sustainable development.

In August 2023, Lahaina Maui was ravaged by wildfires that began because of a broken power line, originally thought to have been contained. Lahaina was once a wetland but as tourism increased, water was diverted for hotels, golf courses and other tourist attractions, leaving Lahaina dry and susceptible to fires. I relate this to the biggest contributing factors of the Appalachians flooding, caused by Hurricane Helene, which was incited because of the region's long history of strip mining that created a thinner soil that is not absorbing moisture from storms due to climate change. The neglected infrastructure is causing more and more climate problems impacting families, women, and girls. Improving these structures are not only imperative but necessary as the livelihoods of local communities depend on it. Just as I have been taught in Polynesian culture to prioritize the maintenance and care of the land that takes care of us and our families, I encourage us all to play a more active role within our own communities to bring about these essential changes.

We were proud to have hosted Ambassador Michelle Sison, Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization, at UVU on October 24, 2024, who recognized our coalition's efforts in advocating for mountain women at the 67th session of the Commission on the Status of Women. We have proudly served our local communities through activities such as: cleaning the Provo River Delta, volunteering at the Conservative Climate Summit hosted by Congressman John Curtis, organizing hygiene kits for the houseless community in Salt Lake and participating in a variety of fundraisers to support initiatives that would benefit the local community of Orem in partnership with the Orem- Lindon Rotary Clubs.

I would like to thank the College of Humanities & Social Science at UVU, Dr Jay DeSart, the chair for the History & Political Science Department at UVU, Tanicca Armstrong, our amazing admin, the Orem-Lindon Rotary Club, the Hope4Orem organization and, our mentor Dr Baktybek Abdrisaev for their unwavering support, without them this trip and event would not be possible.

I thank the speakers for presenting within the 4 minute time limit. At the end of the presentations, we will have a Q&A session. We ask that you please raise your hand if you have a question, and a microphone will be provided for you. We will also appreciate questions to be submitted via chat from the online audience.

Thank you!