

# Tony Medina's Enduring Impact Through Student-Engaged Learning at the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF)

## Fostering Leadership and Global Engagement through Experiential Learning

*By Louyoko Nianza Christ Hermes, Student in Political Science at UVU and Rotaract based in Utah /USA*

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For several years, Tony Medina has been a valued supporter and collaborator of the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), a coalition of student clubs at Utah Valley University (UVU). Through his participation in student-led forums and events, he has helped shape the academic and professional development of many students preparing for careers in international relations, diplomacy, and public service.

The UIMF operates under a student-engaged learning model that emphasizes peer-to-peer leadership, interdisciplinary collaboration, and hands-on experience in global affairs. Mr. Medina has consistently contributed to this model by engaging with students in meaningful dialogue, mentoring them through policy simulations, and participating in strategic planning sessions aimed at raising awareness around the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with a focus on sustainable mountain development and youth inclusion.



*Group photo featuring Tony Medina, UIMF officers Baktybek Abdrisaev, UVU Rotaract members Louyoko Nianza, Alexander Woltjen, Caleb Ream, Natalia Figuereo, etc, and guests from the Orem-Lindon Rotary Club like Cathy Ambrose and Mike Rich.*

## Hosting Tony Medina: A Transformative Student-Led Experience

On **July 29, 2025**, student members of the UIMF and the UVU Rotaract Club hosted Tony Medina for a special event held virtually and in-person. The gathering was organized entirely by students, reinforcing UIMF's commitment to experiential learning. Students managed every detail, from outreach and invitations to the coordination of speakers, moderation of the session, and publication of the proceedings.

The event created a space for open dialogue on key global challenges and offered students an opportunity to learn from Medina's extensive international experience. He shared personal stories and insights that underscored the value of resilience, ethical leadership, and community-focused initiatives. His message aligned perfectly with UIMF's vision of developing globally competent student leaders through action and service.



*Tony Medina addresses UVU students and community guests during a student-led roundtable co-hosted by UIMF and UVU Rotaract on July 29, 2025, at UVU.*

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## Collaboration with the Rotary: Bridging Local and Global Leadership

The event also featured the participation of distinguished guests from the **Orem-Lindon Rotary Club**, further enriching the exchange between students and community leaders. Among the attendees were Cathy Ambrose, the current President of the Orem-Lindon Rotary Club, and Mike Rich, the outgoing President. We also had other members like Dr. Baktybek Abdrisaev and his wife, Dr. Cholpon Akmatolieva. Their presence exemplified the strong partnership between UIMF and local organizations committed to global education and service.

These interactions allowed students to draw connections between local civic engagement and international collaboration. Through open dialogue with Rotary leaders and Mr. Medina, students were encouraged to explore leadership not just as a title, but as an ongoing commitment to integrity, inclusion, and responsibility.



*From left to right: Dr. Cholpon Akmatalieva, Cathy Ambrose (President, Orem-Lindon Rotary Club), Tony Medina, Mike Rich (Past President), and Dr. Baktybek Abdrisaev after the event.*

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## Real Learning Outcomes Through Active Participation

The learning outcomes of this event were clear and measurable. As students, we have to enhance our skills in public speaking, protocol, intercultural communication, and policy analysis. We also need to gain hands-on experience in event planning and diplomatic engagement, which is rarely offered at the undergraduate level. This event was for me and other students, a provider of a deep sense of empowerment and motivation to continue my involvement in international service and advocacy.

In particular, students emphasized how interacting with experienced professionals such as Tony Medina and community leaders like Cathy Ambrose, Lynn Hilsted and Mike Rich helped us to visualize a clear path from learning to real-world impact. For some of the students, this was their first opportunity to lead a formal event with a high-level guest and to speak publicly in an international context.



*UIMF and Rotaract students prepare for the event, finalizing agenda notes and welcoming guests to the session.*

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## **A Model for Student Leadership and Global Connection**

Tony Medina's collaboration with the Utah International Mountain Forum continues to exemplify the power of student-engaged learning. His long-standing involvement, across virtual roundtables, mentoring sessions, and United Nations-related programming, has directly contributed to the academic success and global readiness of many students.

This partnership reflects the mission of UIMF to offer transformative experiences where students learn by doing, connect with community and global leaders, and take the lead in projects that matter. Mr. Medina's ongoing support of these efforts serves as a model for how professionals can invest in the next generation of changemakers.

### **About the author**

Louyoko Nianza, hailing from the Congo, is currently pursuing his education in political science in the United States. With a deep commitment to fostering transformative leadership, Louyoko is the proponent of "smart-africanism," a concept he envisions as the cornerstone for a new era of true leadership in Africa. His academic pursuits and innovative ideas aim to inspire and cultivate a generation of leaders dedicated to the advancement and prosperity of the African continent. Louyoko Nianza is a Visionary Rotaractor.