

**Advocating for Mountain Women at CSW70: My Experience Presenting at the Utah International Mountain Forum Virtual Parallel Event**



*Screenshot from the Utah International Mountain Forum Virtual Parallel Event, “Raising Justice Awareness of Mountain Women Through Student-Engaged Learning,” March 10, 2026, 12:30–2:00 PM EST (NGO CSW Forum 70).*

On March 10, 2026, from 12:30 to 2:00 PM EST, I participated in a virtual parallel event hosted by the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF) called “Raising Justice Awareness of Mountain Women Through Student-Engaged Learning.” The event was part of the NGO CSW Forum 70 for the 70th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW70). As a Political Science student at Utah Valley University (UVU), I delivered a formal statement to delegates and guests. This ended up being one of the most meaningful academic experiences I’ve had so far.

The event came through UVU’s work with UIMF, which gives students a direct connection to global policy spaces, especially around mountain development and gender equity. It was led by

Janessa-Michelle Purcell, who runs the student-engaged learning program. She plays a big role in connecting students to real-world advocacy and creating opportunities for people who would not normally have access to spaces like this. That approach really defines what this program is about.



*Mike Lutz Speaks at the Event*

In my statement, I focused on why mountain women and girls need to be explicitly included in the CSW70 outcome document. I pulled from both personal experience and research. I grew up in a mountain community of about 80 people outside Springville, Utah, where access to resources and opportunities was limited. That experience shaped how I see the issue. Where you live really does affect what opportunities you have. I also talked about my time in Kiribati, where

I saw how climate change and rising sea levels make life even harder for women and families in remote areas. On top of that, I used research from Switzerland to show that even wealthy countries still have geographic inequality. For example, university-track graduation rates in Uri are much lower than in Geneva. The main point was that these issues are real, measurable, and not limited to one place.

A big part of my statement was also about UVU's student-engaged learning model. What stands out about it is that it puts students directly into these global conversations instead of just learning about them in a classroom. As someone who is a non-traditional student and supporting a family, I probably would not have had access to something like this through a typical path. This model made it possible for me to contribute in a real way, using both my experiences and my research. The event included a strong group of students from different backgrounds, all bringing their own perspectives. People like Natalia Figueroa, Amiriah Brock, Ana Caballero, Ben Erickson, Abigail Fisher, Alley Holt, Sophie Jackson, Gaza Jorgensen, Roland Kabongo, Eryms Lammi, Lweyoka Nkenz, Angie Macias, Joao Martins De Silva, Antoine Nkemba, Jonas Tanner, Cristiana Alves, and Domenic Maximos Calor all contributed to the discussion. That mix of voices added a lot to the overall impact of the event.

I took a few key things away from the experience. One is that effective advocacy needs both personal perspective and solid evidence. You really need both to make a strong argument. I also learned how important it is to be clear and concise when speaking to an international audience. And I got a better understanding of how the CSW process works, especially how these parallel events give people a chance to influence broader UN discussions.

Looking back, I am honestly really grateful for the opportunity. Speaking at an event connected to the UN was a big deal for me, especially coming from a small mountain community where

something like this never felt likely. It also reinforced that the issues I care about, geographic inequality, environmental challenges, and women's rights, are part of real global conversations. More than anything, it made me want to keep doing this kind of work moving forward.

***Mike Lutz, Utah Valley University Student***