

## My Presentation at the 70th session of the Commission on the Status of Women

The first week of March I had an opportunity to give my statement at the 70th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women in New York. It has underscored a powerful truth: that the experiences of mountain communities, though separated by geography, are united by resilience, shared identity, and the vital role of women. My reflection connects distant landscapes the Virunga Mountains of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Utah's Wasatch Range to illustrate how women in both regions embody perseverance and leadership. The statement functions both as personal narrative and advocacy, calling for broader inclusion of mountain women in global decision-making while highlighting the transformative potential of student-engaged learning.



**Screenshot of the Presenters at the Parallel Event**

At its core, my message was about connection. By linking my origins in the DRC with education at Utah Valley University, he draws a line between two mountain cultures with vastly different economic and political contexts but similar social values. In both places, women and girls act as stabilizing forces nurturing families, preserving culture, and adapting to environmental hardship. My comparison reminds listeners that women's strength transcends borders, and that empowerment in one region can inspire change in another.

Another central theme of my statement was education as empowerment. I credit Utah Valley University and the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF) for shaping his understanding of service and leadership through the student-engaged learning model. Rather than confining education to theory, this approach promotes experiential learning through community

action. By serving local needs, raising funds for children’s coats or assembling hygiene kits for women students like myself learn empathy, teamwork, and civic responsibility. My observation that this model could empower African women and girls suggests a vision for adaptable education that crosses cultural and geographic boundaries.



***Roland Kabongo with his Peers is Prepared to Make a Statement***

My appeal to the United Nations also brings an important advocacy dimension. I argued that mountain women must not only be discussed in global forums but also included in the shaping of policies that affect them. This echoes long-standing UN Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 5 (gender equality) and SDG 15 (life on land). By emphasizing lived experience and student participation, I propose a bottom-up approach to empowerment, one where education and collaboration drive awareness and change from within communities.



**Group Photo After the Event**

Equally important is my underlying message of shared humanity. Despite the physical and cultural distance between Central Africa and the American West, I find common spirit in their mountain landscapes. Both teach lessons of endurance, ambition, and collective care. The metaphor of the mountain becomes more than geography; it symbolizes the ascent toward justice, equality, and sustainability. My journey from the peaks of Kivu to those of Utah personifies this climb, blending personal growth with global purpose.

Ultimately, my statement is a bridge between personal experience and collective advocacy. It reveals how identity, education, and place can converge to inspire leadership and social contribution. My story reminds audiences that empowering women, especially those in remote mountain communities, requires more than policies; it demands education that fosters empathy, action, and cross-cultural understanding. In linking two mountain worlds, I offer a model of hope: when communities learn *with* one another rather than *about* one another, they rise together.

***By Roland Kabongo, Utah Valley University student***

Roland Kayenga Kabongo was born in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), where he spent his formative years surrounded by the rich cultural, linguistic, and social diversity that characterizes the country. Growing up in the DRC shaped his worldview, instilling in him a strong sense of community, resilience, and a desire to contribute meaningfully to society. These early experiences later influenced both his academic interests and his professional aspirations. Roland eventually relocated to the United States to pursue higher education in Technology Management, Political Science, and enrolling at Utah Valley University (UVU). At UVU, he embarked on a multidisciplinary academic journey that reflects his broad interests in both technology and governance. This combination of fields demonstrates Roland's commitment to understanding not only how technology shapes modern organizations but also how public

policy, law, and governance influence society. His academic focus positions him at the intersection of technology, leadership, and public service.