

## STATEMENT

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70th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women – Parallel Event

*Raising Justice Awareness of Mountain Women Through Student-Engaged Learning*

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Good afternoon, my name is Abbie Fisher. I am a Psychology student and researcher at Utah Valley University, who grew up at the base of a mountain canyon in Spanish Fork, Utah. I am honored to speak today in support of mountain women and girls worldwide, advocating for their inclusion in the final outcome document of this session.

My research on Utah and China highlights how similar patterns in green governance emerge across mountain communities in opposing political systems when gender-equitable leadership is peripheral. Both Utah and China are shaped by complex mountain networks, high water stress in mountain regions, and expanding mountain urbanization and industrialization; and while inclusive governance is idealized in these regions, the reality is that policy-leadership does not exist equitably. Women hold just 31.7% of legislative seats in Utah and hold no executive seats in the Chinese Communist Party's 20th Politburo. This underrepresentation correlates in both regions with persistent gender disparities in health, wages, domestic labor burdens, and more; challenges that undermine long-term sustainable development.

The marginalization of women and girls in Utah and China interact deeply with green governance and mountain-specific challenges, creating tertiary outcomes that are obscure, overlooked, and severely understudied. These outcomes can only be meaningfully addressed by building data infrastructure that connects the complex lived realities of local mountain women with research, policy, and action—opportunities that student-engaged learning can uniquely champion. SEL advances sustainable development outcomes by moving beyond theory to foster community engagement with mountain women, empowering students to focus research on this underrepresented group, and expanding access to research-based resources and advocacy platforms for these stakeholders. At UVU, SEL engages students with real local needs: assembling hygiene kits for local food pantries, raising nearly \$10,000 for children's coats, hosting international events, and engaging in critical research such as what is being presented today.

Mountain women and girls are central to environmental stewardship, resource security, and economic resilience in some of the world's most ecologically critical mountain landscapes. When systems in these landscapes do not engage in equitable policy leadership, we see correlations that systematize and externalize damaging outcomes for mountain women. We therefore urge member states to intentionally build bottom-up governance structures that formally include the lived-experiences of mountain women experts, develop region-specific frameworks for mountain communities, and shift marginalizing cultural norms through sustained relationships with local mountain stakeholders to challenge gender biases and connect communities. It is not just about *what* we can research, but how we can cultivate integrative partnerships to drive impact. What is presented today reminds us that the experiences and voices of mountain women are not peripheral, but central to achieving the UN's goals of equitable, sustainable, inclusive, and just governance for all.

Thank you.