

STATEMENT
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Utah Valley University
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 Natalia Figueroa. It is my privilege to be a moderator of this parallel event hosted by students from Utah Valley University (UVU). I am a mountain girl with Mapuche roots from Chile studying Global Politics at UVU. I also serve as President of the UVU’s Foreign Affairs Club. Today, our team is advocating again for mountain women and girls to be included in the final document of this session as we do every year since 2018 and it has not happened yet.

Mountain regions play a vital role in sustaining life on our planet, supporting rich biodiversity and providing essential water resources. Mountain women are key stewards of these environments, protecting natural resources and cultivating crops. Yet mountain women and girls remain underprivileged and neglected, face injustice in legal and institutional settings, sexual violence, limited access to education, and risks while defending their property rights. As per FAO-UN, nearly 40 percent of them worldwide face food insecurity.

I can tell from my own experiences and research, that similar challenges are affecting the lives of mountain women in Chile. The Law of Usurpación criminalizes Indigenous landowners, impacting more than 810,000 Mapuche women, the largest Indigenous mountain group in the country. Forestry companies use the law to dominate Mapuche lands, often criminalizing women who defend them. Examples such as **Nicolasa Quintreman** who was found dead after resisting construction of a dam on ancestral land, are ongoing for Chilean mountain women. Despite UN intervention, Mapuche women land owners still face weak legal protection while defending their communities and environment.

Recognizing such challenges, since 2007, four International Women of the Mountains Conferences (WOMC) have been hosted at UVU under the umbrella of the United Nations Mountain Partnership and they were recognized for the advocacy for rights of women and girls in the United Nations Secretary General's Reports on Sustainable Mountain Development in 2007, 2009, 2013, and 2016. I was proud to learn that the first executive director of the UNWomen, and former Chilean President Michelle Bachelet, in 2011, stated, *“I am glad that the Conference of Women of the Mountains is addressing the specific and urgent challenges faced by women living in mountainous regions.”*

Today we will demonstrate how UVU’s Student Engaged Learning (SEL) model, guided by faculty mentorship, prepares students to collaboratively address real world challenges facing mountain women and girls. In 2015, UVU students were praised by the UN Secretary General's report on SMD for hosting through SEL the Fourth WOMC at UVU. Through SEL, they organized agenda, logistics, protocol, and fundraising for the event while gaining experience similar to entry level diplomats and civil society advocates. Preparing for this session of CSW, we use the same model to amplify the voices of our students, which also include mountain women and girls. Through the students we partner with the Orem Lindon Rotary Club to raise funds for those activities and serve local mountain communities. As a result, we provided coats for the needy

students and assembled hygiene kits for women and girls in Utah County. These initiatives strengthened our leadership, teamwork, empathy, and problem-solving skills while teaching us to use evidence-based arguments to advocate for mountain women and practice active citizenship.

We recommend students and faculty in other mountain and rural communities to use the SEL model to empower themselves, like us and then jointly work together at forums like sessions of the CSW to make a stronger appeal to impact on policies of our states, impacting the lives of mountain women and girls at home and in adopting the final documents of these sessions.

Further, I will be glad to invite my colleagues to present their own statements and suggestions in support of mountain women and the necessity of this session of the Commission on the Status of Women to take concrete action in recognizing mountain women and girls in their final document. It is now my honor to welcome Aemish Brock.

In 2025, 146 land and environmental defenders were killed or disappeared, 82 percent in Latin America. In Chile, the Ley de Usurpación criminalizes Indigenous land occupations, disproportionately affecting over

810,000 Mapuche women, whose population is the largest Indigenous group in Chile and parts of Argentina. **Nicolasa Quintreman**, who opposed dam construction on her ancestral land, was found dead, reflecting a broader pattern. Forestry companies control vast Mapuche territories vital for water, ecosystems, and culture. Although these industries contribute to the economy and job security, Mapuche women defending these lands are often criminalized rather than protected. Indigenous mountain communities in Utah also face structural land inequality. The Ute Tribe directly controls only about a quarter of its reservation land and often must lease back land on its own territory, showing that issues of land rights and marginalization affect mountain women globally. Despite UN recommendations such as hunger strikes and protests, women land defenders in Chile continue to face limited land rights and inadequate legal representation in government while protecting their communities and environment amid to the climate crisis.

This work has been recognized by former Chilean President Michelle Bachelet, who stated, *“I am glad that the Conference of Women of the Mountains is addressing the specific and urgent challenges faced by women living in mountainous regions. I am especially pleased by the Conference’s focus on women’s leadership and participation, a priority area for us at UN Women.”* Today, we advocate for mountain women and girls who remain underprivileged. Nearly 40 percent of mountain women in mountain regions face food insecurity, yet they have never been recognized in this forum’s final session documents.