Side Event

World Trade Organization
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Empowering Mountain and Landlocked Communities Through Trade Facilitation, Market Access, and Student-Centric Learning: Lessons from the Kyrgyz Republic and the State of Utah, United States

STATEMENT

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Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Alley Holt. I am a political science student and serve as the Vice President of the Sustainable Mountain Development (SMD) Club at Utah Valley University (UVU). I am here advocating for increased attention towards SMD around the world and the role of our collective collaboration in achieving this development.

Through my research at UVU, I have studied the paradiplomatic relationship between the State of Utah and the Kyrgyz Republic and their collective engagement in SMD advocacy. This collaboration began nearly 23 years ago with the 2003 signing of the memorandum on mutual understanding and cooperation. This signing was followed by Governor of Utah Olene Walker visiting the Kyrgyz Republic for the celebration of Kyrgyz Statehood in 2003 and the President of the Kyrgyz Republic Askar Akayev coming to Utah and UVU in September 2004. In 2006 UVU joined the MP, after which followed visits of the Speaker of the Kyrgyz Parliament Marat Sultanov to Utah in 2007, Utah Senate President John Valentine to Bishkek in 2008, as well as the visit of the Ata-Meken party delegation led by Mr. Tekebaev to Utah in 2008. The interactions between Utah and the Kyrgyz Republic over the last two decades have initiated an exchange of knowledge and accountability that has benefited sustainable development in both mountainous regions. We hosted in Utah Ambassador of the Kyrgyz Republic Zamira Sydykova in 2007, 2008, Ambassador Djumaliev in 2013, Permanent Representative of the Kyrgyz Republic Talaybek Kydyrov in 2013, and most

recently PR of the Kyrgyz Republic to the UN, Aida Kasymalieva in Utah in 2023.

The example of the paradiplomacy between Utah and the Kyrgyz Republic surrounding SMD serves as a lesson that expanding networks of communication and exchanges of knowledge facilitated by educational institutions between mountainous regions can impact sustainable development in these regions. Through this connection, both regions have strengthened the voices advocating for SMD, in particular at the UN.

Having grown up under the Wasatch Mountain Range in the Rocky Mountain region of the United States, I have experienced the unique role mountains play in communities shadowed by them. Mountains are a tremendous resource, acting as watersheds, providing energy, agriculture, tourism, and resources. Sustainable development around our mountains is something Utahns have worked on improving since our founding. Since joining MP, UVU jointly with the International University of Kyrgyzstan and Osh Technological University, has been an active SMD promoter. Since 2011, much of this activism has been spearheaded by UVU, utilizing a Student Engaged Learning (SEL) model that encourages students to collaborate together with mentorship of teachers and local organizations to empower students to take responsibility for changing their communities. The SEL model has driven the Utah International Mountain Forum, a coalition of student clubs at UVU over the last 15 years to become the main SMD promoter in the State of Utah. Utah's increasing involvement is reflected in collaborations the State has made with other mountainous regions.

Through SEL at UVU, my peers and I have served local communities and helped raise funds for local charities. I have created posters, brochures, co-hosted the 16th annual UN International Mountain Day, and advocated for mountain women at the 70th session of the Commission on the Status of Women in New York on March 10, 2026.

It is my hope that we will continue to support our mountain communities that are so often undervalued. Our efforts start at the community level as demonstrated by the Student Engaged Learning Model, and are only supported and expanded

through the exchange of knowledge and resources, as demonstrated in the partnership between the Kyrgyz Republic and Utah. Organizations such as the WTO play an important role in supporting this collaboration and exchange of resources between regions around the world.