Side Event

World Trade Organization
July 8, 2026

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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Distinguished Chair, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, My name is Louyoko Nianza Christ. I am a Political Science student at Utah Valley University, and a member of the Utah International Mountain Forum, a coalition of student clubs at UVU, which since 2011 has advocated for the sustainable development of mountain communities. I thank the organizers for this very important side event. It resonates with me, as a citizen of the Republic of Congo, a country rich in natural resources but where mountain people still struggle with poverty because of unequal access to trade and development. All of this inspired me to promote equal opportunities for all through sustainable development. .

At UVU, I learned how Student-Engaged Learning (SEL) can encourage us students to work jointly under mentorship of our teacher to resolve practical problems related to local communities. We serve them alongside Orem-Lindon Rotarians, while gaining skills in advocacy and leadership. As Assistant Researcher at the Gary Herbert Institute of Public Policy, I have studied how landlocked and mountainous state Utah has become one of the best economies in the nation. It happened because of international trade, entrepreneurship, innovation, workforce development, and investments in education. I am also learning from Governor Herbert how his policies enhanced free trade principles in the Utah economy to make it competitive both nationally and internationally. These lessons are valuable for landlocked and mountainous countries seeking pathways to economic growth and prosperity.

Since 2024, through SEL, I have advocated for mountain women to be included in the final documents of the 68th, 69th and 70th sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women. While it didn't happen during those years, I saw that SEL provided us students with opportunities to learn how to work with UN member states on these issues. This side event is teaching us similar important lessons. Two of my peers and I will also contribute to the today's side event "Acceleration action for mountain regions: delivering on the five years of action (2023-2027) at the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in New York, at HLPF, we also will examine the implementation by mountain countries of the Target 6.6 through their Voluntary National Reviews. Through this work we are gaining the skills of the civil society members acting as a watchdog.

As a President of SMART-AFRICANISME NGO from Congo, I am in the process of registering it under the UN ECOSOC to provide opportunities for Congolese students through SEL to advocate for their rights at the United Nations and global institutions. I call upon Member States, and academic institutions to provide similar opportunities to their youth through similar education programs.