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 morning, my name is Sophie Jackson. I am an Honors political science student at UVU. I praise this side event for highlighting the importance of Empowering Mountain and Landlocked Communities by facilitating global trade, as well as showcasing the student-engaged learning model.

Having been born and raised in mountain communities, I have witnessed my community struggle against against many issues such as climate change, racism, and economic disparity. These reasons have inspired me to deepen my support and knowledge of mountain communities globally. By joining SEL, I have been able to expand my educational horizons and serve local communities by volunteering and fundraising in partnership with the Orem-Lindon Rotary Club. These accomplishments gave me a chance to step away from my studies and make a personal impact.

While in this program, I began studying Japan, a prominent contributor to Sustainable development both domestically and internationally. However I have found that Trade liberalization and open-market policies have disproportionately affected Japan’s mountainous communities. The transition away from protective agricultural tariffs has accelerated farmland abandonment and depopulation in mountain communities. Mountains' small-scale farms struggle to compete with international imports. Since 1961, roughly 30-40% of Japan's farmland has gradually disappeared. As the mountains become abandoned, they lack proper management to address the disappearance of native ecosystems and food sources due to climate-related disease.

Building on this research, I've begun studying Somalia and Tunisia for our upcoming visit to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development with a focus on SDG 6, Target 6.6, which addresses water-related ecosystems in the mountains. Nonetheless, my research has found similar disproportionate effects of free trade and Market Access, as well as impacts of climate change on mountain communities.

Somalia's VNR highlights the National Water Resources Strategy as the country's framework for sustainable water management, while addressing climate change and water scarcity. Somalia's economy relies heavily on free trade, with livestock and agriculture contributing about 60% of GDP and supports nearly 70% of the population. However, decade long droughts have weakened mountain sustainability, depleted natural resources, and reduced trade security.

Similarly, Tunisia's VNR highlights progress through monitoring and protecting water-related ecosystems. Nonetheless, trade openness and foreign investment have widened territorial inequalities. Economic prosperity is prioritized in coastal urban hubs, leaving the pastoral mountain communities with little economic growth. Climate change continues to intensify water scarcity, and wildfires continue to decimate agricultural and pastoral land used for livelihoods and international trade.

In conclusion, we must acknowledge the unique economic challenges mountain communities face and provide aid that addresses climate change in mountain regions. At the same time, we can continue to support educational programs such as SEL. Through education, we give students a voice and a chance to be proactive participants in policy and decision-making within international organizations, as my colleagues and I are doing today.

Thank you for your time.