

International Mountain Day at Utah Valley University

I thought the International Mountain Day gathering was very interesting for a few different reasons, and it opened my eyes to a few different perspectives of how mountains affect different cultures across the globe. I was only able to attend the first hour-and-a-half, so I will only comment on the portion of the event that I was able to attend.



Christian Jensen, Vice President, UIMF presents FAO-UN Certificate of Appreciation for contribution to 2016 IMD to Jacques Baraketse, UVU student

First, I enjoyed how we were able to hear the opinions of natives from the areas discussed in the presentations. They are able to see things from a unique viewpoint that a foreigner could not offer. Dr. Patience Kabamba, Professor of Anthropology at UVU, is a native of Congo, and was able to give the audience a very special glimpse at the strengths and problems facing the

Congolese. He was also able to introduce me to different facts that I had no previous knowledge of, for instance I did not know that the mountains in the Democratic Republic of the Congo were so high, especially considering that that the Congo is stereotypically a jungle. I also thought it was interesting that the people used the mountains for protection in many different ways—especially protection. If a group of people settled at the foot of the mountain, or even between two mountains, it would be very difficult to attack them. The attackers would either have to climb over the mountain to attack, exhausting the troops, or attack the people from the low ground, which is a strategically inferior plan. Not only were they able geographically to use the mountains to protect themselves, but the mountain people used trucks to transport the rebels through the country during the war. I am sure this gave them political opportunities to make friends during the war. This is a perspective that we usually do not have, especially here in Utah. Here, the mountains have a dramatic influence our culture and the things we do, but I think we often forget the benefits of being a mountain people to begin with.

Another thing which was mentioned that I thought was very interesting is how the highest mountain in the Congo is similar to Mount Kilimanjaro in its height, and the fact that it is permanently snow-capped, meaning that there is always snow, both falling, freezing and melting. This is one water source for the Nile River. One normally would not think that the Congo has very tall, snow-capped mountains, and furthermore, that this snow is what gives water to the Nile River. Similarly, we can relate to this concept as well. We live near the Colorado River, which begins in the Rocky Mountain Range, which is fed by snow as well. Although we do not realize it, the western states have greatly benefitted from these mountains and river as well. The Colorado River flows into Lake Mead (and through the Hoover Dam), which provides water and power to Arizona, Nevada, and California.

As I did some personal research of these mountain areas, I found a few other things that I liked as well. The first thing I noticed about these mountain areas in the Congo is that they are very beautiful and exotic, and are very different from the mountain beauty we have here. Additionally, I found it very interesting that there are different vegetation zones in Congo. There are hundreds of different types of vegetation, herbs, roots and medicines that grow there, which is very different from what we have here in Utah. The exotic roots and plants that grow there are very unique, and we do not have anything similar to the diversity here in North America.

Overall, I enjoyed the presentation, and the knowledge that Dr. Kabamba had to offer. The thing I most enjoyed is how we could examine the similarities and differences between the mountains here, and mountains in different parts of the world. Although people are different and come from different corners of the globe, it is always good to find commonalities and learn from one another and reduce our differences.

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