

Advocating Mountain Cause and Women from Mongolia, to Utah and to CSW61



Munkhbat Batmunkh During Skype Presentation Before the CSW61 Audience

On March 14, 2017, I made a statement on behalf of the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), a coalition of student clubs at Utah Valley University (UVU) before the participants of the 61st session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW61). It was a presentation via Skype about what the UIMF has done to advocate the gender agenda and the cause of the mountain women in the State of Utah and North America. That day, my colleagues and I learned the importance of group efforts in order to be successful with the advocacy at the UN level. Mrs. Wendy Jyang, President of Utah China F.I.S.H.D & C., a NGO from Utah, facilitated our presentation as part of the event hosted by her NGO at the One UN Hotel in New York. Mrs. Jyang has partnered with the UIMF since 2015, when she spoke during the Fourth International Women of the Mountains Conference (WOMC) at UVU about the role of student exchanges and education in strengthening families, and the role of women among mountain communities. This time she invited UIMF members to be part of her panel virtually,

since our delegation was scheduled to attend CSW61 during the following week, when UVU students had spring break.

In this statement, we highlighted what our coalition has been able to achieve during the 10 years since the first WOMC was hosted at UVU March 7-9, 2007. It is now a grassroots forum in North America to represent the voice of the forgotten mountain communities, families, and women, including important issues such as gender equality, women empowerment, human trafficking, child forced labors etc. Wendy Jyang and her students from China made our presence at CSW61 visible by presenting our materials and brochures among the attendees of the event before we were physically in New York.



Utah Delegation at ECOSOC Chamber During CSW61

Furthermore, what's so interesting and challenging for our group is that thanks to the engaged learning initiative promoted at UVU, we, the students, led the delegation and did all the legwork for the participation at CSW61 to the UN headquarters in New York City. While our teachers kept a distance and watched how we were successful with advocating the mountain

women cause at CSW61 on our own, we knew that they will be ready to help us when necessary. In addition to Dr. Baktybek Abdrisaev, UIMF advisor, support to our efforts have been provided by Kimberly Williamson, staff at the UVU History and Political Science Department and Dr. Cholpon Akmatolieva, contributor to the WOMCs since 2007.

As my responsibility to craft the agenda for the UIMF visit to the CSW61, I contacted Permanent Missions of several countries at the United Nations in New York. Luckily, representatives of Permanent Missions of Mongolia, Romania, Hungary, and the Kyrgyz Republic had responded to our requests for the meetings and treated us in professional and very friendly manner. It also happened thanks to the partnership ties established between UVU and those diplomatic missions by Dr. Rusty Butler, former VP for International Affairs, and Diplomacy at UVU. Dr. Butler, currently the main representative of the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences (RANS), an NGO with Consultative Status under the UN, provided us with personal letters of recommendation to many of those diplomatic missions, in addition to registering us for the participation at CSW61. It was an excellent opportunity for us to present to diplomats from those nations. We explained what we have been doing to advocate mountain women in the past ten years, and the ways our students have been actively engaged to promote gender and sustainable mountain development (SMD) agendas of the UN in State of Utah and beyond its borders.

Our delegation members, Tony Medina, former President of UIMF (2014-2016); Christian Jensen, President of UIMF; Regan Warner, Vice President, SMD Club, UVU; and myself, as Vice President, UIMF are grateful to our university and faculty who provided us such a great opportunity to attend a major UN forum with focus on gender, and to meet all these wonderful people from the CSW61. It was an eye-opening experience for us UIMF members to implement engaged learning at the UN level. During our visit in New York, I was impressed and so proud of my colleague's true leadership, who have been able to facilitate fruitful conversations and achieve meaningful results during the meetings not only with the Permanent Representatives to the UN from four countries that we have visited, but also with numerous VIP representatives and UN officials during side and parallel events. I am sure that Christian Jensen and Regan Warner are now full of energy to lead a new group of UIMF members, and to ensure that they will reach new successes during the CSW62 next year.

As someone originally from Mongolia, I was glad that on the first day of our agenda we had a meeting with Mrs. Guamaral Altangerel, Deputy Chief of Mission of Mongolia to the United Nations and talked about similarities between natural conditions in Mongolia and many other mountain countries including Utah. There are many important issues in this specific matter because Mongolia is a country that is elevated 1580 meters above sea level. Mongolia is a land locked country bordering Russia and China, and their climate is considered one of the coldest and harshest in the world. It's much like climates in many mountain nations at high altitudes. So, here we can find similarities, allowing us to work together to adjust the socio and economic model to improve the status of families and women to their nation's best interest by comparing and sharing the best experiences in SMD with each other. And it gave to our delegation an excellent opportunity to find common ground with Permanent Mission of Mongolia to the UN to work together and raise the issues of the mountain communities, families, and women at the UN level.



Munkhbat Batmunkh with Mrs. Guamaral Altangerel, Deputy Chief of Mission of Mongolia to the United Nations

In the future, I strongly urge and suggest UVU students to get more involved in experiential learning, which is the best way to be exposed to the professional world and gain valuable experiences. UIMF looks professionally strong, and I am confident that our club's coalition will expand its involvement at the UN level even further. From our visit to the United Nations, I believe we have created a professional network for ourselves and strengthened established partnerships between Utah and Mongolia, Romania, Hungary, and the Kyrgyz Republic.

This is a new opportunity for us to get the UIMF involved with its numerous experiential learning initiatives, including the WOMCs at the UN level. We have also to promote the use of the student engaged learning model by other educational institutions around the world, including in the developing mountain nations. This is one of the best ways to expose students to the real world, and provide them with eventual benefits.

Our visit to the United Nations and participation at CSW61 was a success. Each of us have personally been able to learn something valuable for our future endeavors.

Munkhbat Batmunkh, Vice President, UIMF