

UIMF at UN High Level Political Forum: A Protocol Perspective



Samuel Elzinga contacts Permanent Missions of different countries accredited at the United Nations.

Preparing for the High Level Political Forum on sustainable development, an event hosted under the auspices of ECOSOC at the United Nations from July 16th to the 19th, 2018, has been one of the most exciting events of my academic career. For the first time I was able to be part of the Utah Valley University's (UVU) student engaged learning initiative to advocate for the sustainable development goals of the United Nations. This initiative applied to this event at the United Nations requires students to work as a group through the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), a coalition of student clubs at UVU, in order to learn new skills and experiences by practically implementing all stages of the official visit to the UN. UVU faculty serves as a

mentor in this model and provides guidance if students are unable to find a proper solution. Under that mode, I decided to be the point person for protocol, where I was mainly responsible for contacting Permanent Missions of different countries accredited to the United Nations to establish a connection and potentially a meeting with their Permanent Representative and/or staff. Every member state at the United Nations has a diplomatic presence, called a Permanent Mission, and their top envoy, named as Permanent Representative. However, I had to be tactful about which Permanent Missions to contact to ensure our delegation would not only have substantive meetings with these Permanent Representatives, but also allow us to promote discussion about mountain communities in the United Nations' sustainable development goals.

Under the direction of our mentors, Dr. Rusty Butler, main focal point for the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with Economic and Social Council of the United Nations and Dr. Abdrisaev, UIMF adviser, I was able to get in contact with UVU's Office of Global Engagement and receive help from their global engagement coordinator, Amy Barnett. UVU has developed excellent relationships with Permanent Missions of various countries accredited at the UN and UN departments through the Office of Global Engagement, and since we are going as representatives of UVU as well as delegates of the UIMF, it was a logical choice to reach out and contact the Permanent Missions that had supported UVU's efforts at the UN in previous visits and were relevant to our mission for visiting. After Amy Barnett established an initial connection between me, the UN Department of Public Information, and the permanent missions of Uzbekistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Uganda, and Botswana, I was able to begin work on setting up meetings for our delegation.

One of the biggest learning experiences of this entire process was learning to accept not getting replies to meeting requests. Initially I was somewhat disheartened that not every Permanent Mission replied to my meeting request, but those feelings washed away as soon as I got some affirmative responses from other Permanent Missions, departments, and diplomats. With advice of my peers, Damon Ashcraft and Andrew Jensen as well as our mentors, I was able to arrange times and places for these meetings. Since the High Level Political Forum is a large gathering with many different events, I was then tasked with selecting the most important events in its agenda to establish the final agenda for our trip.

I was able also to schedule important meeting with Mr. Felipe Queipo at the United Nations Department of Public Information on July 18th. UN/DPI has closely worked with UVU on building special partnerships between the two entities since November 2017. In addition, I worked with the Mountain Partnership (MP) Secretariat to have a meeting with Mr. Grammenos Mastrojeni from the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs who currently is the chair of the Mountain Partnership (MP) Steering Committee and Mr. Giorgio Grussu, an MP Secretariat representative. UVU has been a member of the MP since 2006 and MP coordinates the implementation of the United Nations agenda on sustainable mountain development globally. This is one of the most important meetings for our delegation with the UN body which partners and supports UVU during more than 10 years.

As one of the delegates from the UIMF who are interested in promoting sustainable mountain development (SMD) on a global scale, I scoured every main event and side event hosted at the High Level Political Forum concerning mountain development. My primary focus when scheduling events was to ensure we had delegates at the voluntary national reviews of 14 nations who are members of the MP. These mountain countries' voluntary national reviews will

cover sustainable development as a whole, but since they work with the MP we are hoping they will provide a special emphasis on mountain development.



Samuel Elzinga prepares souvenirs for the trip to New York

After I scheduled those activities into our agenda, I looked for side events governments and organizations were holding that pertain to mountain development. I noticed also that as per initiative of the MP, the government of Andorra, is co-hosting a side event promoting mountain development with the governments of Argentina, Chile, Italy, Kyrgyzstan, and Switzerland. We informed MP that our delegation will attend their side event and contribute to its agenda. Our senior colleagues in Rome, Italy, the location of the MPS headquarters, were happy to know that we will be in the audience.

After this event was added, I continued looking for events and adjusting our agenda accordingly to ensure we had enough time to meet with every Permanent Representative and UN departments I set meetings with. I am looking forward to this trip and to see all my hard work pay off in a substantive and exciting way for every member of our delegation.

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