

## **UIMF engaged learning lessons during general debates at HLPF 2018**



*Eleanore Koulijian (second from the right) and members of the Utah International Mountain Forum*

Members of the Utah Valley University (UVU) delegation to the 2018 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on sustainable development had the opportunity on 19 July 2018 to present an oral statement to the member-states and other groups attending the HLPF. We participated in general debates of High Level Special Plenary session, in which statements related to the HLPF agenda were made by national governments, major non-governmental (NGOs) groups and other inter-governmental organizations (IGOs) as well. We spoke as representatives of the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences, which is an NGO in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations (UN). (See: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/ecosoc6945.doc.htm>). Our statement (See: <http://webtv.un.org/meetings-events/economic-and-social-council/watch/49th-meeting-part-b-ecosoc-high-level-segment-2018/5811730419001/?term=> ) was focused on: 1) attaining mountain targets; 2) promoting student engaged learning model to implement mountain targets 3) increasing partnership to achieve the sustainable development goals. We were the only delegation which spoke during general debates of this highest political event at the UN on sustainable development goals about the importance of providing sustainable way of life to mountain communities, who are among the poorest and neglected by international community.

In preparation for the visit in May 2018, we created already an online document in which all members of the delegation and especially our peers, Caitlin Tomley and Kyler Pigot, who were not able to come with us to the UN in July, had the opportunity to create and edit a written and oral statement. After several intense days of writing and editing, we were able to come to a consensus on the different policy issues and create statements that reflected the beliefs of the Utah International Mountain Forum. Then we submitted them first for the approval by the 1) Russian Academy of Natural Sciences (RANS); 2) Utah China Friendship Improvement Sharing Hand Development and Commerce, and 3) The Mountain Institute, three non-governmental organizations with the consultative status with the ECOSOC. We can't do that directly on behalf of UVU or UIMF, due to the requirements of the UN, which reserve such activities to the NGOs, registered under the UN, like three mentioned above ones. It took several years for UVU and UIMF to build partnerships with focus on the promotion of the mountain agenda with all three of them. Then all three NGOs submitted both documents as joint statements to the 2018 HLPF secretariat. It took about one month then for us to get a response from the UN that one of NGOs, the RANS was selected among a few to speak during general debates at HLPF (See: <http://utahimf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/N1816361.pdf>). After that Samuel Elzinga, my colleague was able to find a copy of our written statement posted at the HLPF web site already, which meant, that it was also accepted by the HLPF Secretariat. (See: <http://undocs.org/E/2018/NGO/17>).

After being informed via UN online system CSONet that RANS was recommended to give an oral statement, I had to begin coordination with various UN offices the logistics and protocol for making the oral statement as my responsibility according to the task list for our delegation members. Dr. Rusty Butler, the main focal point for RANS at the UN, was not able to join us due to the health condition of his wife. He asked Dr. Baktybek Abdrisaev, UIMF Adviser, to speak instead of him as an alternative focal point for RANS at the UN. Then both of them decided after a long discussion that it would be more important for our delegation to get a permission from the HLPF secretariat to allow all student members to speak by reading a part of the statement one after another. As a result, they decided, that it will demonstrate to the UN audience the developed student engaged learning model in the best practical way.

I found out through several inquiries online and by calling to the UN, that Ms. Eleanore Koulajian was our main contact in the UN Secretariat, as a coordinator for the Non-Governmental Organizations within the UN. At that moment, I had several questions for her: 1) when our

delegation is scheduled to speak, because there was no any information about that in the official HLPF agenda posted online; 2) how long should be our oral statement; 3) whether it is possible for three student members of our delegation instead of one to speak one after another. I communicated with her on many occasions in order to primarily ensure us that we were still giving an oral statement and additionally to secure information about the date and time of our statement. Originally, on Sunday, July 15, 2018 she was able to inform us only that our statement would be given during general debates either from 10:00AM until 12:00PM or from 3:00PM until 6:00PM of the HLPF last session on July 19, 2018. It was a day also, when we scheduled to leave New York by flying back to Salt Lake City from Newark airport at 7:30PM and the perspective for us to speak during late afternoon challenged our departure plans, when it was necessary for us to go to the airport right in the moment of the debates.



*Copies of passes for general debates on July 19, 2018*

We were able to resolve all problems one after another: at the beginning, Ms. Koulajian said that it will be no problems for three student members to speak, but the entire group had to do that within three minutes. She also invited us to receive two passes to enter the Trusteeship Council Chamber on July 19, 2018, the day of our presentation. For certain high-level events any attendee needs official pass to enter various council chambers. While we secured already two passes to begin with, however, Ms. Koulajian was able to provide us two more. As a result, we ensured that all student members of our delegation would be able to have an access to the Trusteeship Council Chamber to give an oral statement during both times of general debates at HLPF as well as Dr. Baktybek Abdrisaev, our advisor to take photos as we made the statement. We provide her with a final version of the oral statement which was under the 400 words long to ensure that we will speak

within 3 minutes sharp. We rehearsed making the statement several times at our hotel and it looked that we would be able to speak within required time during general debates.



*Andrew Jensen with Mr. Marc-Andre Dorel, Acting Chief, NGO Branch Office of Intergovernmental Support and Coordination for Sustainable Development; Department of Economic and Social Affairs; United Nations*

As we approached Thursday, July 19, the day that we were giving our oral statement, I additionally communicated with Mr. Marc-Andre Dorel, Acting Chief, NGO Branch Office of Intergovernmental Support and Coordination for Sustainable Development; Department of Economic and Social Affairs; United Nations. I shared with him the main concern of our



delegation: whether we could speak as earlier as possible due to the flight scheduled at 7:30PM. I had a feeling that Mr. Dorel seriously considered my message, while he provided me specific advice about the logistics for making oral statement.



*Andrew Jensen makes an oral statement during general debates at HLPF 2018*

On Thursday, July 19, 2018, when we knew that our presentation was scheduled to the last session during 3:00pm-6:00PM we still arrived to the Trusteeship Council Chamber at 9:00AM in order to check all entrances and sits and watch the beginning of the morning debates. We had a meeting also with Mr. Richard Jordan, our awesome adviser, who has been actively involved with UN activities during 39 years. Mr. Richard patiently answered to many our questions related to timing and logistics for making an oral statement from his own point of view and contacts at the UN. Damon Ashcraft and myself continued preparations for making an oral statement at the UN Lounge, while Dr. Abdrisaev with Sam Elzinga went to the side event hosted by the Permanent Mission of Tajikistan to the UN on results of the HLPF on water in Dushanbe, capital of Tajikistan in June 2018.

At 2:30PM, we went to the Trusteeship Council Chamber to meet with Mr. Dorel and he helped us to know the route we would walk, when we would speak, and other various important details of information. With Mr. Dorel and Richard Jordan's help we were able to coordinate and

eventually give our oral statement. Mr. Dorel made us speak at 4:10PM, which allowed us to reach airport much earlier before our flight departure to Salt Lake City. Each of us spoke within one minute in alphabetical order: Samuel Elzinga followed Damon Ashcraft and I was the last speaker. After the making statement, the President of the session, Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations, Mr. Jerry Matthews Matjila, congratulated us on keeping to our allotted time limit. Overall, this was a great experience and was a new achievement in implementation of SDGs and mountain targets through student engaged learning in Utah and North America.

*Andrew Jensen, President, Model United Nations club*