

Utah Valley University Hosts Permanent Representative of Tajikistan



Permanent Representative Mahmadamin Mahmadaminov addressing students at UVU

On October 5th, 2108, Utah Valley University (UVU), in cooperation with the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), a coalition of student clubs at UVU, including the Foreign Affairs Club, had the opportunity to host the Permanent Representative of Tajikistan to the United Nations, His Excellency, Mr. Mahmadamin Mahmadaminov. Earlier that morning, UIMF members had the opportunity to demonstrate to Ambassador Mahmadaminov the advantages of the UVU student engaged learning model to promote United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) focusing on mountain targets in particular. Our VIP-guest was able to witness for himself, how a self-directed team of 10-15 students both applied and gained new skills and experiences in protocol, logistics, as well as analytical capabilities through hosting His Excellency. While a UVU faculty member served as a mentor to the students, ready to assist only in the case of an emergency. A selected group of UIMF leadership consisted from such students as Sam Elzinga, Joseph Lloyd, Hagen Isaacson, Megan Davis and Viktoriia Bahrii presented to Ambassador Mahmadaminov their research, as well as information regarding students' promotion

of the U.N. sustainable mountain development agenda in the State of Utah and globally since 2011; the year when UIMF was established. The students presented to the VIP-guest copies of U.N. and U.S. Congressional documents, recognizing UIMF's contribution to the advocacy of the SMD agenda.



Group photo of UIMF members with Ambassador Mahmaminov

After the meeting with UIMF, Ambassador Mahmaminov addressed a variety of UVU students with his major presentation, titled: “Tajikistan and the Sustainable Development Goals.”

Permanent Representative of Tajikistan to the UN, Mr. Mahmaminov, spoke sincerely about life in his country. Showing an informational video highlighting Tajikistan’s strengths, landscape, and culture, students were able to visually comprehend the country, instead of simply relying on statistics and their own imaginations.

Ambassador Mahmaminov shared his observations openly with the student-audience, stating that as the plane was landing at Salt Lake International Airport, the Ambassador felt as though the plane was landing in Tajikistan. The landscape reminded Ambassador Mahmaminov of home, but the hospitality from everyone at UVU made Ambassador Mahmaminov feel at home, indeed. The focus on family values in Utah excited the Ambassador, as the promotion of

family values is a principle Tajikistan is vigorously pushing, in order to combat radicalization in their country.

Ambassador Mahmaminov continued by detailing more of Tajikistan's efforts to limit the negative consequences of sharing a border with Afghanistan. Because of Tajikistan's strong border security, over 110 tons of narcotics have been stopped from reaching Europe in the past 15 years, as Afghanistan is the world's largest producer of opium. Besides the threat Afghanistan brings by means of radical Islamic followers, their drug production reaches farther across the globe and faster than terrorism can. Seeing the threats Afghanistan holds against their neighbors and the world, Tajikistan is focusing their efforts to protect their citizens. Annually spending over 40% of their state budget on border security, as well as assisting in any ways possible in the development of Afghanistan. It was Tajikistan who brought power and electricity to their neighbor Afghanistan. Because the people there have no skills, jobs, incomes, or resources, Tajikistan has brought their neighbors what they needed to help better themselves, such as jobs and education, in order to reduce radicalization.

When Emma Warner, one of the students in the audience, asked Ambassador Mahmaminov what the United States could do to further help the development and industrialization of Tajikistan, the distinguished guest replied: "In order to help Tajikistan, the world must fix the social and economic issues in Afghanistan." In regard to this, and other issues facing the world, Ambassador Mahmaminov encouraged students to use their skills and join the international conversation; by stating on multiple occasions "You see the issues and problems; you should tell us what to do, you should assist us, you should advise us."

This was an incredible event, both to raise student awareness about countries such as Tajikistan and as an opportunity for students demonstrating to ourselves our own potential for significant growth as professionals, through the student engaged learning model. I thoroughly enjoyed my first experience working as a team under the UIMF.

Hannah Bieker, UVU student, member of UVU College Republicans and Foreign Affairs Club