

## Utah Valley University Hosts Consul General of Azerbaijan in Los Angeles



*Nasimi Aghayev, the Consul General of Azerbaijan in Los Angeles speaks at UVU*

On October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2018, Utah Valley University (UVU) and the Office for Global Engagement hosted His Excellency Nasimi Aghayev, the Consul General of Azerbaijan in Los Angeles, California. Aghayev serves as the senior representative of the Republic of Azerbaijan to California and twelve other western states, including Utah.

The focus of Aghayev’s presentation was on the “Successful Model of Multi Faith Harmony and Peaceful Coexistence,” an area of concern that Azerbaijan has exceeded in on the global stage. The meaning of the country’s name is “The Land of Fire” because early people in the region worshipped fire, but that country has also commonly been called the Land of Inter-Religious Harmony.

He first gave background on the geography and religious background of Azerbaijan. The country is landlocked near the Middle East and surrounded by the Caspian Sea, Iran, Russia,

Georgia, and Armenia. It is the only country in the region, that borders both Iran and Russia. Around 95% of the population consists of Muslims. Of this population of Muslims, a majority are Shiites, as Azerbaijan has the second largest Shiite population in the world. The country also has a sizable Sunni population. Unlike in other areas that consist of a majority of Muslims, the Shiites and Sunnis pray together and cooperate. This is especially true at the Heydar Mosque in Azerbaijan. The country also has a population of citizens who are Catholic and Christian. The Catholic Church in Baku, Azerbaijan's capital is standing on land that was given to the church free of charge from the government. The Jewish population is treated in the same manner as the other religions. The government built a synagogue for the Jewish residents in the country as well. All of these acts relate back to Azerbaijan's view of inter-religious harmony. The country is for *accepting* everyone, not just tolerating them. Pope Francis has visited Catholics in Azerbaijan even though there are not very many of the followers of his faith because of the country's acceptance and united stance on all religions. The country's parliament consists of a Jewish woman and a Christian member as well who represents an almost entirely Muslim population. This just shows how well Azerbaijan performs in uniting different religions and making them feel as though they're one. Azerbaijan also has great relationships with neighboring countries and places around the world. It has a large amount of oil providers in neighboring Georgia and is the number one investor in that country. It also has good relations with Turkey, Russia, Iran, NATO, and many other countries.



**(L to R): H.E. Nasimi Aghayev and Hagen Isaacson**

During Mr. Aghayev's visit to UVU, the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF) did not plan time to directly present to VIP guest some of the forum's sustainable development goals and targets or share information on Utah's model of sustainability. However, I did get the brief opportunity of presenting His Excellency Nasimi Aghayev with a gift from UIMF and a folder of documents. The documents within the folder discussed the recent achievements and recognitions of UIMF by the United Nations and the United States Congress. UIMF would appreciate the chance in the future to discuss more with the Consul General on sustainability and development and share ideas about the similarities and differences in Utah's and Azerbaijan's models of sustainability.

*Hagen Isaacson, Treasurer and Director of Service, UIMF*