

Reflections on UIMF Celebration of International Mountain Day

On December 5th, 2018, the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), a coalition of student clubs at Utah Valley University (UVU), hosted a celebration of the [ninth - annual International Mountain Day](#). Students, faculty, and guests gathered from 10:00am – 12:00pm to hear speeches and see presentations on the celebration’s topic, [#MountainsMatter](#), as well as topics related to local, regional, and international efforts to implement the [sustainable mountain development \(SMD\) agenda](#) of the United Nations (UN) 2030 Development Agenda, as well as how the UVU student engaged learning model has been effectively used to provide students professional advancement and to contribute in a positive way to the UN’s SMD agenda. The celebration also featured the recognition of its participants, as well as UIMF members and UVU students who contributed to the International Mountain Day and who have helped to raise awareness about mountains and mountain communities.



Dr. Baldomero Lago speaks before UVU audience

The two-hour celebration featured speeches and presentations by UIMF President Samuel Elzinga, Editor-in-Chief of Youth and the Mountains Journal Rebecca Bindraban, as well as Dr. Baldomero Lago, UVU Global Engagement CIO/Vice-Rector, Orem City Mayor Richard Brunst, Russian Academy of Natural Sciences (RANS) Main Representative at the UN Dr. Ross “Rusty” Butler, and Utah-China Friendship Improvement Sharing Hands Development and

Commerce (FISH & D&C) President Mrs. Wendy Jyang. Each speaker showcased the importance of mountains and mountain communities to the UN SMD agenda and to the broader concepts of sustainable development in harmony with the UN 2030 Development agenda, as well as how UVU has played a role in SMD advocacy in Utah and the world.

UIMF President Elzinga opened up the celebration by highlighting how UIMF members and other UVU students have recently advocated for SMD and mountain women in particular at the global level, describing the efforts of students to give speeches, present statements and events, and lobby high-level officials at the 63rd Commission on the Status of Women and the 2018 High-Level Political Forum on sustainable development. He also spoke on the importance of SMD in the UN 2030 Development agenda, reiterating [the message](#) of H.E. Mahmamin Mahmaminov, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Tajikistan spoken earlier this year during the visit to UVU, that if mountains are ignored, everything else falls apart.

Dr. Lago then spoke on his many efforts to work with high-level officials at the UN as well as diplomats from a number of countries to both advocate for SMD, as well as engage UVU as an institution with high-level officials, bodies, and initiatives to promote sustainability. Dr. Lago also highlighted his and others' long efforts to make UVU an [Associate Member](#) of UN-DPI (United Nations Department of Public Information) and bring many high-level officials to UVU campus. Dr. Lago further announced the upcoming [2019 UN DPI \(Department of Public Information\) NGO conference](#), and that UVU will host there a side event dedicated to the implementation of mountain targets.

Orem Mayor Brunst then spoke on how mountains matter to the city of Orem and the State of Utah, as well as the world in general. Mayor Brunst reflected on the many ways in which mountains contribute to everyday life, describing the lumber, ore, minerals, water, and many other things which come from the mountains and that are often taken for granted. Mayor Brunst underscored the importance of mountains to the economy of Orem, Utah County, and the State of Utah, focusing on the recreational uses of mountains along with economic uses. The Mayor applauded the efforts of UVU and UIMF to advocate for local, national, and global sustainability and urged those present to get involved in SMD advocacy at all levels.

Dr. Butler then spoke on the partnership that [RANS](#) has experienced with UIMF, noting his long role as UVU Associate Vice President for International Affairs & Diplomacy, as well as his recurring role as main representative at the UN for RANS. Dr. Butler highlighted the importance of student engagement in SMD advocacy, professional advancement, and in contributing to high-level forums on sustainability. In particular, Dr. Butler described how RANS continues to partner with UIMF to advocate for mountain women and communities, announcing his organizations' [partnership](#) with UIMF delegations to past high-level events and the upcoming 63rd Commission on the Status of Women (CSW63).

[Utah-China FISH & D&C](#) President Jyang then described her efforts to contribute to successful family upbringing and social development through organizing a number of humanitarian trips to Asia, through both Utah-China FISH & D&C as well as [WJS Liahona International Services](#). In specific, Mrs. Jyang described a number of projects she has been involved in, which have

provided opportunities for young people to contribute to humanitarian aid and get more access to experiences which improved their personal lives. She also emphasized the role of families in the UN 2030 Development Agenda as catalysts for local sustainability and poverty eradication.

Ms. Rebecca Bindraban then spoke briefly on the mission of the Youth of the Mountains Journal and how UVU students have contributed to academic and scholarly discourse on a number of topics related to the Sustainable Development Goals, SMD, and research on sustainability practices of other nations, states, and localities. Ms. Bindraban noted the opportunity the journal gives to students and others to contribute in a positive way to SMD, particularly in the [2017 edition](#) of the journal. She presented copies of the 2017 issue of the Youth and the Mountains journal to contributing authors.



Michael Hinatsu introduces Mayor Richard Brunst

Overall, the celebration was a unique and exiting opportunity to celebrate the achievements of UVU, UIMF, and civil society in general to advocate for mountains and mountain communities, as well as to stress the further need for SMD advocacy. Personally, I had the honor of introducing Orem Mayor Richard Brunst during the event, under the direction of UIMF member Haagen Isaacson, who led the preparations for and moderated the celebration's events. Thanks to the student engaged learning model, it was a good experience for me to speak with Mayor Brunst and other event participants, both to make meaningful connections and talk briefly about my

efforts to prepare to advocate for mountain women at CSW63. The event as a whole showcased the high level of effort and cooperation that currently takes place between UVU, Orem, UIMF, NGOs, and other civil society participants, as well as showed the need for further, greater cooperation between civil society at a regional and national level. In specific, the efforts of all of the presenters constitutes an indispensable addition to both SMD advocacy and the furtherance of UVU and the State of Utah as leaders in sustainability, cooperation, and environmental stewardship. Furthermore, the event showed the need for cooperation between all relevant parties to more effectively advocate for SMD at the global level. \

Michael Hinatsu, UIMF member