

The Importance and Power of Civil Society Discussion with Ms. Alison Smale, Under-Secretary-General, United Nations



UVU students and UIMF Members with Ms. Alison Smale after the round table discussion

On Friday, March 29, the Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications at the United Nations, Ms. Alison Smale, visited Utah Valley University (UVU) for a round-table discussion on "A UN Perspective: The Importance and Power of Civil Society" in the UVU Center for Global and Intercultural Engagement center. Her visit to Utah and UVU was to meet and prepare for the 68th United Nations Civil Society (UNCS) Conference "Building Inclusive and Sustainable Communities" which will be held this upcoming August 2019 in Salt Lake City. This will be the first UNCS

Conference held on U.S. soil that is not in New York City. In November 2017, UVU was granted affiliate membership status with UN Global Communications and works to educate the campus and larger community on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.



Megan Davis with Ms. Alison Smale advocating for Gender Equality

During the round-table discussion, three youth delegate members for the UNCS Conference were a part of a panel along with Ms. Smale. Alison Smale started off the discussion with a brief introduction and presentation. Following her presentation on her own personal affairs with the U.N. and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the three students asked the Under-Secretary-General to the U.N. some questions concerning youth involvement, SDGs, and the upcoming UNCS conference in SLC. My colleagues, Samuel Elzinga, Andrew Jenson, and Lauren Johnson were all members of

the 3-student delegation panel and are a part of the youth committee for the 2019 UNCS Conference. These students also traveled to the United Nations Headquarters in New York last week to meet with other youth committees in preparation for that conference.

While Ms. Alison Smales answered the questions from these UVU students, she heavily and repeatedly emphasized the importance of sustainability and youth involvement. In response to the question from Ms. Lauren Johnson, What is the most important part of SDG 11? Ms. Smales replied; “the most important part is that it is sustainable.” It’s one thing to take action, but it is important to make sure those actions taken create sustainable outcomes for the future. She also stated that youth engagement with SDGs is very important. The youth are the most impactful voices for SDGs and a sustainable future relies on the youth generations. Change starts with us, and the U.N. Civil Society Conference in August is a forum for local NGOs and civilians to have their voices heard and speak on matters which is most important to them.

All thanks to Dr. Lago and the UVU Center for Global and Intercultural Engagement center, UVU students and faculty were given this amazing opportunity to listen to the wise words of and interact with such a high-level dignitary through the engaged learning model here on campus.

Megan Davis, UNA-USA Liaison and UIMF Member, UVU