

## Reflections on UIMF activities during day 2 at CSW63



*Utah Valley University delegation speaks at our parallel event at CSW63*

On Tuesday, March 19, 2019, members of the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), a coalition of student clubs at Utah Valley University (UVU), continued their advocacy work at the 63<sup>rd</sup> Session of the United Nations (UN) Commission on the Status of Women (CSW63) by hosting a parallel event at the Church Center of the UN, titled “Student Engaged Learning to Empower Mountain Women and Girls.” The event was the culmination of preparations that began in September 2018, and featured presentations by students and faculty regarding the implementation of the UN’s 2030 Development agenda about sustainable mountain development (SMD), Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) #5 on gender equality, as well as the three mountain targets under the SDGs.

The day began according to Aldon Trimble's schedule, with students meeting at 8am at the Church Center of the UN to prepare the room for the event. All preparations went smoothly, even as we asked Church Center staff for assistance with video and sound for the event. I was tasked with moderating the event and making sure that it went smoothly and within our allotted time, as well as overseeing our room preparations.

There was a larger audience than I had expected, which was also very good for our delegation members, shared important issues regarding the empowerment of women and girls. We first heard welcoming messages by Dr. Baldomero Lago, UVU's CIO and Vice Rector for Global Engagement, and Taylor Bell, UVU's student body president. Then we heard from Abdulrahman Alghanmi and Viktoriia Bahrii, who both spoke about their involvement with UIMF and how it has helped them research issues related to Saudi Arabia and Ukraine's Carpathian Mountains, respectively. Then, Noorani Barkat, PhD. candidate at Washington State University, spoke on empowering Pakistani and other women in agriculture; Hannah Bieker, UIMF member and Rotoractor, spoke on how Rotary International can empower women; Rebecca Bindraban, editor of the student journal Youth and the Mountains, spoke on how the journal empowers students to do academic research on SMD and women's topics; Megan Davis, UIMF Director of Public Relations and UNA-USA liaison, spoke on how mountain women in Utah have engaged themselves with local organizations and civil society to give charity and, in particular, create the Women of the Mountains Conferences (WOMCs); William Gum-Causey spoke on the issues facing indigenous people in Utah and elsewhere; Hailee Hodgson and Laila Mitchell, UIMF Photographers, spoke on the urban/rural economic divide in Utah and Utah women's opioid issues, respectively; Ezra Pugliano spoke on the role that business can play in empowering women; and Aldon Trimble spoke on his research on the effects on children of incarcerating their parents.

Even though we went over time, our event was a success, and I take this time to openly thank all of my fellow students for their hard work and contributions. Unfortunately, one of our team members, Veronica Caballero, was unable to attend with us. She has a unique position at UVU and within UIMF as one of the participants of the first WOMC in 2007, and her presence was missed.

After the event, we took group photos in front of the UN compound. We made some adjustments to the schedule, and split off for lunch, with Dr. Baktybek Abdrisaev joining Aldon Trimble, Paul and myself for lunch. Afterward, Dr. Abdrisaev and I returned to the UN compound area to wait for Abdulrahman Alghanmi, who was conducting business at Saudi Arabia's consulate. After he joined us, we toured the UN compound again, visiting the chambers of the Economic and Social Council, Trusteeship Council, and the Security Council, as well as taking photos around the compound itself.



*Michael Hinatsu at a Norman Rockwell painting in the UN compound.*

At 2:30pm, we attended a parallel event put on by the NGO Big Ocean Women, which advocates for women's empowerment via motherhood and family responsibilities. Two speakers from Sweden spoke about how Sweden's system of child care, which was implemented to help mothers and children, was actually hurting children and causing health and mental problems among Swedish youth, because the familial element and motherhood component of families was being

removed or replaced by artificial mother figures. These speakers also highlighted the role that women can play in their families, emphasizing that the mother and the family are the best social protection system in society. They and the third speaker all advocated for what they called “maternal feminism” which highlights the innate characteristics of women as mothers and caregivers, arguing that women must realize this to benefit their families and bring themselves and other women and girls to equal footing with men, especially in societies which focus less on motherhood and caregiving and more on financial and material measures of success. It was very interesting to hear this modern critique on contemporary feminism, as well as to hear specific cases of how even the UN’s attempts at gender equality and female empowerment fall short or are not inclusive enough.

After the event, Abdulrahman and myself joined with other of our colleagues to attend the regional caucus put on by the NGO Commission on the Status of Women, New York (NGO CSW/NY) for the Europe/North America region. This consisted of a short report by NGO CSW/NY leaders and a longer period similar to a break out session, whereby caucus participants grouped together to discuss issues regarding building awareness for and implementing best practices for uniting civil society more effectively to work on gender equality. This was especially interesting for me to engage in conversation with NGO representatives and leaders from around the world who have been working on gender equality for many years. All of the UIMF members in attendance were able to engage with others in a similar manner, sharing business cards and important ideas and suggestions for amplifying civil society’s voice to the UN. Another highlight of this event for me was to meet in person Mrs. Winifred Doherty, Main NGO Representative to the UN, whom I worked with during the many online sessions related to preparing the CSW63 zero draft document.

Afterwards, we joined other UIMF members for dinner at Grand Central Station and to relax after the day’s events. Overall, as a leader and fellow delegation member, I was very pleased with how the parallel event happened, as well as the way that my colleagues conducted themselves both during the event and at other events during the day, especially in meeting with and promoting UVU, UIMF, engaged learning, SMD, and other topics to civil society.

*Michael Hinatsu, UIMF member*