

Statement

**Parallel event “Student Engaged Learning to empower mountain women and girls”
63rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women
Ezra Pugliano, member, Utah International Mountain Forum,
a coalition of student clubs at Utah Valley University**

It is an honor to be here today and speak about a topic I am passionate about. My name is Ezra Pugliano. I am from Herriman, Utah and attend school at Utah Valley University where I am a senior studying political science.

As a result of my involvement with the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), last year I had the opportunity to volunteer on the International Women’s Day of service at UVU. It was a project affiliated with the UVU Women's Success Center. Days for Girls International is located in Washington and is a NGO. It has chapters throughout the US and has twenty chapters located in the state of Utah. In my time serving I learned a lot about the different needs of women and girls in developing countries. I left campus that day with a strong feeling that more had to be done. I later collected 600 pairs of girl’s underwear, and myself along with over twenty friends put together hygiene kits. These female hygiene kits will improve the quality of life for hundreds of women and girls, as well as save lives. This service activity allowed me to see one of the many opportunities that are needed to help women. I am here at the UN today as a member of the UIMF delegation. Because of UVU’s student engaged learning model I am able to attend today. This model allows students to become involved in issues that are important to them both inside and outside of the classroom. Because of incredible faculty such as Professor Bek who create a classroom culture that fosters the engaged learning model. We worked very hard to come here and many of us, myself included are non-traditional students.

I have worked hard to empower women and girls throughout the state of Utah. I believe that the best way to empower women and girls is through private businesses. One of the reasons I am able to attend college is because of the company I work for, Chick-fil-A, who provided me with a \$25,000 scholarship for school. It is a company with a global outreach and I see that many other businesses like my company can invest in empowering women in a variety of ways. A few ways I wish to highlight:

First, is by hiring women! In 2014, the Utah Women & Leadership Project released a research and policy brief titled “The Status of Women Leaders in Utah Business.” “According to this study since 2014 the percentage of women in top leadership roles in Utah companies with 100 employees or more has dropped nearly in half, from 11.6 to 6.4.” When qualified women are hired as key players in businesses, other Utah businesses will follow suit.

Another way private business can empower women is by investing in their future. Businesses that provide college tuition reimbursement allow its employees, many of whom are women the opportunity to return to school and further their education. This allows employees to receive degrees, that can in turn allow them to invest in their community with the knowledge they acquire. My own example demonstrates that this approach can work.

Lastly, business can help eliminate barriers for mothers to work. From benefits such as

maternity leave, healthcare, and childcare mothers will be able to provide for their families while taking care of them. If you have worked at your present company for at least a year, you are entitled by federal law to take up to 12 weeks of unpaid maternity leave. For families across the state of Utah, and also the country, this is nearly- impossible for a family to go without income for 12 weeks. However, when business invest in their employee's wellbeing, employees will in turn invest back in their company.

It is my goal to continue to raise awareness among my coworkers, colleagues, and friends about the responsibility we all have to empower women. I am grateful for the experience I have to attend the UN and to continue to develop a relevant vision for our joint actions.