

STATEMENT

D. William Gum-Causey 68th UN Civil Society Conference

My name is William Gum-Causey I am a UVU student, majoring in Political Science. Also, I am a non-traditional student, which means that in addition to getting my education, I am married. During the last two years, through engaged learning, I have interned for House Representatives in the Utah State Legislature. In class, I conducted research for a House Representative of the US Congress. I conducted research on County Government Structure which was compiled into a report, and, during this Conference, I am hosting the Senior Manager for Social Sustainability with UN Global Compact. Lastly, I have contributed to the UIMF efforts to advocate for the UN sustainable mountain development agenda in the state of Utah. All of this has been done through engaged learning which allows students to gain professional skills through hands-on activities as a group, with faculty serving them as a mentor.

I became interested in helping the UIMF in advocating not only for Mountain sustainability but also Indigenous Women when my advisor recommended me to take Federal Indian Policy and Law, a class taught by Dr. Dusty Jensen, to fulfill a requirement for my public policy major. I learned about local indigenous sovereign tribal nation members who lived in the mountainous areas of Utah, New Mexico, and Arizona. As a UIMF member, last year I created a panel to highlight the problems facing indigenous nations, titled “UIMF: Addressing Issues of Indigenous Sovereign Nations” where I invited Dr. Jensen, Jacob Crane, Chase Hobson, and Jaclyn Booth, UVU students and members of sovereign tribal governments, to address the 17 UN sustainable development goals in their communities. Panel participants raised serious concerns about a lack of access to a market, high unemployment, drug abuse, housing problems, the dwindling population on reservations, and physical abuse.

Indigenous sovereign tribal members face barriers to achieve all 17 UN sustainable development goals but the one most pressing is the 5th, Gender Equality. According to UN statistics “1 in 5 women and girls, including 19% aged 15 - 49, have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner with the last 12 months” (#5). However, the National Institute of Justice in the United States reports “84% of American Indian and Alaskan women have experienced sexual assault, this is 1.2x’s more likely than non-Hispanic white women. In another student engaged learning experience I presented my findings at a parallel event during the Commission on the Status of Women this Year.

Both at the national and international levels, we can shed light on these issues. Utah has taken it upon itself to address issues facing members of indigenous tribal nations. Governor Gary Herbert in 2019 hired Larry Echo Hawk as Specials Council on Indian Affairs to “build better relations with the state’s eight tribes, some of whose positions differ sharply with Utah’s political leadership”. Utah Valley University is committed to addressing the issues of this underrepresented group and has done so in particular by recently opening its new Native American Studies minor. A key aspect of completing this minor is using student engaged learning to help its students, many of which are Native American, bring awareness of these issues. It is through engaged learning that I learned that there is a need to bring awareness about Native American issues to the broader population. Thank you very much for your attention.