

## Advocating for Mountain Women at the 66<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women



I am a member of the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), a coalition of student clubs at Utah Valley University, which is the only educational institution in North America to be a member of the United Nations Mountain Partnership under the UN Food and Agriculture Organization.

Our club works through a student-engaged learning method (SEL), where students address real-world problems as a group through hands-on activities with a faculty member serving them as mentors. Our events are hosted and run entirely by students, from advertisement and logistics to actively hosting the various events. I am very proactive with our method, taking each event to a higher level. Through this model, I was part of the Utah International Mountain Forum delegation at the 66th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW66) during March 14-25, 2022.

During this highest gender-focused forum of the UN, the UIMF delegation and myself advocated for the role of mountain women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programs; a major issue in mountain communities. As preparations for the visit, I was able with other students to submit a written statement on that issue to the CSW66 through the sponsorship of the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences (RANS), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). The statement was distributed as an official document of the UN on December 12, 2021.

Furthermore, I spoke about SMD and the SEL model during a parallel event titled “Inclusive Student Engaged Learning Model to Empower Mountain Women Globally” on March 21, 2022, as part of the CSW66 agenda. In planning this event, I handled the registration of over 30 speakers, being the liaison between the student delegates from Snow College and the student delegates at Utah Valley University, all while maintaining my classes and working a full time job. I was the first to volunteer for event tasks and provide a powerful voice to our cause of sustainable mountain development.

Through my preparatory research, I found that my home state of Wyoming is doing really well at women's rights. The best statistics for Wyoming is that it is ranked 16th out of 50 US states for political empowerment. In education and health, Wyoming ranked 31st, and in workplace environments, Wyoming ranked 40th. I have a passion for Yemen, and I believe we can do more as a global society. I was excited to learn of Tawakkol Karman. She won a Nobel peace prize in 2011 "for their non-violent struggle for the

safety of women and for women's rights to full participation in peace-building work." Women's rights and full participation in democratic processes are essential to ensure lasting peace. In Yemen, democratic rights are restricted.



*Myself, speaking during CSW66*

In 2005, Tawakkol Karman co-founded the group Women Journalists Without Chains to promote freedom of expression and democratic rights. From 2007 to 2010, she regularly led demonstrations and sit-ins in Tahrir Square, Sana'a. She actively participated in the 2011 protests against ruling regimes in many Arab countries. The revolutions of the Arab Spring in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and Syria, and the movement towards processes in other Arab countries such as Algeria, Morocco, Bahrain, Sudan, and others, in terms of motivation, driving power, and objectives, didn't take place on isolated islands cut off from all the rapid and astonishing developments and changes which our world is witnessing. The Arab people have woken up just to see how poor their share of freedom, democracy, and dignity is. And they revolted.

This experience is somewhat similar to the spring that swept throughout Eastern Europe after the downfall of the Soviet Union. The birth of democracies in Eastern Europe was difficult, and victory emerged only after a bitter struggle against existing systems. Similarly, the Arab world is today witnessing the birth of a new world that tyrants and unjust rulers strive to oppose, but in the end, this new world will inevitably emerge. I cannot help but draw comparisons to Wyoming and Yemen. Wyoming was the 1st for women across many sectors and opportunities. See next page on a list of 1st that Wyoming was able to accomplish. I do not see why Yemen can not emerge as a regional example for women's suffrage. Hearing his excellency speak at the end of our statements gave me great hope that the Organization of American States will create a CORE organization of Inter-mountain development. I am also hopeful that this core will place women's suffrage as a part of the core, and his contacts for my research project have been amazing. Ambassador Forsyth discusses mountain targets with the UIMF Wyoming Women's Firsts 1st State or Territory to Grant Universal Suffrage: In 1869, the first Wyoming Territorial Assembly passed the Women's Suffrage Act granting women the right to vote and hold public office, putting them on equal footing with men. When Wyoming became a state in 1890, this right was written into Article 6 of the new constitution, ensuring universal suffrage.

**Stephan Atkinson, UIMF Member**