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**MOUNTAIN DAY**  
**“THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN SUDAN AND SOUTH SUDAN”**  
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Hello everyone, my name is Winnie Jada. I am an international student at Utah Valley University currently studying Political Science with an emphasis in Global Politics. I am South Sudanese, born in Sudan and raised in Uganda. I will be addressing the status of women in Sudan and South Sudan today.

Sub-Saharan countries Sudan and South Sudan face numerous issues and for a long time have been struggling with obtaining and maintaining sustainable development goals. Gender inequality being one of the biggest issues. Tradition is important in the cultures of both countries, and is often used as an excuse for gender inequality and gender based violence. In Sudan, there are laws that restrict women from wearing pants, escaping child marriage and enjoying representation in the government. Women face harsh cultural practices such as female genital mutilation which was banned by the government in 2020 but is still practiced in various places in the country. They also face gender based violence for example military and government officials beat, rape and sometimes murder women who speak out against abuse. In South Sudan, women face similar issues as those in Sudan. One of the biggest issues the country currently faces is girl child marriages. According to the United Nations, South Sudan is one of the countries with the highest rate of girl child marriage, with over 52% of the population getting married before the age of 18. Women also suffer gender health disparities. Due to violence in the country, there is limited access to health facilities hence a high mortality rate. Women also face gender inequality in education. Due to the high rates of early marriages, girls are more likely to drop out of school after marriage and take care of their new families while the men continue with their education.

Growing up in Uganda, I often visited family in Sudan and South Sudan during the holidays. One of my memories is that of having to dress “properly” before I went anywhere outside the house. I could not wear whatever I wanted to like I did in Uganda because wearing pants out in public in Sudan is prohibited. I had to make sure my shoulders were covered and my clothing was not too revealing and this is the experience of all women in Sudan. Anyone who broke any of these rules was punished and in most cases this is done through stripping you and flogging. The rules are not as strict in South Sudan but the culture frowns upon wearing clothes that are too revealing.

Ending gender inequality has always been a major interest to me hence my interest in political science. In 2018, I participated in a campaign in Juba, South Sudan called “Ana Ma Mara Sakit” translation, “I am not just a woman”, “mara sakit” is a demeaning Arabic term meaning “just a woman” which is often used to disregard women who speak up for their rights. The campaign was organized by some members of the United Nations Mission In South Sudan to bring awareness to the gender inequalities that women face. Through this campaign, we went to several schools, churches, and villages talking to

girls and women about the importance of education and women's rights. I was privileged to be born into a family that prioritizes education so my participation in this event was to show the girls my age and those younger than me that they could attain an education as well. We also donated a few clothes and sanitary materials to the girls and women. This was a wonderful experience for me and made me more passionate to see a change when it comes to the status of women in South Sudan.

I also hope that through my experience with student-engaged learning at Utah Valley University, I will be able to apply this as a solution in the future to empower women, as I plan to work in Sudan and South Sudan, fighting against gender inequality.

Thank you.