

## 13<sup>th</sup> International Mountain Day Celebration at Utah Valley University

### “Women Move Mountains”

Utah Valley University held its 13<sup>th</sup> International Mountain Day (IMD) Celebration on December 6, 2022. Members of the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), a coalition of student clubs at UVU celebrate IMD by focusing the event on women that live in mountainous regions throughout the world. Two special guests and a few students spoke at the event, “Women Move Mountains.”



#### *Dr. Lago the Chief International Officer at UVU speaks at IMD*

Introductory remarks were given by Joshua Kooyman, the President of the Sustainable Mountain Club at UVU, and Scripting Manager of the UVU podcast “In the Interest of National Security.” Dr. Baldomero Lago, the Chief International Officer at UVU, was the first speaker. Dr. Lago focused on what mountains have to offer the people living in those regions and shares the importance of creating awareness of mountains. He highlighted the potential mountains offer to improve society and economy, along with strengthening alliances around the world. Mountains cover 1/5<sup>th</sup> of the world's environment and landscapes and 1/10<sup>th</sup> of society lives in mountains. He has shared that through his travels he has seen how women play a key role in helping protect economies, resources, biodiversity and traditional medicine in mountainous regions. Lago also

introduced the book, “Why it Matters.” The book has conference publications on Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) topics and focuses on UVU engagement with global activities. Lago stresses the importance of focusing on promote gender equality, social justice and resilience for women in the mountains.



***Dr. Rusty Butler, main representative at the UN for the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences***

Dr. Rusty Butler spoke next, focusing on Sustainable Mountain Development (SMD). He shared how the student-engaged learning (SEL) model has provided students opportunities to get involved with different organizations in efforts to advocate for mountainous regions. One of those groups is the Mountain Partnership under the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). UVU is one of the 450 members that contribute to this group through involvement in initiatives and projects. Student coalition members have also advocated for adopting and implementing mountain targets as part of the SDG’s. UVU has hosted Foreign Dignitaries through SEL, including representatives from Hungary, Austria, Fiji, Kenya, Romania, India, Macedonia, Kyrgyzstan, Switzerland, Greece, Georgia, Germany, Uzbekistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Tajikistan, Russian Federation, Peru and the UN Global Communications General. UVU has also hosted four Women of the Mountain Conferences (WOMC) from 2007-2015. UIMF members also had the opportunity to go to the UN and participate in the Commission on the Status of Women session in 2019. These activities help promote gender and SMD under Mountain Projects in North America.





***Jokudu Jada (Winnie), UVU international student from Sudan speaks at the event***

Jokudu Jada (Winnie) is a student from Sudan, she lived in Uganda and is studying Political Science at UVU. She shared her experiences of inequality in Sudan and about the history of the country. Sudan split into two different countries in 2011 but women face the same issues in both states. Winnie shared her personal experiences of how she was expected to cover herself in Sudan versus Uganda. Tradition is used to keep inequality for women of Sudan and South Sudan. For example, laws restricting freedom of women, child marriage, domestic violence, gender-based violence, gender disparities in health, lack of representation in government, inequalities in access to health and education, and harsh cultural practices such as FGM which was banned by the government in 2020 but still practiced. Organizations such as the UN and USAID have been helping address these issues along with help from private organizations. The people of Sudan protest against oppression and try to elect women into government positions. Initiatives such as “No to Women Oppression” and campaigns such as “Ana ma mara sakit” (I am not just a woman) are also fighting against gender-based inequalities. Hopefully through the efforts of these organizations, inequalities women experience in Sudan can be diminished.



***Handen Torsak, UVU students speaks at the event***

Handen Torsak is another student speaker studying Political Science at UVU who shared his experiences of women moving mountains. He shared how his mother was a role model for him. She was involved with UIMF and attended the UN women's conference of 2015. Through her involvement she took the opportunity of having two Pakistani women live in her home with her family, Noorani and Mehak. Noorani impacted Handen's life by sharing her culture with him. She had goals to study agriculture in the United States so she could move home and help the people of her country. Mehak shared clothing and supported those in need and was a great example to Handen as well. Her goal was to support the Kalash people of Pakistan. They are a religious minority group of 3000 people. These women are great examples and have taught Handen how to enrich life by uniting those around you, the importance of embracing culture and that you can learn from everyone.



***Priyanka Prem Kumar speaks at the event virtually***

Priyanka Prem Kumar joined the event virtually and spoke on the Women’s Status in India. There are many gender issues against women in India including women discrimination, discriminatory social norms, laws and cultural practices. These have led to unequal opportunities, child domestic work, teenage pregnancy, poor education, sexual abuse, low survival rates at birth, poor health, violence, exploitation and possibility of child marriage. Women active in the labor force hit its peak in 2005 at 26% and has continued to decrease every year since then and is now at 20%. AI For Rural (AIR) is associated with studies based on sustainable development for mountainous communities in the State of Utah and India and has been partnered with UIMF and UVU since 2015. Priyanka is involved in research for AIR that focuses on improving the livelihoods of mountainous people in India using sustainable development with the help of Artificial Intelligence. She has presented its results at the UN Conference “Why It Matters” hosted at UVU this past October.

Following the speakers, Stephan Atkinson and Rachel Welker presented awards recognizing individuals who contributed to Sustainable Mountain Development and UIMF President, Alitha Thompson gave the Closing Remarks.

During this event I was able to participate by introducing student speaker Handen Torsak. I appreciate the opportunity to be involved in celebrating International Mountain Day. The speakers at this event gave me insights on how I can become more involved in advocating for women throughout the world. Listening to the personal experiences and efforts our speakers shared helped me have appreciation for the opportunities I have as a woman. After the event I had the opportunity to speak with Dr. Rusty Butler, the main representative at the UN for the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences. I appreciate the members UIMF, and all involved in organizing this event for giving me the opportunity to interact with our guests and gain a better understanding of how I can become a better advocate for women in the mountains.

*Laila Mitchell, UVU Student*