

## **International Mountain Day Celebration at Utah Valley University**

This past Tuesday, December 6th, 2022, students and speakers celebrated International Mountain Day. That was the 13th year of celebration at Utah Valley University. The conference consisted of five wonderful speakers.

We first heard from Dr. Lago who is the chief international officer of UVU and works with many international organizations such as the United Nations, The World Trade Center. Dr. Lago first touched on student engaged learning. Through student engaged learning, students can solve problems for themselves and learn a multitude of new things. When students are engaging in projects and activities, they experience new opportunities that can be beneficial to their future endeavors.



*Dr. Lago, Chief international officer of UVU speaks at the event*

To begin speaking on International Mountain Day, Dr. Lago shared 3 reasons why the celebration is so important. He first spoke on how awareness is created. The mountains are not only beautiful but important to Mountain communities. They should not be taken for granted. Secondly, Dr. Lago pointed out the alliances and opportunities that are brought about. Mountains

are able to bring communities together as they share culture, economy, and Mountain impacts. The third and final point that was made about the importance of this day was gender equality. Dr. Lago mentioned how women have a big part in taking care of the mountains. Women are very involved in most mountain communities as they are the “keepers of knowledge”. He then shared some important facts about mountain communities. The first one being that 1/5 of large environments are mountains. Next is that mountains provide a home for over 1/10 of all people. The mountains are able to provide people with multiple resources such as shelter and fresh water.

We take pride in UVU and its involvement with International Mountain day along with the relationships that are kept with other nations. The students involved in Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF) have led the discussion and hosted an international conference. At that conference, UVU student research papers were presented. These examples of student engaged learning show just how involved students can be.



*Dr. Rusty Butler, UVU Associate Vice President speaks at the event*

Next, we heard from Dr. Rusty Butler who is a former UVU Associate Vice President and is now involved in the UN. Dr. Butler also touched on student engaged learning (SEL) and spoke about the demographics of UVU including the high number of non-traditional students.

Dr. Butler said that UMIF is great for non-traditional students such as mothers because they can use their strengths to make the organization profitable.

Dr. Butler then went on to share how a UVU student was able to share a statement in front of the UN open working group. Not only has UVU gone to the UN, but UN members have been able to visit UVU. We have welcomed representatives from Kenya, Fiji, Hungary, and more. One of the most noticeable events to take place at UVU was the Women of the Mountains conference beginning in 2007. 22 nations were in attendance as members spoke on the important part women play in mountain communities and how to implement women promoting policies. This conference happened again in 2011 and then moved to Peru the following year. Eventually, it was a conference completely run by students. In 2015, a group of 79 students made up of BYU and UVU hosted with the theme of equal opportunity for women. In all, the United Nations Secretary General's reports on sustainable mountain development highlighted UVU 6 times since 2007. The only academic institution in North America to do so.



*UVU students in the audience*

Winnie Jada, a UVU student from Sudan shared her knowledge of gender inequality in her home country and what she can do to bring back change. She spoke about modesty

expectations from women in both Sudan and South Sudan. Women have to wear clothing that covers hair, shoulders, and body down to the ankles. If not followed, women can be punished by the modesty police. Winnie also shared how Sudanian women are victims of female genital mutilation. These are only two of the things that show the inequality of women in Sudan. Winnie plans to finish her education at UVU and then take what she has learned back to Sudan to make a change.

The next speaker was Handen Torsak. A UVU student as well. He shared how he is a second-generation member of UIMF and how the organization has taught him a variety of life lessons. Handen told us about his experience getting to know Mehak and Noorani, two members of Women of the Mountain (an organization that focuses on sustainable mountain development and gender equality). Through his experience, he learned to build trust versus intolerance and how we should focus on what we have in common with others.

The final speaker of the conference was Priyanka Kumar. She is from India and is knowledgeable about gender inequality in the country. In India, there is gender discrimination which results in not many women being active in the labor force. Kumar also touched on sustainable development and AI solutions for agriculture. She introduced AI for Rural (AIR) and its relationship with UIMF. Together, they have done research and produced studies on improving the lives of those in mountain communities with the help of artificial intelligence.

UVU has been recognized multiple times by the UN. Through students engaging in learning, they have been able to experience once in a lifetime opportunity. The international relationships that UVU has built will be beneficial to both the University and its students far into the future.

***Kamryn Cooke, UVU Political Science Student***