

13th International Mountain Day Observation held at Utah Valley University

On December 6th, 2022, Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), a coalition of student clubs at Utah Valley University (UVU), hosted UVU's 13th annual International Mountain Day Observation



The 13th annual UVU observation of International Mountain Day (IMD) was held on December 6, 2022, by the Utah Valley University students (UVU). This event, which is a United Nations (UN) event, was hosted by the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), a coalition of student clubs. This year's main theme was "Women Move Mountains". This was the Mountain Partnership's decision, which is part of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. It coordinates initiatives and activities to promote sustainable mountain development (SMD). Since 2006, UVU has been a member of the MP. It is the first North American academic institution to do so.

The IMD was hosted by UIMF members using the student-engaged learning model. SEL encourages students and faculty to solve practical problems by working together with mentors. The creation of a task was the first step in preparing for this event. The task list was designed to make it easy for students at UVU to sign up for different tasks in preparation, during, and after the event. The event was attended by a wide range of students, including students majoring in National Security and Political Science as well as students majoring in Information Technologies.

To prepare for the observation, students arrived at LA 116 at UVU early. Before guests arrived, chairs were set up and tables were arranged.

After guests arrived, Joshua Kooyman opened the event. He is the president of the Sustainable Mountain Development club at UVU. Following him was a warm welcome from Dr. Baldomero Lago at UVU who expressed his appreciation for UIMF's participation in this event.



Dr. Baldomero Lago greets audience members

Dr. Lago talked about UVU's leadership in Utah and North America to promote the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals via academic activities. He shared with us the story of how UVU and Salt Lake City hosted August's 68th United Nations Civil Society Conference. This was the first time that a UN conference of this high quality was held in the western part of the United States, and not at UN Headquarters. Dr. Lago also spoke about UVU's participation in hosting the first academic conference "Why it Matters" on SDGs in October 2022 on the UVU campus. It was attended by representatives from over 67 countries. Students and faculty from

UVU contributed to the success of the conference by presenting their academic research, with a particular SDG in mind. Dr. Lago also spoke out about the importance of UIMF in promoting SMD in Utah and the UN's gender agenda.

After his welcoming remarks, Dr. Rusty Butler followed. He was the Associate Vice president for International Affairs and Diplomacy and Director of the Utah Russia Institute from Mid-2016 until his retirement. Now, he is the main representative to the United Nations for the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences. This NGO has general consultative status with UN ECOSOC. His remarks included his experience hosting numerous important international figures at UVU and showing them the school as well as the amazing work of students here. He also spoke on UIMF, which was featured in the Report on Sustainable Mountain Development 2022 by the Secretary-General of the United Nations. His comments were well-received and appreciated.



UVU faculty and students during the event

After Dr. Butler's presentation, the audience had the opportunity to hear from Winnie Jada (a current student at UVU). Winnie Jada, a South Sudanese native, spoke about the challenges that women face every day in South Sudan. Her speech was eye-opening and also addressed her actions in promoting gender equality in Sudan. She spoke about how the UIMF helped her and the use of SEL to join joint actions. After graduating from UVU, she expressed the hope of implementing a similar educational model in her country.

Next, Handen Torsak (a UVU student from Utah) spoke about his experiences hosting women in Pakistan at his house while he was growing up. His mother hosted the fourth International Women of the Mountains conference through SEL as the executive secretary. This experience helped him understand not only Pakistani women but also how people can come together peacefully and create positive experiences.



Rachel Welkers and Stephan Atkinson presenting certificates

After Handen's remarks, Priyanka Pram Kumar, a researcher from India, delighted the crowd with her presentation about women in India and their challenges. It was amazing to see how women in India play a leading role, especially in the field of Informational Technology and computer science. She was happy to discuss the partnership between UIMF members, AI for Rural, an NGO with which she worked in advocating for gender equality, and SMD in India and Utah.

The annual UIMF awards ceremony in which students who had been involved with the club that year received awards for their efforts in supporting the club. The ceremony was headed by Stephan Atkinson and Rachel Welkers. The preparations involved including going through all of the UIMF write ups and identifying all those who participated in making UIMF a phenomenal success.

Finally, the conference was closed by Alitha Thompson, who shared her thoughts on the importance of SMD, and highlighted how the IMD observation will contribute to the preparations of UIMF members for the visit to the UN next March when they will plan to advocate for mountain women during the 67th session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

- *Stephan Atkinson (Child), President of UVU Foreign Affairs Club*