

International Mountain Day 2022 Celebration at Utah Valley University



UVU students were invited to attend the presentations

On December 6th, 2022, members of the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), a coalition of student clubs at Utah Valley University and their associates met to celebrate the declared by the United Nations International Mountain Day by sharing the work they are doing under the UIMF in advocating sustainable mountain development in the State of Utah and worldwide. Multiple speakers were given the opportunity to present. The main presenters included: Dr. Baldomero Lago - the Chief International Officer at UVU, Dr. Rusty Butler - the main representative to the United Nations Russian Academy of Natural Sciences, Winnie Jada - a representative of the Immigrant and Refugee Student Union, Handen Torsak - a UVU student, and Priyank a Prem Kumar - a research analyst for improving food security and sustainable food

systems. Additional remarks were given by: UVU students: Spencer Thompson, Joshua Kyooman, Alitha Thompson, Tristin Smith, Joshua Kyooman, McKay Brooks, and Laila Mitchell.

Some of the major issue areas UIMF covers include sustainable development and gender equality, particularly in mountain communities. These areas tend to be more rural, and oftentimes end up being less developed than non mountain communities. During her remarks, UIMF president Alitha Thompson shared her own experience growing up in one of Utah's mountain communities. It was normal for her to see girls getting married at 16 and starting families shortly thereafter. To those from more urbanized areas of the US, this sort of practice seems backwards, but to these communities it's seen as necessary. The reliance on farming creates a need for labor, and starting families early is one of the ways that communities are able to meet this need.



Dr. Rusty Butler presents on the Russian Academy of Natural Science's involvement with UIMF

What stuck with me most about Alitha's story was how close it was. She only lived about an hour and a half south of me, and yet she grew up in a way that is so alien to me. These development issues aren't just something that happens far away overseas. It happens here too. We like to see ourselves as advanced or civilized in the US, but we have left some of our own communities behind.

The event was hosted by UIMF members through a student engaged learning model. According to this model students work as a group on practical problems and the teacher provides them advice when they need them. As per my assignment, I had the opportunity to introduce Winnie Jada. Winnie is an international student from Sudan who was originally born in South Sudan.



McKay Brooks and Laila Mitchell introduce speakers



Winnie Jada presents on the status of women in South Sudan

Winnie spoke on some of the forms of oppression that women in South Sudan face, and how her family had to leave the country in part to protect her from the persecution she would have faced if they didn't.

UIMF has pulled in members from different international backgrounds which really solidifies the club's status as one that is focused on global issues. It is clear to me that UIMF provides opportunities that would be invaluable to me as someone who wants to work in international politics, and this led me to ask Alitha and Tristin how I could get more involved with UIMF. They informed me of how they could use extra hands to conduct leadership responsibilities, and extended an offer to become the vice president of UVU's Rotaract. Knowing the relationship

between Rotaract and Rotary International, and the types of service projects that Rotary International chapters organize being in line with the reason I chose to study political science, this opportunity was a perfect way to build the kind of experience I need for my desired field. I am deeply grateful for the opportunities that UIMF and UVU are providing me through the SEL model so that I can thrive when I leave this school.

McKay Brooks, UVU Rotaract Vice President