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Vice President, Utah International Mountain Forum
A Coalition of Student Clubs at Utah Valley University
68th session of the Commission on the Status of Women

Parallel event

“Empowering Mountain Women Economically Through an Inclusive Student-Engaged Learning.”

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Good morning, everyone. My name is Braden Birbara and I am a political science and philosophy student at Utah Valley University (UVU). Today, I have the privilege of speaking in support of mountain women and girls. We must address mountain communities due to their vital importance in achieving inclusive sustainable development for all. At UVU, we have been championing gender issues through Sustainable Mountain Development (SMD) since 2011 by using the Student Engaged Learning (SEL) model.

We advocate for SMD through a co-curricular SEL model. The extracurricular core of this model is the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), a coalition of student clubs. This also includes Rotaract, a student club for Rotary International. Through SEL, we tackle real-world problems as a team of both traditional and non-traditional students. Non-traditional students are 25 years and older and they take on a mentorship role within the club. As a traditional student myself, my non-traditional peers' advice and experience has been invaluable.

I am a Vice-President of UIMF and a member of the UVU Rotaract. We work with Rotarians from Orem-Lindon and Bishkek Rotary Clubs. Through our efforts, we have organized and participated in service projects that positively impact our communities, such as observing World Polio Day, contributing coats for students at local Title I schools, and hosting distinguished guests such as the sponsor of this event, the Permanent Representative (PR) of the Kyrgyz Republic to the United Nations (UN), Ambassador Aida Kasymalieva. In December last year, together, we observed the annual International Mountain Day at UVU for the 14th time. The skills and experiences gained through our efforts are not only valuable locally but can be shared globally, and we are demonstrating this by working with other mountain states. The SEL model has proven to be effective in tackling challenges, with a specific emphasis on SMD advocacy and the empowerment of mountain women.

My research, in studying SMD, focuses on Austria. UVU takes pride in our strong relationship with the Republic of Austria, having hosted the President of ECOSOC, PR of Austria to the UN, Ambassador Martin Sajdik, in 2015, and one of his successors, Ambassador Jan Kickert in 2019. I wish to extend my gratitude to Mr. Matthias Sultz of the Austrian Foreign Ministry for collaborating and providing official numbers, information, and sources about Austria's contribution to SMD for my research. I hope that we can continue with further interaction and collaboration.

I am certain that SMD advocacy through SEL can make education a pillar for the implementation of the United Nations resolution “Five Years of Action for the Development of Mountain Regions.” By investing in mountain women and girls, we are investing in the future.

Thank You.