

**Janessa-Michelle Purcell**

**Vice-President of the 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.”**

**March 20, 2024**

Good morning, my name is Janessa-Michelle Purcell, and I am a Political Science student from Utah Valley University (UVU). It is my pleasure and honor to raise my voices during this parallel event, in support of women and girls from the mountain communities. I am also grateful to be a voice for my native mountain communities in Hawai'i. These communities must be included in the focus of this session as they encounter many challenges in their pursuit to achieve sustainable development. Many of them can relate, in particular, to the harsh natural conditions, remoteness, lack of services, and the emerging threat of climate change.

Since 2011, undergraduate students at Utah Valley University have been able to advocate for sustainable mountain development (SMD) for local communities, women, and girls. Through an inclusive co-curricular student-engaged learning model (SEL) this is possible. The Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), a coalition of clubs, which includes Rotaract, a student club for Rotary International, is an extracurricular core. The SEL model encourages students to work as a team and be hands-on with real-world problems under the mentoring of faculty. The model involves traditional and non-traditional students to advocate for SMD. UIMF activities are integrated with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals class as models of an academic program.

As members of the UIMF and UVU Rotaractor Club, we collaborate in many of our initiatives. Our team partners with Rotarians from Orem-Lindon, the Bishkek Rotary Clubs, Bishkek Nomad Rotaractors, and the Kyrgyz Republic. It is with this joint partnership and support we are gaining skills allowing us to make the arrangements for this visit, including financial ones, and displaying the SEL model in action before you today. We serve local communities by planting trees, selling oranges, and delivering coats and dictionaries to kids in elementary schools in Orem, Utah. In addition, we are happy to highlight the involvement of students from Asbury University in KY, located in the Appalachian Mountains, in our partnership. This past December our joint team of Rotaractors hosted Ambassador Aida Kasymalieva at UVU, and with this model, we jointly observed the annual International Mountain Day for the 14th time.

I hope that today's side event will demonstrate the impact and advantages of this model for the advocacy of mountain women and girls. It is accessible at any campus, particularly in rural and mountain areas around the world. I am eager to implement the Sustainable Development Goals through the SEL model in my native island of O'ahu, Hawai'i where we are surrounded by the ocean and share the land with our one-of-a-kind mountain ranges. Just like my ancestors who came from the small island nation of Samoa and the magnificent countries of Africa, we depend on the land for our needs. This initiative can make education an important pillar for the implementation of the United Nations resolution "Five Years of Action for the Development of Mountain Regions." In closing, in taking the time to invest in the women and girls of the mountains, we are investing in future generations to come.

Thank you for your time.