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**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, my name is Jessica Van Woerkom. As a student studying political science here at Utah Valley University (UVU), I am grateful to participate in this Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) through the Utah International Mountain Forum, (UIMF). Women have a critical role to play in sustainable development, but too often we are barred from participation. This access barrier is particularly high for women in mountain regions, compounded by harsh conditions and lack of economic support.

Despite what seem to be insurmountable obstacles, women in mountain communities continue to fight for a seat at the table. I have witnessed this firsthand, as I volunteered to offer mentorship and teach citizenship classes for refugee women in Utah. Through the organization Women of the World, which was both founded and directed by Samirah Harnish, a refugee woman herself, I saw just how important it is to support pathways of access for every woman, especially in mountainous regions. When resources and support are provided to women, communities flourish and a future of sustainable development is easier to reach.

At Utah Valley University, I am currently enrolled in the course ‘United Nations Sustainable Development Goals’. This class uses a model called Student Engaged Learning (or SEL), which allows students to solve real world problems through joint efforts alongside professors who are mentoring us. This model of collaborative learning provides unique opportunities to women attending UVU to empower ourselves with new knowledge and skills, through which we can empower our own communities. This semester I have studied the critical role mountain women play in their communities in the Hellenic Republic, especially when it comes to local leadership.

Mountainous regions are home to resources that are rapidly depleting as we battle both the causes and effects of climate change. These regions have the unique opportunity to place women at the forefront of efforts to combat climate change and manage our limited resources. As stated by the World Bank, “A growing body of evidence shows that women's participation and leadership in climate action is associated with better resource governance, conservation outcomes, and disaster readiness.”

Through the SEL model employed by the UIMF, women at UVU have shown that in positions of leadership women enact deeply impactful change. Implementing this educational

model in mountain communities in other parts of the world can help to create similar opportunities for women; all we need is a seat at the decision-making table.

Thank you for your time.