

## Opening Remarks

**Ritikaa Gupta**

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**68<sup>TH</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women**

**Side Event**

***“Advocating for Mountain Women and Girls’ Education through Student-Engaged Learning.”***

**March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2024**

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- I would like to express thanks to the Permanent Mission of the Kyrgyz Republic to the United Nations, Utah International Mountain Forum, and the Mountain Partnership Secretariat for providing an opportunity to speak today during this side event advocating for mountain women and girls through education.
- My name is Ritikaa Gupta, and today I am here representing the Mountain Youth Hub of the Mountain Partnership, led by a group of youth professionals passionate about sustainable mountain development.
- I am a forester-by-training and was born and raised in the Virginian countryside. I now live and work in Canada on wildfire policy.
- From a country girl - to navigating city life - to a young mountain advocate - my path was shaped by annual visits to India’s Himalayan region during summer breaks with my family. The valleys transformed every year as a result of deforestation, landslides, and degradation - while communities struggled in every aspect of life.
- Last summer I found myself in the Italian Alps taking a training course focused on youth and mountain forests hosted by the Mountain Partnership. I learned and conversed with youth from 26 countries about:
  - The effects of climate change on mountain ecosystems, the importance of sustainable management, and restoration of mountain areas to sustain mountain livelihoods.
- We also learned about the **Five Years of Action for the Development of Mountain Regions 2023-2027**. This Action Plan represents an opportunity to raise awareness of the challenges faced by mountain ecosystems and peoples and an opportunity to take action.
- As part of our commitment to sustainable mountain development, my classmates and I felt the importance of issuing a **Youth Call to Action for the Five Years of Action for the Development of Mountain Regions 2023-2027**.

- To implement the Five-Year Action Plan, we **founded the Mountain Youth Hub** with support from the Mountain Partnership.

### **Mountain Youth Hub**

- The Mountain Youth Hub (MYH) is a youth-led initiative to empower and mobilize youth across mountainous regions worldwide and foster a network for mountain sustainability.

### **Mountain Facts**

- Mountain ecosystems and their communities remain overlooked on both national and international environmental agendas despite their increased vulnerability to climate change, extreme weather, deforestation, and land degradation.
- Mountains also face unique challenges that are more nuanced and complicated than those in the lowlands.
  - City youth are unconscious/ignorant of mountains. Mountain youth are disconnected from city opportunities by distance and by knowledge.
  - It is important to remark that mountains are not only diverse in biodiversity but even more diverse in culture, language, and thinking. For example, in the Indian Himalayan region alone, there are more than 50 languages and dialects spoken.
- One way of unlocking mountain women and girls' access to education and development is by tailoring materials in local languages. And providing access to information on climate change, sustainable mountain practices, and topics relating to mountain sustainability that they can implement in their daily mountain life.

### **Youth Call to Action and Advocating for Mountain Women Education**

- Within our Youth Call to Action and, within the framework of the Five Years of Action there is a focus on:
  - the education and self-development of women, girls, and youth networks in mountain areas and support of education among local mountain communities
- To realize the potential and protect mountain communities and livelihoods, the Mountain Youth Hub hopes to support mountain girl's education by improving access to information.

### **MYH and the Forum**

- By contributing to this forum, we wish to initiate dialogue not only with mountain youth but also with all young professionals interested in safeguarding mountain regions.
- Forums like these will enable the MYH to gain visibility, expand our network, and attract partners for collaboration and fundraising - Better positioning us to make a meaningful impact on the future of mountain communities around the world.

- We are happy that we have established such cooperation with the Utah International Mountain Forum, a coalition of clubs at Utah Valley University, in advocating for mountain women and girls within this side event and we are looking forward to building more initiatives with UIMF in the future.

### **Request to Join Mountain Youth Hub**

- I envision our participation in today's side event as the inauguration of our new platform on the global stage.
- With that, we take this opportunity to invite those of you who are interested in being part of the change for mountains to consider joining our Mountain Youth Hub. We also invite organizations and strategic partners to collaborate with us to implement initiatives and advance the mountain agenda.

### **Closing Remarks**

- In closing, I want to share that I have been inspired by my late grandfather, who devoted his life to agricultural cooperatives and being a voice for women farmers. I follow in his path to inspire action towards improving the state of education among mountain women and girls. Thank you - if you can now kindly turn your attention to the screen to hear from a few members of the Mountain Youth Hub.