



Office of International Affairs and Diplomacy

16 October 2013

Mountain Focus Group
At the United Nations

Dear colleagues,

On behalf of Utah Valley University and the Utah-Russia Institute I would like to thank you for inviting us to take part at the meeting of the Mountain Focus Group on October 17, 2013.

Utah Valley University and the Utah-Russia Institute are members of the Mountain Partnership since 2006. During those years our institutions contributed and will continue to contribute jointly with our partners from Kyrgyzstan to the promotion of the sustainable mountain development (SMD) agenda of the United Nations both in the Rocky Mountain region and globally. We were supportive of the efforts of the MP secretariat before and we will continue to do so in the future.

We focused on SMD-advocacy in collaboration with others since our initial involvement; and we are proud that our first “Women of the Mountains Conference” in 2007 in Orem, UT was first event ever in North America, gathering representatives of most of the US mountainous states, as well as 110 senior women leaders from 22 nations under the United Nations gender and SMD-agenda. Our success was achieved thanks to support from our traditional partners from CO, WY, and other states.

The decision of the MP to create a regional hub in North America in neighboring Aspen, CO in 2011 was also a great sign of recognition of our joint efforts, and our institution is determined to support efforts of *VERTEX* from CO to sustain it as a regional hub in North America. We are glad that our friends from Aspen were elected during the 4th Global Mountain Partnership Meeting in Erzurum, Turkey to represent civil society groups from North America in the MP Steering Committee. We wish them success and will help them to achieve that goal. We will have success only if we advocate mountain cause through a joint regional approach.

We are determined to contribute to further expansion of SMD-activities in the overall agenda of the United Nations on sustainable development and to follow up the decisions of the 2012 RIO+20 Conference in Brazil. This goal cannot be achieved without involvement of the mountain communities of North America in SMD-advocacy in the similar way as it is done in the European continent, where Swiss, Italian and other mountain communities play a leading role in that process.

It was a loss that United Nations Secretary General’s (UNSG) report on SMD 2013 completely omitted any mention of contributions from North America to the mountain-cause advocacy. We need to change that situation through joint efforts and to make sure that the UNSG report 2015 features this part of the mountainous world as one of the active contributors to the SMD agenda. Also mentioning that UVU has a number of initiatives, which could contribute to the achievement of that goal.

UVU was able in the past to contribute to the process of engagement to gender and mountain agendas of the U.N. in North America by hosting a series of International Women of the Mountains conferences as grass-roots initiatives. Our institution is confident, that hosting the fourth international Women of the Mountains conference in Orem, UT in 2015 as a gathering of all MP members and any other institutions interested in gender and mountain agendas from North America and rest of the world will make a significant difference concerning the place of SMD-activities in the overall U.N. agenda.

We hope that the MP secretariat can help us raise the profile of the gathering to ensure that in the future it will be hosted on an annual basis with alternating sites for the conferences between Utah and mountainous nations around the world, as it was envisioned in the Orem Declaration of Mountain Women, the final document of the first international Conference Women of the Mountains in 2007.

As before, UVU will be glad to raise money elsewhere in order to host conferences in Utah and to engage our youth in that process. We are confident that by raising money throughout a region as we did before we will be able to increase significantly the awareness in the SMD-agenda among local people in the Rocky Mountains and to engage them in the mountain cause advocacy globally.

We also hope that the MP and F.A.O. will make sure that International Mountain Day celebrations will be featured in the UNSG report as a separate and very important chapter, not as a part of other areas of activities. In this case mountain communities will have more institutions involved in celebrations of IMDs around the world and use it as an important gathering to summarize joint efforts in SMD-advocacy on an annual basis. Annual IMD celebration in Utah, since 2010, made a difference in our state. As a result, our faculty and students created a coalition of student clubs named Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF). It will use a fourth annual celebration of IMD as one more opportunity to both promote the overall mountain agenda and raise a new generation of leaders throughout the state. UVU is proud to be the only institution both in the state of Utah and in the whole region which continues to do so.

Another important initiative of UIMF among others with an aim to raise youth dedicated to the SMD-advocacy is to host the fourth essay contest for Utah high school students dedicated to the U.N. designated Year of Family Farming in March 2014. We are grateful that more institutions in the state are supporting such activities with the involvement of our youth.

UVU through its variety of initiatives and projects has proved that the SMD-agenda is becoming a part of life and activities of local communities in the state of Utah. Faculty and students at UVU would like to share those experiences with the head of the MP secretariat Dr. Thomas Hofer if he should decide to visit North America and Utah next year. UVU hosted the predecessors of Dr. Hofer and would be glad to host the newly elected head of the MP secretariat and to help him personally witness the dramatic changes happening in the Rocky Mountains and the whole of North America.

With warm regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "R. Butler". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

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