

Statement
**Parallel event “Mountain Women Empowerment Through the Inclusive
Student-Engaged Learning Model”**
65th session of the Commission on the Status of Women
Jeff Hibbard,
Utah International Mountain Forum,
A coalition of student clubs at Utah Valley University

I would like to thank the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences as well as Utah Valley University (UVU) for giving me this opportunity to raise awareness about mountain women at this highest gender forum of the United Nations. The UIMF advocates for the mountain women, girls, and families, who are among the poorest and most neglected on national and international levels, it is to be in the focus of the UN 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. UIMF does so through a Student Engaged Learning (SEL) approach that encourages students to gain professional skills while addressing real-world issues on local and international levels with faculty serving as mentors. As a major contribution to SMD advocacy globally, UIMF hosted through SEL the Fourth International Women of the Mountains Conference in 2015 in Utah. UIMF was highlighted by the UN Secretary General’s report on SMD A/74/209, on 29 July, 2016, the only student group worldwide to receive such recognition. Today’s event was also accomplished through SEL by managing the logistics, agenda, and protocol ourselves. Additionally, I would like to thank Orem Rotary who involved us in fundraising to cover some costs for our participation in CSW 65.

Through UIMF and SEL I personally have been able to get involved and contribute in hosting activities advocating for sustainable mountain development (SMD) like the tenth and eleventh observations of the UN International Mountain Day at UVU in 2019 and 2020 as well as UVU’s 2019 diplomatic conference. All of these helped promote the state of Utah as one of the models of SMD and best states to do business.

Currently I am conducting personal research regarding deforestation in Nepal with a special focus on the effects on women and the vital role they play in sustainable development. Nepal, one of the world’s most mountainous countries, has lost much of its forest cover over the last several decades. Nepali women’s burdens have become heavier in many areas as a result. Tasks such as raising crops and rearing animals have become more difficult due to environmental changes. Studies are showing how important Nepali women are to their communities and in mitigating the effects of climate change. Additionally, Nepali women have shared their concerns during Women of the Mountains Conferences, which UVU hosted regularly since 2007. Conducting research and holding my position as the Vice President of the Foreign Affairs Club has allowed me to participate in events like that help my professional development, prepare me for future endeavors like graduate school, and allow me to continue to advocate for mountain women and communities.