

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

I am honored to be here today during this event as part of the coalition of clubs at Utah Valley University during this highest gender-focused forum of the United Nations. Since 2011, UIMF has advocated sustainable development for mountain communities and families. Taking this opportunity, I would like to add my voice in support of mountain women. Mountain women are among the most impoverished and neglected on national and international levels and must be the focus of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Having spent my whole life exploring Utah's beautiful mountains, I have developed a deep respect for the ecological and cultural diversity that mountains cultivate. Through the UIMF and its Student Engaged Learning model, I was able to expand my interest in this area by gaining professional skills working with my peers and university faculty to solve issues facing communities in mountainous Utah, all while having faculty serving us as mentors.

I was proud to join a group that, in 2015 through SEL, hosted the Fourth International Women of the Mountains Conference here in Utah, for which it was praised by the United Nations Secretary General's 2016 Report on Sustainable Mountain Development. Last year, I observed as my peers from UIMF commemorated World Polio Day and celebrated International Mountain Day for the 11th time. I saw how they used the SEL model to raise community awareness of the challenges facing women and children in mountain communities and bring international attention to UIMF and Utah's mountain development model. UIMF's SEL approach gives students at Utah Valley University real opportunities to do meaningful research, create robust networks, and develop practical advocacy skills to help attract attention about mountain communities and women's needs for sustainable development.

In 2016, Utah Valley University hosted a delegation of the Republic of Georgia led by Permanent Representative of Georgia to the UN, Ambassador Kaha Imnadze, to celebrate International Mountain Day. During the event themed "Building Bridges: Exploring Georgian Art and Politics," Ambassador Imnadze unveiled a new exhibition of Georgian Art at the Springville, Utah Museum of Art, which houses the largest collection of Twentieth-century Russian and Soviet art in the western United States. The event highlighted the similarities between Utah and Georgia as mountain communities.

Building a bridge between Utah and Georgia is significant to me as I have spent the last eight months studying the Caucasus nation: its evolution from a soviet satellite state into an independent and sovereign state, and the ongoing struggle to tackle challenges facing the

communities and families in mountain regions of Georgia, who are gripped by pervasive poverty and unemployment and facing emerging threats such as climate change. My research is now focused on comparing economic models in Georgia and in the state of Utah to identify areas for both parties to learn from one another and develop strategies that focus on sustainable development.

I will carry the knowledge and experience I've gained through UIMF with me into my career in the legal field. I will continue building bridges between mountain communities and fighting for the marginalized mountain women and girls in particular.