

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

I appreciate an opportunity to speak here today at this highest gender forum of the United Nations thanks to the sponsorship of the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences. RANS has partnered with our student coalition since 2016. The UIMF advocates for the mountain women, girls, and families, who are among the poorest and most neglected on national and international levels, to be within 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. We, as undergraduate students at Utah Valley University, wish to raise these issues at this highest central forum.

Growing up in Virginia, near the Appalachian Mountains, and living here in Utah surrounded by the Rocky Mountains has enhanced my perspective of the importance of mountains. Because of the UIMF, I could contribute to SMD through this SEL program. As a non-traditional student with a full-time career, I was encouraged even more by mentors and faculty to participate in this student-led initiative. I was glad as a UVU Rotaractor to raise funds both for local families and children and for participation at CSW65. I leveraged contacts with my employer BambooHR, to raise awareness of this event and the challenges that mountain women face. I received strong support primarily from women, which made it worthwhile. I thank them and BambooHR for supporting me in this SEL initiative.

By participating in UVU events surrounding International Mountain Day and World Polio Day I was able not only to understand but also raise awareness among my peers at UVU how these issues are also relevant for us all and internationally. One of the more important tasks that helped me be prepared professionally was through student research publications. My research contributions on SMD in Romania was published in the 2018 *Youth and the Mountains* academic journal at UVU and made me interested in further developments in SMD in that country. In 2018, Romania passed the “Law of the Mountain” which acknowledges the disadvantages of these communities by targeting economic activities which protects the environment and preserves the culture. I was happy to find in the news that Romania now plans to make the Southern Carpathian Mountains the next “Yellowstone.” This would be a significant achievement for conservationists and SMD.

My current research focus is Austria, an advanced country in SMD. I have found great examples of SMD through the development of non-winter tourist attractions which have stimulated local economies in Austria. UVU and UIMF have hosted Permanent Representatives of Austria to the UN, Mr. Martin Sajdik and Mr. Jan Kickert so my research will complement this partnership

and will add new ways we can work together on SMD. While these environmental solutions in both of these countries are providing me more data and knowledge about SMD in those countries, my and our team's main concern is about mountain women and communities. They have to be in the focus of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. targets and goals. We still need to work on achieving this goal and we hope that you all will support us.