

My Experiential Learning at the 61st United Nations' Commission on the Status of Women



(L to R) Christian Jensen, Munkhbat Batmunkh, Regan Warner, Tony Medina, and Dr. Baktybek Abdrisaev at the United Nations Headquarters.

Christian Jensen V, Munkhbat Batmunkh, Tony Medina, and myself have been very excited to participate at the 61st session of the United Nations Commission on Status of Women (CSW61) on March 20-23, 2017. We represented both students of Utah Valley University (UVU), and the leaders of the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), a coalition of student clubs at UVU, at the CSW61. The UIMF promotes the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) of the United Nations with an emphasis on mountain development, mountain women, and families in particular. Our primary goal at CSW61 was to share our experiences with SMD and gender advocacy in North America by hosting the international Women of the Mountains Conferences (WOMC) under the umbrella of the United Nations Mountain Partnership since 2007. We were

also prepared to report to the participants of the highest gender-related UN forum about how UIMF members hosted the Fourth International WOMC in Orem in October 7-9, 2015, for the first time as an experiential learning initiative. The 2016 United Nations Secretary General's Report on SMD emphasized the work UIMF did in both hosting WOMC and in promoting implementation of a number of SDGs, including the SDG# 5 on gender.

Although our delegation was not able to achieve our goal to make an official presentation during CSW61, as part of experiential learning, we were able to study in practice and gain experience into how we could do that next year during the CSW62 through three different ways: 1) by hosting a side or 2) a parallel event and 3) by making an official statement.

We learned that side events usually are hosted by Permanent Mission to the UN of particular countries at the facilities inside of the UN headquarters. In order to explore ways for hosting future side events our delegation discussed this issue during meetings at Permanent Missions of Mongolia, Romania, Hungary, and Kyrgyzstan to the United Nations. It was also a part of our effort to strengthen relationships with Ambassadors who have visited Utah and already knew about our efforts in SMD and gender advocacy.

During the meetings with diplomats we, members of UIMF, were given an opportunity to hold negotiations and discuss details of future cooperation, while our advisor, Dr. Baktybek Abdrisaev was observing how we conducted the meetings. More experienced students, like Tony Medina, outgoing President of the UIMF, were leading the conversations. Thanks to the professional work of Munkhbat Batmunkh, who arranged for our delegation the meeting at the Permanent Mission of Mongolia to the United Nations, Tony Medina started the conversation with Mrs. Guamaral Altangerel, Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) of Mongolia to the UN, by skillfully presenting the package with information about many successful efforts of UIMF members in gender and SMD advocacy and explaining the mutual benefits of cooperation of the UIMF with Mongolia. In closing, our delegation extended the invitation for Mongolian diplomats to cooperate with UVU and UIMF in the future to promote mountain women.

During our meeting with Mrs. Elisabeta David, DCM of the Romanian mission to the United Nations, Christian Jensen and myself were already more active and contributed to the overall discussion about both further partnership during CSW62 and building partnerships with Romanian students as well. When our delegation had a meeting at the Permanent Mission of Hungary, to my surprise, I was given a role of the leading presenter, to wage a conversation with

Permanent Representative (PR) of Hungary to the United Nations, Ambassador Katalin Bogyay. Ambassador Bogyay is a very experienced diplomat with an impressive career and it was a great experience for me not only to hold the conversation, but also to promote our major goal – to continue to work with the Permanent Mission of Hungary in preparations for the next year. During the meeting at the Permanent Mission of the Kyrgyz Republic to the UN, Tony Medina and Christian Jensen were able to identify several areas of further cooperation for UVU and UIMF with PR of Kyrgyzstan to the UN, Ambassador Mirgul Moldoisaeva, including a joint celebration of the International Mountain Day on December 11th and certainly during the CSW62.



(L to R) Regan Warner leads UIMF presentation to Ambassador of Hungary, Katalin Annamária Bogyay.

We attended a side event at CSW61, hosted by Permanent Mission of Kenya to the UN, which provided us with experience how to arrange them and what we need to do to have such event during our participation at CSW next year. The Kenyan side event was focused on the particular issues of sustainable development goals (SDGs) and the role of the family in promoting them. The presentation was conducted via a panel, composed of six experts in the area of SDG in Kenya and family science. This helped provide a more complete understanding a coverage of the

issue for those participating. We hope to be able to partner with multiple nations and NGOs for our own event at CSW62 to have this same impact.

We also were able to learn that the parallel events at the CSW61 could be organized and hosted by non-governmental organizations (NGO) if they are registered and provided a special consultative status under the United Nations. For that purpose, we attended one parallel event which was hosted by Operation Underground Railroad (O.U.R), a Utah based anti-human trafficking NGO. Although O.U.R. doesn't have such status yet, several NGOs with UN recognition from Utah and North America co-sponsored their event. For myself, this was a very exciting event to attend. I hope to eventually make anti-human trafficking work my life career and making connections with the members from O.U.R was immeasurably helpful in reaching this goal. Additionally, it was very useful for us, as the UIMF, to watch a successful parallel event being held to better understand how to run our own. The panel members from O.U.R were very well prepared for both their presentation and the Q&A portion of the event and got their message across to the audience in a powerful and impactful way. Although UIMF is not an NGO, its members were able to build strong partnership with Russian Academy of Natural Sciences (RANS), one of NGOs with special consultative status under the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. Thanks to support from Dr. Rusty Butler, main representative of RANS at the UN, our delegation was registered at CSW61 and now hopes to co-host a parallel event during the CSW62 next year. This partnership would also allow us to make a statement during the CSW62. We need now to work very hard to present before the international community, in best possible way, our cause about the urgency of providing support to the mountain families and particularly women.

The entire experience was extremely successful, that being said, we also learned an immense amount on what we can do to improve and prepare for the CSW62. This being Christian Jensen, Munkhbat Batmunkh, and my own first visit to the CSW. It was very much trial by error learning experience; this being extremely fitting with the experiential learning theme of our coalition. Due to lack of experience, we learned the hard way that in order to get a spot as NGO for a parallel event at the CSW, you must be among the first to apply when registration opens in October. In the coming months we will prepare our presentation for next year and coordinate with several other NGOs and the PRs of different countries to the UN, that agreed to work with us, so that we can apply for a parallel, and possibly a side event, on the importance of mountain women

advocacy as it pertains to the SDG. We care deeply about this issue, we see its value, and we also see the lack of attention its getting by the international community. Over the next year we will be working tirelessly to prepare for CSW62 and continue to learn and partner with others to get the most possible attention and precedence put on the women of the mountains, from Utah to Kyrgyzstan and everywhere in between.



(L to R) Tony Medina (UIMF President 2014-16), Munkhbat Batmunkh (UIMF Vice President), Regan Warner (Sustainable Mountain Development Vice President), Christian Jensen V (UIMF President)

From a very young age my parents encouraged me to chase my dreams and to never let the opinions of others, or the stereotypes they might place on me, prevent me from doing exactly what I want to do. This guidance and encouragement from my family has shaped me into the person I am and helped me never shy away from my ambitions. Now as a non-traditional student at Utah Valley University, I am tasked with balancing school and work, however because of the values instilled in me by my parents, I chose to also accept a leadership position in the Utah International

Mountain Forum (UIMF), as the Vice President of the Sustainable Mountain Development Club (SMD). The UIMF is a coalition of student clubs at UVU which work to promote the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) of the United Nations with an emphasis in mountain development and gender equality. These goals called to me greatly due to my educational pursuits as a female political science major with an accentuation in environmental management and an aim to work in anti-human trafficking efforts in my post-grad career.

My recent visit and participation at CSW61 has strengthened my desire and willingness to do more in order to help many mountain women around the world by connecting them and providing support from local communities and students in North America and in the State of Utah as well.

Regan Warner, Vice President of the SMD Club at UVU