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### Commission for Social Development

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**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: strategies for the eradication of poverty to achieve sustainable development for all**

### **Statement submitted by the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences, Mountain Institute, and the Utah China Friendship Improvement Sharing Hands Development and Commerce, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\***

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution [1996/31](#).

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

This statement highlights the practice of engaging students, in particular non-traditional students, in hands-on involvement and practical implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals to address the eradication of poverty, principally in impoverished mountain regions of the world.

Today, mountain communities, being disproportionately affected by the challenges of living at high altitudes, and left almost on their own to deal with emerging new threats such as climate change, etc., are among the world's poorest. They must be at the centre of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. On their behalf, we must address poverty and hunger eradication; promote gender equality; provide decent work opportunities and economic growth; and develop industry and infrastructure. Lack of access to education and information further deepen their dependence.

About 39 percent of the mountain population in developing countries, or 329 million people are estimated to be vulnerable to food insecurity, according to a recent study of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in collaboration with the Mountain Partnership Secretariat. When only rural areas are considered, nearly half the population is at risk. During the period 2000–2012, despite food insecurity decreasing at the global level, it increased in mountain areas. The study revealed a 30 percent increase in the number of mountain people vulnerable to food insecurity from 2000 to 2012, while the mountain population increased by only 16 percent.

As one of the ways to raise awareness about the need for sustainable development and poverty eradication for mountain communities, the Mountain Partnership, with which the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences collaborates, focuses efforts in mobilizing grassroots activists, youth and students in developed and in developing nations. In North America in particular, the Mountain Partnership has encouraged the faculty and students of one of its members, Utah Valley University, to be an active contributor to the sustainable development of mountain communities in the developing world.

Utah Valley University is the largest university in mountainous Utah, a state with one of the most successful models of sustainable development in the United States. While the United Nations encourages youth in promoting and implementing the sustainable development goals, the Utah Valley University model was able to engage significant numbers of non-traditional students, or students who are often older than 25 years. Non-traditional students are defined as the ones who may have delayed enrolment into postsecondary education; attended university part-time and work full time; are financially independent for financial aid purposes; have dependents other than a spouse; are single parents; or do not have a high school diploma. These students represent more than 30% of college students in the United States and many are women. However, most have diverse professional skills and experiences which they are ready and eager to contribute to benefit the global communities — mountain ones in particular.

As its major contribution to sustainable mountain development advocacy globally, the university hosts, together with its partner the Kyrgyz National Centre for Development of Mountain Regions, the international men of the Mountains conferences. The conferences became one of the major grassroots-level forums in North America to promote and contribute to the gender and sustainable mountain development agendas of the United Nations globally.

The first Women of the Mountains conference hosted by the university in 2007 served as an academic forum to both raise awareness and advocate eliminating gender inequality, as well as address sustainability challenges and poverty eradication in mountainous areas in North America and overseas. In follow-on conferences, students undertook service learning initiatives under the umbrella of the Mountain Partnership where they played major roles in organizing and hosting through the engaged learning model. Under that model students gained professional skills and experiences by addressing real-world problems of mountain women advocacy in addressing poverty eradication at local, regional and United Nations levels with an instructor serving them as a mentor.

The fourth international Women of the Mountains conference was hosted in Utah, October 7–9, 2015 solely through the efforts of the Utah International Mountain Forum, a coalition of student clubs at Utah Valley University. Members of the coalition, the majority of whom are non-traditional students, raised funds to host the event and brought diplomats, experts and women from mountain nations worldwide to Utah. The goal was to engage students in creating awareness and seeking solutions compatible with gender-related Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations.

The United Nations Secretary-Generals Report on sustainable mountain development [A/71/256](#), from 29 July, 2016 highlighted the Utah Valley University model of student engagement in advocacy of gender and sustainable mountain development agendas of the United Nations. It emphasized the important role which students play not only in hosting the conference but also in adopting the final document of the conference with recommendations concerning the implementations of sustainable development goals and mountain targets in particular. The document recommended that goal #5 needs to have strong support for improving women's rights and welfare, including women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life; that target #6.6 requires stressing the role that women play in the protection of the environment and water sources; and the implementation of target # 15.1 takes into account the critical role women play as promoters of innovation, development and cooperation for the common good.

The model allowed students, non-traditional ones in particular, to gain professional skills and experiences through the advocacy of different initiatives with a focus in particular on poverty eradication among the mountain communities on local and global levels. They did it by not only hosting the international Women of the Mountains Conferences and conducting research on gender norms, sexuality, and religion in Utah, but also by successfully teaching women business management in Zambia; working with students in Indonesia on tsunami-preparedness community education projects; conducting research on water quality in Senegal, the impact of mining and oil pipelines on indigenous people in Ecuador and globalization impact to Tarahumara Mexican women.

This experience demonstrates that students of all ages can play an essential role in the implementation of the 2030 development agenda of the United Nations, and in poverty eradication in particular. It can be used by other universities in rural and mountain states of North America and globally to provide similar benefits to their students, and at the same time encourage them to contribute to advocating the post-2030 Development agenda with a focus on poverty eradication.