

## **Interacting with Ambassador Ibragimov about foreign policy priorities of Uzbekistan**

Ambassador Bakhtiyor Ibragimov presented his credentials to the United Nations Secretary-General in May 2017 and has since served as Permanent Representative of Uzbekistan to the United Nations. In his address to students at Utah Valley University (UVU) on Monday, February 5, 2018, Mr. Ibragimov began by stating the important role that education has in this changing world. He reaffirmed the need for more competitive and creative solutions to the world's problems, solutions that we as the rising generation can help to implement. He admonished students to appreciate every moment they have in the university and encouraged students to form friendships that would further career and educational paths.



*UVU students with Ambassador Ibragimov (the fourth from the left)*

In 2016, Mr. Shavkat Mirzyoyev was inaugurated a new President of the nation of Uzbekistan, prompting a radical change in the way that his country interacts with the rest of the world. New initiatives have been launched primarily to strengthen relations with other Central Asian countries such as Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and the Republic of Kyrgyzstan. Within the last year the government of Uzbekistan has radically altered narratives in these surrounding countries, promoting various initiatives to strengthen economic ties, infrastructure growth, and sustainable development. He affirmed the vital role that Central Asian countries have in connecting the East to the West, and the positive benefits that come through development in this area of the

world. Since taking office, the President of Uzbekistan has met with all nations in the Central Asian area. In recent months, the governments of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan agreed to reopen flights between the two countries. In addition, the two nations convened a business forum where they encouraged mutual beneficial relations and focused on expanding trade, the focus of which can help to extend political dialogue between nations in this highly volatile region. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have both contributed to an United Nations Resolution that will help to manage rivers and water in the two countries. Mr. Ambassador Ibragimov stated that Uzbekistan is ready to create an open dialogue to address all Central Asian nations regarding all issues.

The second part of Mr. Ibragimov's presentation focused on the strategic importance of Uzbekistan as a nation directly adjacent to Afghanistan. Reaffirming the importance that Afghanistan has on the governments of Central Asia, a new coalition was formed: The Central Asian 5 nations and Afghanistan, to combat security issues in the nation of Afghanistan. This new initiative opened flights between Afghanistan and Uzbekistan that depart 4 times a week, a monumental advance in the relations between the two countries. In addition, the most crucial part of the new Uzbekistani initiative involves a world summit to address security issues. This summit will involve nations with an influential role in Afghanistan such as: The United States, China, Russia, Italy, Germany, India, Pakistan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and the 5 Central Asian nations. This summit entitled: "Afghanistan: A Path to a Peaceful Future" will be the first of many meetings and coalitions to create policy aimed at reducing violence in the nation of Afghanistan and to promote social, economic, and developmental standards that will allow this war-torn nation to make strides in its internal development. In Uzbekistan, the national identity is changing from a player on the sidelines during the United Nations General Assembly, to a nation ready to create policies aimed at reducing conflict and increasing peace in its community.

In addition to the presence at the official presentation of the Ambassador Ibragimov, UVU students and in particular the members of the Utah International Mountain Forum, a coalition of student clubs at UVU and myself included participated in special meeting to discuss the Sustainable Mountain Development (SMD) initiative, which focuses on students contribution to the United Nations agenda through the student engaged learning. Students had an opportunity to share with the Ambassador the development projects that each has designed. Specifically, students had the opportunity to discuss the ability of organized religion to encourage development in mountain areas. In his response, Mr. Ibragimov discussed the prospect of religion in his country, referring to Uzbekistan's policy of religious harmony. The policy initiative allows for freedom of religion but restricts proselytizing. This policy has made real advances in decreasing tension and strife in the country, allowing the basic right of each to worship as they please but preventing the conflict that archetypically accompanies sentimental feelings of religion. This section was very important to advancing the UVU initiative in sustainable mountain development.

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