

UIMF asked mountain-focused question during Voluntary National Review of Romania



UIMF members Andrew Jensen and Sam Elzinga in attendance at the Voluntary National Review of Romania

Delegation of Utah Valley University (UVU) at the 2018 High Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development had the opportunity to attend the Voluntary National Review (VNR) of Romania at the United Nations on July 18, 2018.

In order to increase accountability of the member states towards the implementation of the seventeen adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) within the Agenda 2030, the United Nations (UN) has implemented the Voluntary National Review system. It is a voluntary opportunity for nations to review their progress towards achieving the SDGs with only 12 years left until the completion of the agenda. While during 2017 HLPF 43 countries provided their VNR, during this year HLPF there were 46 nations. In preparation for the HLPF event, any delegations, accredited at the forum, and ours included, had the opportunity to submit statements and ask

questions about implementation of any interested SDGs by individual countries that are doing a VNR. This request came via official United Nations channels to each of us within three weeks prior the beginning of HLPF.

The UVU delegation made the decision to submit their statements as cross-cutting, or applying to such fourteen nations, as Romania and Bhutan and other various nations in the HLPF agenda. All of them are the members of the Mountain. There were 227 representatives of different NGOs from around the world who submitted their request to HLPF to be among willing to ask questions during VNR sessions. This was our mistake however, because the coordination of cross-cutting VNR submissions among all volunteered individuals was not well organized as we previously thought. Next year, I think that it would be important to submit many VNR statements and questions however, submit each under a specific country in order to raise the likelihood of being able to address the country. This will be an important thing for the next delegation to do in order to raise the visibility of UVU at the UN. Due to some circumstances I received a response on my request to submit specific language about mountain targets from NGO representative, who was responsible for finalizing the statement and Q&A for VNR of Romania. It was encouraging for us fact, because we had previous experience of working with Permanent Mission of Romania to the United Nations and its head, Ambassador Ion Jinga visited UVU in 2015. We added a specific language and the final version of the question from NGOs to the delegation of Romania was finalized in the following way: the first question was “the Romanian VNR underlines the importance of education to the universal achievement SDGs how will Romania make education more inclusive and equitable to all groups?” and the second was “food insecurity remains a burning challenge for the mountain communities in Romania, are they any measures taken to target the rights violations of these groups?”.

During Romania’s VNR, presented by The Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Environment Gratiela-Leocadia Gavrilescu, Laszlo Borbley who is the along with representative representing the Interministerial Committee, the Minister of Environment, the Sub-Committee for Sustainable Development of the Parliament of Romania and the Department for Sustainable Development under the Prime-Minister Office. The VNR was primarily focused on how Romania is doing in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Romania reported that they have achieved the goal of 25% of renewable energy and are currently working to stay on track for the rest of the goals. They stated that this is a symbol of their dedication and prioritization of the SDGs as a national

focus. They explained the importance of each SDG and additionally reported on their progress. After each statement, the opportunity is then given for various states and Non-Governmental Organizations to ask questions and submit interventions. One question was from a NGO and involved the importance of children and youth in Romania. And it sounded in a way, as we formulated it with our language about mountain targets and food insecurity among mountain communities included. (See: <http://webtv.un.org/search/22nd-meeting-2018-high-level-political-forum-on-sustainable-development-2018-hlpf/5810834552001/?term=HLPF&sort=date&page=2> 54:00-55:30).

While officials of Romania answered various questions about children and youth, they said nothing about mountain communities, unfortunately. Reflecting on this experience, it is likely that the next time that our delegation attends VNR presentations, that the work must begin much earlier to ensure that these statements are highlighting mountain people and mountain targets. Next year, it will be important to remember that the process of Voluntary National Reviews begins in September of the year previous to the HLPF. Next year, the delegation must reach out to national contacts within the Mountain Partnership to begin the review process of VNRs in September as opposed to March of the same year that the HLPF will be held.

Overall however, the VNR experience was a first-time for UVU and surely will be valuable to future students.

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