

UIMF attended a 2018 HLPF side event on Central Asia



A panoramic shot of the side event “SDGs Implementation in Countries of Central Asia”

On the evening of Wednesday, July 18, Dr. Baktybek Abdrisaev, our adviser and I were able to attend the side event at the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development hosted by the Permanent Mission of Slovakia to the United Nations (UN) titled “SDGs Implementation in countries of Central Asia.”

Initially, I was confused why the Permanent Mission of Slovakia to the UN was hosting a side event relating to Central Asia, but it was soon revealed that the EU Special Representative to Central Asia was from Slovakia. Mr. Peter Burian is the European Union’s (EU) Special Representative for Central Asia, and his encouraging comments about Central Asia’s development provided excellent insight into bilateral relations between the EU and the Central Asian region. According to Mr. Burian, the EU is finishing a new strategy for Central Asia, part of which includes 1.2 billion Euros to establish multidimensional presence of EU in the region.

Future development in Central Asia is focused on three main areas: addressing inequalities and regional disparities, building inclusive societies, and decreasing dependence on natural capital. Of course, the greatest challenge facing future development is climate change, and the central message of this side event was that Central Asian nations must build resilient societies. Other officials who joined him during the side event included: Serdar Berdymukhammedov, Deputy Foreign Minister of Turkmenistan; His Excellency Kairat Umarov, Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan to the United Nations; Mr. Yerzhan Ashikbayev, Deputy Foreign Minister of Kazakhstan; His Excellency Michael Mlynár, Permanent Representative of Slovakia to the United Nations; Ms. Olga Algayerova, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations; Her Excellency Mrs. Mirgul Moldoisaeva, Permanent Representative of the Kyrgyz Republic to the United Nations; His Excellency Mr. Mahmamin Mahmaminov, Permanent Representative of Tajikistan to the United Nations; and His Excellency Mr. Bakhtiyor Ibragimov, Permanent Representative of Uzbekistan to the United Nations.

The side event focused on many interesting aspects of Central Asian international relations. It was interesting to see the various nation's interpretations and implementation of the SDGs. Uzbekistan, for example, is primarily focused on promoting sustainable partnerships in the Central Asian region and is focused on building sustainable and resilient societies in their country. To promote sustainable and resilient societies in Uzbekistan, the government is starting to build affordable housing and subsidizing mortgages. The government has also begun promoting technology entrepreneurship in their country to help diversify the economy. These new housing and technology policies are part of their overarching goal of continuing to implement far reaching social reform to better the lives of their citizens. Ambassador Ibragimov reminded us at the end of his presentation that at the end of the day, the SDG implementation is all about cooperation. I thought this concluding message tied Mr. Ibragimov's philosophy of the SDGs very well, and he discussed that [with our delegation during our earlier meeting with him](#) as well.

Ambassador Mirgul Moldoisaeva, Permanent Representative of the Kyrgyz Republic, discussed Kyrgyzstan's SDG implementation at great lengths, particularly related to sustainable mountain development (SMD). Kyrgyzstan has largely implemented the SDGs in national policies since its selection as a pilot country for the implementation of SDGs, and even established an SDG committee under the Prime Minister of the country.



Mr. Alexander Avanesov, UNDP, Permanent Representative of the Kyrgyz Republic to the UN, Ambassador Mirgul Moldoisaeva and Sam Elzinga after a side event

Currently, sustainability strategy of Kyrgyzstan is in its final drafting stages, with each chapter in the strategy correlating to an SDG. One challenge Kyrgyzstan faces in its continued implementation of the SDGs, however, is the aftermath of uranium mining in the southern part of the country. Ambassador Moldoisaeva then expressed hope that international aid from either intergovernmental organizations or nation states would help the Kyrgyz government successfully clean up the uranium mining tails. I particularly enjoyed this presentation, and it tied in excellently with [our delegation's meeting with her](#) from earlier that day. I will be watching the cleanup the uranium tailings very closely, as I published a piece in the undergraduate journal *Youth and the Mountains* about the mining history of Eagle County in Colorado.

Ambassador Mahmamin Mahmaminov, Permanent Representative of Tajikistan to the United Nations, also reported on SDG implementation in Tajikistan. Ambassador Mahmaminov began his presentation by pointing out that the 2030 agenda, which was

established three years ago, is already lagging behind and leaving people behind as a result. Ambassador Mahmaminov then reminded us that building sustainability and resilience in society is of prime importance. Speaking on behalf of Tajikistan, Ambassador Mahmaminov noted that his nation takes the ownership of the SDGs very seriously. Currently, Tajikistan is focused on large scale reforms in their water sector to increase sustainability with an emphasis in water resource management. Tajikistan shared its resources in this regard to help save the Aral Sea, one of the largest environmental disasters in Central Asia. Ambassador Mahmaminov explained that Tajikistan does this to promote regional peace and security as the Aral Sea is still vitally important to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. With all of Tajikistan's efforts to promote proper water sustainability practices, it is very clear why many countries look to it for models of water sustainability. Currently, the Tajik government is focused a great deal in integrated water resources. I quite enjoyed this presentation by Ambassador Mahmaminov, and it was great [meeting with him on a few different occasions](#) at the HLPF.

Mr. Serdar Berdymukhammedov, Deputy Foreign Minister of Turkmenistan, gave a report on his country's involvement in implementing the SDGs in his country. His presentation was rather brief, but Mr. Berdymukhammedov covered many policies Turkmenistan has implemented regarding sustainable development. He started presentation by expressing hope that this side event will serve as a good platform to further increase cooperation between the Central Asian nations in regard to coordinating sustainable development policies. Recently, Turkmenistan adopted a resolution promising to provide safe drinking water to all cities in the country. This resolution is working in conjunction with the Turkmenistan President's work surrounding sustainable development in small villages across the country, particularly surrounding the quality of life in these villages. Turkmenistan is paying very close attention to its neighbors and their policies, seeing which will work if applied to their own country and which will not work for them. Though the presentation was brief, it provided me with great insight into Turkmenistan's sustainability policies in the present and their sustainable development goals in the future.

This side event was very pertinent to my own personal interests as I have become fascinated with Central Asian international relations related to my major at Utah Valley University (UVU) on national and international security, peacebuilding, and development. Sustainable development encompasses security, peacebuilding, and development, so this event

covered all of my interests in Central Asia. To add to the interesting topic, I was able to briefly interact with His Excellency Mr. Kairat Umarov, Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan to the United Nations (KR). Kazakhstan currently is a non-permanent member the UN Security Council, starting the term in the beginning of 2016 and ending at the end of this year. Ambassador Umarov accompanied Mr. Yerzhan Ashikbayev, who made a presentation during the side event. Mr. Ashikbayev opened his presentation by stating Kazakhstan's proposed priorities for the Central Asian region, which are clean water and proper land preservation. Both of these issues are of prime importance to every single Central Asian nation and many countries, like Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, highlighted their devotion to these two core concepts. Mr. Ashikbayev also noted how Kazakhstan has always been an advocate for the SDGs, which was shown in a speech President Nursultan Nazarbayev made following the RIO+20 meeting in 2015. At the conclusion of the presentation, Mr. Ashikbayev called for an increase of regional cohesion, and stated that all Central Asian nations must contribute to the SDGs.



(R to L): Samuel Elzinga with Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan to the United Nations Mr. Kairat Umarov

Despite the busy schedule and presence of the VIP guest, Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan, Ambassador Umarov was attentive when I approached him and introduced myself. I conveyed greetings to him on behalf of UVU faculty and students and expressed a hope that he could visit UVU campus at the time of his convenience. This brief interaction was one of the highlights of my time as a Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF) delegate to the United Nations.

As a great advantage of the UN, I was able to meet again before and after the side event with envoys of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to the United Nations. Having our meetings with these envoys before attending this event was very beneficial as I was able to continue building professional connections with the ambassadors and diplomats who I previously met during the week. This side event was definitely one of the highlights of the trios, and I am hopeful I can help arrange for more central Asian ambassadors to come to UVU.

Samuel Elzinga, President, Foreign Affairs Club at UVU