

UIMF oral statement and general debates at HLPF 2018



Samuel Elzinga addresses ECOSOC during general debates.

The pinnacle and last activity of the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF) at the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development took place on Thursday, July 19, 2018, when we were able to present the oral statement that advocated for sustainable mountain development and the implementation of mountain targets when countries execute their sustainable development plans. This presentation was unprecedented for both Utah Valley University (UVU), the state of Utah as we were the first university students to address during general debates the major forum on sustainable development of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Our oral statement was one of 87 presented during both the morning and afternoon general debates, including 58 nations, 17 inter-governmental organizations, and 13 major non-governmental organizations (NGO) presented during the second general debates at the Trusteeship Council Chamber from 3:00PM until 5:30PM. We were scheduled to speak after the diplomats and officials, representing countries and intergovernmental organizations. This allowed us and myself in particular to listen to the debates of not only how nations that were giving voluntary national reviews, but also how inter-governmental organizations and other NGOs perceive the implementation of sustainable development goals (SDGs) across the globe.

By far the most exciting aspect of the general debates is that we were given the same platform to discuss important issues as many countries and the United States in particular. Assistant Secretary of State Kevin Moley addressed ECOSOC concerning sustainable development in the United States. He suggested greater cooperation between the public and private sectors is one way of helping the most vulnerable communities across the globe. Another worthy goal Assistant Secretary of State Kevin Moley suggested was the creation of more affordable housing, investment in technology, and supporting small businesses. He also noted the various projects the United States is working on to protect safe drinking water for all of its citizens. He emphasized that change will not happen overnight, but we must move these seemingly “low priority” issues like sustainable development to the front of the international discussion.

One of the most surprising parts of the general debates was the presence of other youth voices there. Ms. Beck was a young delegate from Denmark who spoke on sustainable development in her country. She mainly advocated for SDG 12, which focuses on sustainable consumption. She said many countries need to take a deep look within to try and consume more sustainably and that societies around the globe need to address city planning very quickly. She also had an interesting angle on SDG 17, which involves strong partnerships. Ms. Beck’s analysis of this was the need to have strong partnerships between the young and old in regard to implementing the SDGs. It was excellent seeing another young person addressing this body, and I am excited to see more young people getting involved in this type of advocacy.

One of the nations that presented was Uzbekistan, which was an excellent way to hear more about the implementation of the 2030 agenda in a broad sense in Uzbekistan. Very good friend of UVU, Permanent Representative of Uzbekistan to the UN, His Excellency Mr. Bakhtiyor Ibragimov addressed ECOSOC, covering a wide range of economic practices and policies to transform Uzbekistan into a more resilient society. Ambassador Ibragimov spoke broadly, noting how Uzbekistan is actively working towards achieving all aspects of the 2030 agenda. He referenced strong economic growth as signs of a more resilient society and mentioned the strength of the industrial sector. He also mentioned the minister of finance’s policies to help improve the water supply and living conditions of those inhabiting the Aral Sea region. The points Ambassador Ibragimov addressed were different than the points he discussed

in previous meetings and side events I participated in, but it was still excellent to hear what he had to say.

Interestingly, we were not the only ones to discuss the inequality faced in many mountain communities. We came into the debates thinking we would be the only group to advocate for mountain communities, but the small Pacific country of Timor-Leste also used some of their time to showcase some of their domestic policies that help mountain communities in their country. Specifically, Timor-Leste is focusing on providing more infrastructure of mountain communities. Other policies of interest discussed in Timor-Leste's oral statement was their effort to boost water security in the country as a whole. I found this to be particularly interesting because I just came from Tajikistan's side event concerning the Dushanbe water conference. This voluntary national review was excellent, and perhaps it would be beneficial for UVU to invite the Permanent Representative of Timor-Leste to the UN, Her Excellency Ms. Maria Helena Lopes De Jesus Pires, for a visit to our campus to discuss mountain development. Though this presentation was a surprise to me, I was quite impressed that a nation state would take time to discuss aspects of sustainable mountain development during their oral statement.



(L to R) Damon Ashcraft, Samuel Elzinga, Lucas Tavares, Andrew Jensen, and Dr. Baktybek Abdrisaev meet after Mr. Tavares' oral statement

We were also able to listen to Mr. Lucas Tavares, a senior liaison officer for the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO-UN) in New York. Mr. Tavares is also the liaison between the FAO and the Mountain Partnership, and it was a great experience listening to him speak about food insecurity and why a new urban-rural alliance is necessary to ensure the disparities between these two areas can effectively address food insecurity in rural areas, since so many resources are headed to the population centers and leaving rural areas behind. Mr. Tavares was happy to meet with us before we gave our oral statement and was very accommodating in helping our delegation get better pictures of us giving the oral statement.



(L to R) Samuel Elzinga, Damon Ashcraft, and Andrew Jensen after presenting their oral statement
Overall, presenting the oral statement during the general debates was a resounding success. We were able to effectively communicate the successes of the UIMF as a coalition of clubs at UVU in promoting mountain agenda, while also listening to statements by nations like Uzbekistan and Timor-Leste, UN organizations like the FAO-UN, and other stakeholders. I am proud our group

was able to accomplish a feat like this, and the months of hard work finally paid off. I am hopeful we can continue the tradition of UVU not only attending but also contributing to the activities of the High-Level Political Forums on Sustainable Development.

Samuel Elzinga, President, Foreign Affairs Club at UVU