

## TAJIKISTAN AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS: PRESENTATION AT UTAH VALLEY UNIVERSITY BY H.E. MAHMADAMIN MAHMADAMINOV

The Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF) recently hosted His Excellency Mr. Mahmamin Mahmadaminov, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Tajikistan to the United Nations (UN), who spoke on Tajikistan's efforts to implement the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In a presentation to guests, faculty, and students of Utah Valley University (UVU), Ambassador Mahmadaminov focused on Tajikistan's efforts to promote regional and international partnership to implement the SDGs, highlighting his country's focus on water sustainability and youth/family empowerment to solve critical development issues.

Ambassador Mahmadaminov began by highlighting similarities between Tajikistan and Utah, both of which are characterized by mountain communities and positive economic development. Stating that he felt at home in Utah upon arrival, Ambassador Mahmadaminov stated that a primary role of Tajikistan and its Central Asian neighbors was, and should continue to be, partnering with other actors, such as the State of Utah, Salt Lake City, and UVU to better implement the SDGs for widespread benefit. Highlighting Tajikistan's involvement with regional and international actors, the Tajik Ambassador listed a number of organizations that Tajikistan coordinated sustainability efforts with or played a leading role in furthering the organization's efforts, including the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the Commission on the Status of Women, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, and a number of other organizations, including the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Eurasian Economic Community (EAEC), the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Ambassador Mahmadaminov also praised the cooperation of Tajikistan with neighboring countries, such as Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The Ambassador promoted the importance of regional partnerships by illustrating cooperation with Uzbekistan on building power stations in Tajikistan that would service Uzbekistani communities. As a result of what the Ambassador Mahmadaminov called "unprecedented cooperation between the two [countries]," not only were both nations able to benefit financially and economically from the exchange, but relations between the countries vastly improved, especially after relations soured following the end of Tajikistan's civil war. Additionally, the exchange served to drastically secure the Tajikistan-Uzbekistan border by encouraging Uzbekistanis to stay in their country and find jobs, rather than bring narcotics into Tajikistan.

The VIP guest also spoke on the importance of water sustainability and youth and family well-being to economic development. Ambassador Mahmadaminov stated that Tajikistan's economy is one of the best in the region, noting the expansion of foreign investments, industry, agriculture, and the increase of trade partners. The Ambassador praised his country's open-door trade policies as key to economic development, stating that Tajikistan has welcomed all countries to engage with Tajikistan. In describing his country's resources, Ambassador Mahmadaminov noted that 93% of the country is mountainous, with nearly 1450 lakes, some of which are above 4000m (13,124 ft.) in elevation. Additionally, the country boasts 947 rivers that are 28,500km (17,710 mi.) in total length. Tajikistan, therefore, could be a regional leader in water conservation and sustainability efforts.

With regards to youth and family well-being, Ambassador Mahmadaminov stated that education, protection from narcotics and radicalization, and empowering the family unit are essential parts of sustainable development. The Ambassador Mahmadaminov noted the

importance of education in mountain communities and also the tradition of high education levels in Tajikistan, stating that even during Soviet times, the country had one of the highest education levels on the continent. Combined with sound economic policies and regional cooperation, education has contributed to the 52% decrease in poverty in the past fifteen years and increase in public spending of recent years. Ambassador Mahmaminov also focused on the need to prevent the radicalization of youth, stating that this phenomenon is the “real threat to global youth, and is a serious global challenge.” Highlighting cooperation with the United States and others, the Ambassador Mahmaminov called for more global cooperation to countering terrorism and safeguarding youth against terrorist ideologies, noting the importance of Tajikistan as buffer zone against Afghanistan and as a model for cooperative counterterrorism. In harmony with protecting the youth is, according to the Ambassador, bolstering the family unit, which he called the “foundation of society.” Ambassador Mahmaminov stated that the family is the starting point and catalyst for eradicating hunger, promoting education, increasing gender equality, and implementing all of the SDGs.

In a brief question and answer period, Ambassador Mahmaminov stated that an essential part of presenting a more unified international front on solving transnational issues is uniting on contributing to Afghanistan’s socio-economic development. The Ambassador argued that if a fraction of the money spent on recent wars in Afghanistan could have been used for economic development, many issues such as terrorism and radicalization would not exist. Ambassador Mahmaminov highlighted efforts by Tajikistan to help Afghans near the border to develop better agricultural and irrigation methods, which has reduced the influx of narcotics from the area by 50%. Additionally, the Ambassador Mahmaminov stated that the best counterterrorism is sustainable development that focuses on job creation and education.

Throughout his presentation, the Ambassador Mahmaminov stressed the need for youth and student voices to inform the discussion on sustainability and implementing the SDGs. The Ambassador considered the youth as the key informants as to how national, regional, and global sustainability practices should play out, and invited the youth present at his presentation to become more engaged with local organizations and leaders.

The visit of Ambassador Mahmaminov to UVU thus provided an important opportunity to consider ways that students, organizations, and government leaders can expand sustainable development policies and international cooperation to implement the SDGs both in mountain communities and in nations in general. I very much appreciate the efforts of the UIMF at UVU to bring such a high-level official to our campus.

***Michael Hinatsu, Political Science Major Student, Utah Valley University.***