

Utah Valley University Students Hosted Ambassador Mahmaminov

Utah Valley University (UVU) students hosted the Permanent Representative of Tajikistan to the United Nations (UN), Ambassador Mahmaminov Mahmaminov at UVU campus at 10:00 am on Friday, October 5, 2018. They were able to do this as members of the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), a coalition of student clubs at UVU (www.utahimf.org) through the school's student engaged learning model. According to that model, students as a group acquire professional experiences by addressing real issues from the global world, with faculty assisting them as mentors.



Samuel Elzinga, President of UIMF moderates the meeting with Ambassador Mahmaminov

The meeting began with the introduction of the Ambassador Mahmaminov to the audience. Samuel Elzinga, President of UIMF and UVU student, directed the majority of the meeting. Elzinga started by expressing how the topography of Tajikistan was very similar to that of Utah's, thus highlighting the two regions and their ability to help one another in creating sustainable mountain development.

After the introduction of Ambassador Mahmaminov, Samuel invited Hagen Isaacson, UVU freshman to speak. Isaacson is a member of the UIMF and addressed the similar goals between UVU and Tajikistan in terms of promoting the sustainable mountain development (SMD) through the implementation of the UN mountain targets. Isaacson handed Ambassador Mahmaminov a folder containing copies of official UN documents highlighting UIMF contribution to the SMD, which was also displayed on the boards that were set up around the front of the room. Isaacson indicated that UVU is the only school in the country that addresses issues regarding mountain development at the UN. The UIMF has also paid a visit to the UN where students that are members of the organization spoke to the participants of the High-Level Political Forum on sustainable development in July 2018. Isaacson stated that UIMF will continue to visit major UN forums and report to the UN about the importance of providing sustainable development to mountain communities, a majority of whom are the poorest in the world and neglected by the international community. UIMF will continue to visit these forums until the year 2030.

After Isaacson, Megan Davis, UVU student and UIMF member, spoke about the student engaged learning model and how it was developed in 2011 in order to advocate the SMD agenda in the State of Utah, North America and globally.

Another UVU student and UIMF member, Victoria Bahrii, spoke regarding UIMF and UVU's partnerships with several nongovernmental organizations accredited with the UN, such as United Families International (UFI). Victoria then invited UFI representative, Marsha Barlow, to speak for a moment.

Ms. Barlow outlined the duties and functions of UFI and how they collect data from around the world to identify how national policies that have a positive impact on families engenders positive economic development. Barlow mentioned that one of the projects that UFI is currently working on in Tajikistan is finding ideal venues for fly fishing. This would not only create space for positive family activity, but would also positively impact Tajikistan's tourism industry by giving fly fishing enthusiasts and opportunity to find fresh areas to fly fish. After Ms. Barlow finished speaking, representative from the International Organization for the Family (IOF), Wendy Wixom, also gave a short presentation. Ms. Wixom mentioned the flagship program of the International Organization for Families, World Congress of Families (WCF) and its role in protecting the foundation of the family in several places around the world. Wixom then thanked the Ambassador Mahmaminov for his attendance.



Abeir Isawy, UVU student asks question from Ambassador Mahmaminov

After Ms. Wixom's comments, Samuel Elzinga turned remaining time over to Ambassador Mahmaminov, who opened the meeting up for questions. Unfortunately, there was only time for one question to be asked. Meeting attendee and UVU student, Abeir Isawy, asked about Tajikistan's recent undertaking of the construction of a dam, and how this project has and will affect not only Tajikistan's economy, but also its neighboring countries. Ambassador Mahmaminov replied by saying that this project is working in unison with neighboring countries involved and that the only way to achieve sustainable development is to wisely use and share resources. The Ambassador mentioned that there is also a power station jointly operated by Tajikistan and Uzbekistan which provides electricity and power to several countries such as Azerbaijan and Pakistan. Ambassador Mahmaminov also mentioned how important mountain development is for Tajikistan, as 93% of the Tajik population resides in the country's mountains. Tajikistan is also home to one of the world's largest glaciers which gives Tajikistan access to freshwater. Ambassador Mahmaminov explained that it is Tajikistan's moral duty to provide downstream countries with a water supply.

This is considered a meeting successfully hosted by UIMF members, which demonstrated to all in the audience how the student engaged learning model works in practice. It also demonstrated the students' ability to be able to host in a very professional manner such high-level dignitaries, such as the Permanent Representative of Tajikistan to the UN, Ambassador Mahmaminov.

Matthew Brady Simon, UVU student