

Utah Valley University Hosts UN NGO Conference

Utah Valley University, in collaboration with the UN Department of Public Information held a Non-Governmental Agency Conference on the 27th of October 2018. At this conference many organizations were represented, including Salt Lake City, the host of the 2019 UN SDG 11 Conference, The United Nations, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Utah Valley University, and many other Utah, and non-Utah based NGO's.



Dr. Baldomero Lago speaks during the conference

The conference was broken up into three parts, each lasting several hours, with some breaks in between. Baldomero Lago, Chief International Officer of UVU welcomed everyone to the conference and introduced some of the key speakers and representatives of the day, along with setting the day's agenda. We then heard from Jeff Brez of the UN Department of Public Information on the upcoming conference next year in Salt Lake, and some of what we could expect during his and Felipe Quiapo's presentation at the end of the day.

Most of the time following was spent introducing the NGO's Women of the World, and Globus Relief from representatives Justin Harnish and Rebekah Ellsworth respectively. We learned about their respective missions as NGO's and how they tied into the goals of the United Nations. They shared Mr. Brez's excitement for the conference in 2019, to be held in Salt Lake City.

The conference then broke out into an outreach, display, and networking session. Many of the different NGO's and officials started reaching out to each other, expressing interest in cooperating and helping one another in common goals. There was also a great deal of education about each individual NGO. Many of them had booths set up, with representatives there to help explain what each group's mission was, and how they implemented their mission.

After the breakout session, we were seated again and heard from Jennifer Hogge from Africa Now, Sam Elzinga from the UVU Foreign Affairs Club, Lonny Ward from Choice Humanitarian, and Carolina Allen from Big Ocean Women. Each of these presentations helped us to gain a better understanding of their missions. Their presentations were followed by a musical selection from UVU's School of Arts students.

The final presentations were held by Ahmad Corbitt and Ryan Koch from LDS Charities. We then heard a brief word from Jackie Biskupski, Mayor of Salt Lake City on how it came to be that the UN would be meeting in Salt Lake in 2019, and that the smaller conferences were key to preparing for that historic meeting. We were lastly addressed by Astrid Tuminez, President of Utah Valley University on her international experience and the things that she had seen. She praised the NGO's and the UN on their continuing work in trying to make the world a better place.

After a lunch break, we heard from Jeff Brez, and Felipe Quiapo briefly on the role of the Department of Public Information and what they do to help coordinate and integrate different organizations into the UN framework. They also spoke on the Sustainable Development Goals. With the 2019 Salt Lake UN Conference focusing on SDG 11, Sustainable Cities and Communities, he asked for suggestions on certain topics that the different organizations were concerned about and how they could implement those concerns or issues into the conference.

My personal suggestion was that, as a mountain community that is one of the most rapidly growing areas in the United States, Utah could be a leader and facilitator on a discussion on how mountain communities can be built in a stable and sustainable way, and that it would be something of interest for all other mountainous cities and regions, and could help those communities to find solutions to the special difficulties that they face.

The rest of the time was filled with these suggestions, questions, and answers. These smaller conferences are key in preparing the UN, and the participants for discussing meaningful ways to affect change in the future. I look forward as well to the UN Conference in 2019, and hope to take part in contributing to that discussion, and also to help, along with others, in implementing that change for a more safe, stable, and sustainable world.

By Brandon Pedler, President German Club at UVU