

Working Together Making a Difference during UN Conference at UVU

Non-Governmental Organizations conference at Utah Valley University, in collaboration with The United Nations Department of Public Information

On Saturday October 27, 2018 Utah Valley University (UVU) collaborated with the United Nations Department of Public Information (DPI), in hosting a conference for Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO). Titled “Working Together Making a Difference” it was envisioned as a preparatory forum for the major UN DPI global conference held in Salt Lake City during August of next year. Numerous local NGOs had tables and displays set up for people to approach and receive information regarding the work these organizations conduct. UVU’s Global Engagement office invited students to assist with hosting the conference while members of the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), a coalition of student clubs at UVU, was involved in participating in the conference activities. Although UIMF has been contributing to UN activities since 2011, many new members of the coalition such as myself, are still gaining the skills and knowledge necessary in order to effectively engage in UN activities as well as how to interact and host UN officials.

To kick off the first section of the conference, UVU’s Chief International Officer, Dr. Baldomero Lago gave many thanks to those responsible for making such an event possible, as well as an introduction to what participants at the conference may expect, including presentations from: Jeff Brez, Chief DPI NGO Section, United Nations; Justin Harnish, Co-founder of the NGO Women of the World; Rebekah Ellsworth, the NGO Globus Relief; Jennifer Hogge,

Executive Director of the NGO Engage Africa Now; Sam Elzinga, President of UVU Foreign Affairs Club; Lonny Ward, Field Project Director from the NGO Choice Humanitarian; Carolina Allen, Founder and Board Member, of the NGO Big Ocean Women; Ryan Koch, from the NGO LDS Charities, New York and Ahmad Corbitt, representing the NGO LDS Charities, Salt Lake City; Jackie Biskupski, Mayor of Salt Lake City, Utah; and Astrid Tuminez, President of Utah Valley University. Following lunch, there was a United Nations special session conducted by Mr. Jeff Brez and Mr. Felipe Queipo, Information Officer DIP NGO Section United Nations.



Mr. Lonny Ward, from the NGO Choice Humanitarian, speaks at the conference

The presenter who inspired me the most, Lonny Ward, spoke on behalf of Choice Humanitarian and detailed the NGO's goals, efforts, and successes. Ward explained how Choice Humanitarian works with people from impoverished communities around the world, to help

them see their potential and turn that into action. Choice Humanitarian works with private organizations, governments, other NGOs, and international aid organizations to achieve their overall goal: communities becoming the problem solvers. Many communities world wide, where residents live under the world poverty line, are actually surrounded by many resources and possess tremendous potential, so Choice Humanitarian goes there to educate the local population and provide them with the tools necessary to make their lives better. For example, in Nepal, Choice Humanitarian turned a \$286k investment into \$1.1 million of project funding, which has lead to an increased standard of living and economic growth within the country. Due to the efforts of Choice Humanitarian reports in Nepal, one third of families in their program have lifted themselves out of extreme poverty. Choice Humanitarian has been able to achieve this though their core programs: Economic Development, Leadership and Training, Health Initiatives, Education Initiatives, Environmental Initiatives, Cultural Preservation, and major projects such as water projects, schools, and community hospitals.

Choice Humanitarian was slightly different from some of the other NGOs that presented simply due to the expanse of areas in which they work, and their firm belief that individuals can change their life for the better, no matter their current situation. Choice Humanitarian was proud to show, with a little guidance, people in poverty can change their own life and communities can be more efficient in solving their own problems; eliminating the need for handouts and food drops.



UN conference audience

It was an incredible experience for me to hear from Choice Humanitarian, as well as the other Non-Governmental Organizations and their work. It was also an eye opening experience for my peers and myself to learn how much of an impact Non-Governmental Organizations have on communities overall, but more importantly the degree of impact individuals have on one another. Statistics are valuable in measuring the success NGOs have in communities around the world, but numbers can not measure the impact a human can have on another human. And in a lot of ways, the experience one person can give another is what truly creates the path for a sustainable change.

Hannah Bieker, Student at UVU and member of the Foreign Affairs Club