

PR of Austria to UN, Mr. Jan Kickert visits Utah Valley University



Megan Davis (left) presenting folder with official U.N. and UIMF documents to H.E. Mr. Jan Kickert (right)

On Tuesday, February 19, His Excellency Mr. Jan Kickert, Permanent Representative (PR) of Austria to the United Nations, visited the campus of Utah Valley University. Mr. Kickert was hosted by the UVU Office of Global Engagement and Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF) members. During his time at UVU, he was invited to a lunch with a few select faculty members, the Office of Global Engagement members, and UIMF members.

As a UIMF member, I was invited to attend the luncheon with the Austrian Ambassador. During the lunch, he answered many questions while we were being served. Some of the questions included the history of Austria, what Austria is doing at the United Nations right now, and the differences of skiing in Utah and Austria.

After the luncheon with Ambassador Kickert, a few students, including myself, were able to have a one-on-one discussion with the PR of Austria to the UN. During that discussion, I was able to present on UVU's engaged learning model and what UIMF has been doing since 2011. I also was able to present to the Ambassador a folder that included official U.N. documents about UIMF activities. Other students were able to present on official and high level professional events

that UIMF has participated in. One of my colleagues, Hailee Hodgson, asked Ambassador Jan Kickert how we could work with his Permanent Mission to better advocate for mountain women at the 63rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW63).

After the one-on-one discussion, the PR of Austria to the UN was given the time to present on the small foreign countries policies and history. During the lecture, Ambassador Kickert talked not only about his homeland country, but also what the Permanent Mission of Austria does at the United Nations and where their interests are. In his presentation, he mentioned many historical and modern facts about Austria. Mr. Kickert quoted before stating these facts, “foreign policy of every nation is influenced by geography and history.” This small country in central Europe that once was a huge empire is currently military neutral. Neutrality in Austria was declared in 1955 and means that they prohibit entering into any military alliances and the establishment of foreign military bases on Austrian territory. Austria does declare themselves as a peacekeeping nation and they do send out over 100 peacekeeping troops abroad. During his presentation, Mr. Jan Kickert made a statement that really stood out to me. While talking about some Austrian history and the Iron Curtain the Ambassador said, “Everything starts with your neighborhood.” Even though Austria did not join NATO, international law is still very important to the country and they were able to join the European Union (EU). Foreign policy is not only influenced by geography and history, but it is also influenced by maintaining peace and alliances with neighboring countries. The Austrian Permanent Mission does a lot at the U.N. right now and Mr. Jan Kickert made mention of that. Austria has been elected for the ECOSOC three times and is currently running to be elected for a fourth time. The Permanent Mission is also strongly against nuclear weapons and nuclear warfare and holds conventions to try to ban nuclear weapons and land mines. Mr. Kickert stated that his country believes that the second biggest threat to humanity is nuclear weapons and explosives and the first is climate change.

The visit of Ambassador Jan Kickert to UVU’s campus was a very rewarding and educational experience. Members of UIMF were not only able to build their professional portfolio by interacting with a high-level political figure, but they were also given an opportunity to promote the goals of UIMF, advocate for sustainable mountain development, and participate in yet another engaged learning experience.

Megan Davis, UIMF member