

Meeting with PR of Austria to the UN, Ambassador Jan Kickert



Ambassador Jan Kickert Speaks at Utah Valley University

Ambassador Jan Kickert, Permanent Representative from Austria to the United Nations, visited Utah this month. He spent his time visiting with state leaders, companies, and came to Utah Valley University on February 19, 2019. The opportunity that Utah Valley University had to host an ambassador goes along with the school's mission to advance presence and prestige in the international community.

The students of UVU were privileged with the opportunity to hear from Ambassador Kickert. This opportunity allowed for UVU students to become globally competent graduates.

Ambassador Kickert spoke of many topics while visiting with students, most important to him, advancing the rights of women. He is a self-described "gender champion" with a goal to advance women's rights not only in his home country of Austria, but also in the United Nations, and across the world. He spoke to the students about his pledge to make the United Nations a more female and family friendly environment. He highlighted that for the first time in the UN's history, women outnumber men in senior positions.

In addition to championing women's rights, he also spoke about his passion for improving the rights of those with disabilities. He explained this group is often forgotten and advancing their rights is long overdue.

Another group he feels are often excluded are minorities. Minorities rights are important to the country of Austria. Minority groups are protected in his country and he believes this is a step other countries should adopt.

Before turning the time over to students to ask questions, Ambassador Kickert spoke about religion. In Austria, their constitution specifically recognizes religions. He highlighted that Islam has been recognized since 1912. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormon), the predominate religion in Utah, is also protected under their constitution. He explained that in Austria, there is no separation of church and state. Religion is taught in school and funded by the government.



Group photo with Ambassador Jan Kickert. Ezra Pugliano is second from the left

Lastly, students were able to ask the Ambassador questions. Hailee Hodgson, a student who is preparing to attend the 63rd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women at the United Nations Headquarters in New York City, New York next month asked how students can work with Austria to highlight mountain women in United Nations language. Ambassador Kickert explained

that including language from a civil society is difficult. He recommended that the best way to highlight mountain women in language would be to meet with member states and countries who are interested in the cause of advancing women's rights. He went on to explain that negotiations in the UN are extremely difficult due to the blocks of countries (G77 and EU) that vote the same way. Each member state must accept the language.

Ezra Pugliano, Senior at Utah Valley University studying Political Science, Attending the 63rd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women