

Statement

**Parallel event “Student Engaged Learning to empower mountain women and girls”
63rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women
William Gum, member, Utah International Mountain Forum,
a coalition of student clubs at Utah Valley University**

My name is William Gum-Causey I am a UVU student, majoring in Political Science. Also, I am a non-traditional student, which means that in addition to getting my education, I have a wife, Breanna, who is here today in this audience and she fully supports me in my efforts to contribute to empowering women and girls, like her, particularly from rural mountain areas.

During the last two years through engaged learning, I have contributed to the UIMF efforts to advocate for the UN sustainable mountain development agenda in the state of Utah. Engaged learning allows students to gain professional skills through hands-on activities as a group, with faculty serving them as a mentor. I became interested in helping the UIMF in advocating not only for Mountain but also Indigenous Women when my advisor recommended me to take Federal Indian Policy and Law, a class taught by Dr. Dusty Jensen, to fulfill a requirement for my public policy major. I learned about local indigenous sovereign tribal nation members who lived in the mountainous areas of Utah, New Mexico, and Arizona. Navajo and Utes are only a couple of tribes in the Utah area. As a UIMF member, last year I created a panel to highlight the problems facing indigenous nations, titled “UIMF: Addressing Issues of Indigenous Sovereign Nations” where I invited Dr. Jensen, Jacob Crane, Chase Hobson, and Jaclyn Booth, UVU students and members of sovereign tribal governments, to address the 17 UN sustainable development goals in their communities. Panel participants raised serious concerns about a lack of access to a market, high unemployment, drugs abuse, housing problems, the dwindling population on reservations, and physical abuse. The class I took, and this panel garnered my interest and I have been engaged further in researching these issues. I learned from my professor Dusty Jansen and my research, that indigenous women are more subject to domestic violence, sexual assault, and rape.

Indigenous sovereign tribal members face barriers to achieve all 17 UN sustainable development goals but the one most pressing is the 5th, Gender Equality. According to UN statistics “1 in 5 women and girls, including 19% aged 15 - 49, have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner with the last 12 months” (#5). However, the National Institute of Justice in the United States reports “84% of American Indian and Alaskan women have experienced sexual assault, this is 1.2x’s more likely than non-Hispanic white women. They also report that in most cases the abusers are non-Indian, or non-tribal members. (NIJ). Similarly, The Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission concludes, in their report, that the US and Canada are not “[ensuring] the safety and protection of Native women” and recommends that they “take immediate action to review, monitor, and provide comprehensive reports on violence against Indigenous women”. However, Response facilities that provide services to indigenous tribal members suffer from inadequate support structures and funding that they need to help these members when a crisis happens according to the Navajo Area Health Services. There are reasons this serious topic is not being addressed. These problems are prevalent, and occurring at higher rates. Both at the national and international levels, we cannot weight the lives of indigenous people as less important.

The CSW63 needs to include language in the final documents emphasizing international cooperation to address these crimes that affect members of indigenous people. In the US, these issues can be addressed through initiatives within states and by the federal government. For instance, Utah has taken it upon itself to address issues facing members of indigenous tribal nations. Governor Gary Herbert hired Larry Echo Hawk as Specials Council on Indian Affairs to, “build better relations with the state’s eight tribes, some of whose positions differ sharply with Utah’s political leadership”. Utah Valley University is committed to addressing the issues of this underrepresented group and has done so in particular by recently opening its new Native American Studies minor. A key aspect of completing this minor is using student engaged learning to help its students, many of which are Native American, bring awareness of these issues. It is through engaged learning that I learned that there is a need to bring awareness about Native American issue to the broader population.

Thank you very much for your attention.