

Days Four and Five in New York following CSW63

On March 17-20, members of the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), a coalition of student clubs at Utah Valley University (UVU), travelled to New York City to advocate for mountain women and girls at the 63rd Session of the United Nations (UN) Commission on the Status of Women (CSW63).

Beginning on Monday, March 18, UIMF members spent many hours at the UN Headquarters familiarizing themselves with the compound, but more importantly, participating in a number of side and parallel events related to different aspects of the UN 2030 Development agenda regarding gender equality and female empowerment. On Tuesday, March 19, UIMF hosted a side event, titled “Student Engaged Learning to Empower Mountain Women and Girls,” in which they showed how UVU’s student engaged learning (SEL) model can empower women and girls to be educated about and work to solve issues of sustainable mountain development (SMD) in their communities. On Wednesday, March 20, UIMF further advocated for mountain women during daily civil society briefings and the Europe/North America caucus hosted by UN Women and the NGO Commission on the Status of Women, New York (NGO CSW/NY).



(L to R): Michael Hinatsu and Samuel Elzinga near the Fox News building

I was very honored to be joined by my hard-working and driven peers during our advocacy campaign. While most of them travelled back to Utah on Wednesday, March 20, I stayed in New York along with Dr. Baktybek Abdrisaev, UIMF faculty mentor, to both observe the final CSW63 events and to conduct administrative tasks related to our advocacy campaign. For example, Dr. Abdrisaev and I during the latter half Thursday and on Friday were able to edit and finalize students' personal reflections and submitted articles on CSW63's events, as well as finalize a number of other documents related to the preparations for our advocacy campaign.

During the first part of Thursday, Dr. Abdrisaev and I walked around New York City, seeing such places as Times Square, the Empire State Building, Rockefeller Center, and everything in between. I also was glad that we had so much free time later on Thursday to do work, as Dr. Abdrisaev and I both agreed that some free time on Friday to do some sightseeing would provide some respite from the week's work. Additionally, UIMF President Samuel Elzinga had flown in on Wednesday night to take part in planning the youth section of the UN Civil Society Conference to be held in Salt Lake City, Utah on August 26-28, 2019, and we all expressed the desire to experience more of what New York City had to offer.

Samuel Elzinga invited Dr. Abdrisaev and myself to accompany him on Friday, March 22, to visit Brighton Beach in Brooklyn, to find some Russian books and visit other Russian/Central Asian sites, as he is planning to study in Kyrgyzstan next year. We agreed to accompany him, and decided to meet at the Church Center of the UN on Friday at 11:00am to use the public transit system to travel there. That day, after finalizing some more documents and eating breakfast at Cafe Olympia, Dr. Abdrisaev and I travelled with Samuel Elzinga to Brighton Beach. The travel itself was a novelty for me, as I had never until visiting New York been on a subway or on a train, and enjoyed both the ride and viewing the houses, businesses, buildings, and other myriad New York sites that I had previously seen only on TV.

After arriving to Brighton Beach, which has a sizeable Russian/Central Asian population, we proceeded to the Russian bookstore "St. Petersburg." I was struck by the amount of signs and advertisements in the Russian language, and was grateful to be accompanied by Samuel Elzinga and Dr. Abdrisaev, as my grasp on the Russian language is weak, to say the least. However, I was very interested in observing both the variety of Russian products in the store, but also in hearing so many people speaking Russian. I was equally impressed with the local cuisine, as Dr. Abdrisaev treated us to some Central Asian street food. We also found a restaurant named "Bek," which we for obvious reasons were excited to try out. We were served traditional Central Asian soup, bread, and kebabs, which for all three, my palate was thankful. Afterward, we travelled to John F. Kennedy International Airport to return to Utah.



(L to R): Michael Hinatsu, Samuel Elzinga and Baktybek Abdrisaev near the Bek restaurant

Overall, I am very thankful for the chance I got to travel with my peers and others to advocate for mountain women, SMD, and SEL at CSW63, both for the eye-opening experiences of visiting such a highly-populated and diverse part of America, but also for learning through experience how best to advocate for mountain women and girls, as well as learning the UN system as it operates vis a vis the Economic and Social Council. I look forward to further advocating for such topics with my peers at the upcoming Civil Society Conference, as well as in other ways as UIMF seeks to make a larger impact locally and internationally.

Michael Hinatsu, UIMF Vice President