

The 11th Annual International Mountain Day Observation at Utah Valley University

Hosting an observation of International Mountain Day (IMD) has become a long-standing annual tradition for students at Utah Valley University (UVU). Typically, the event is held in person on campus, however, this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, doing so was not feasible. Although the pandemic posed special challenges to organizing and hosting the event, it did not stop students and the event was able to be organized virtually via Zoom. This year I also had the pleasure of participating in the event as well as some of the preparations.

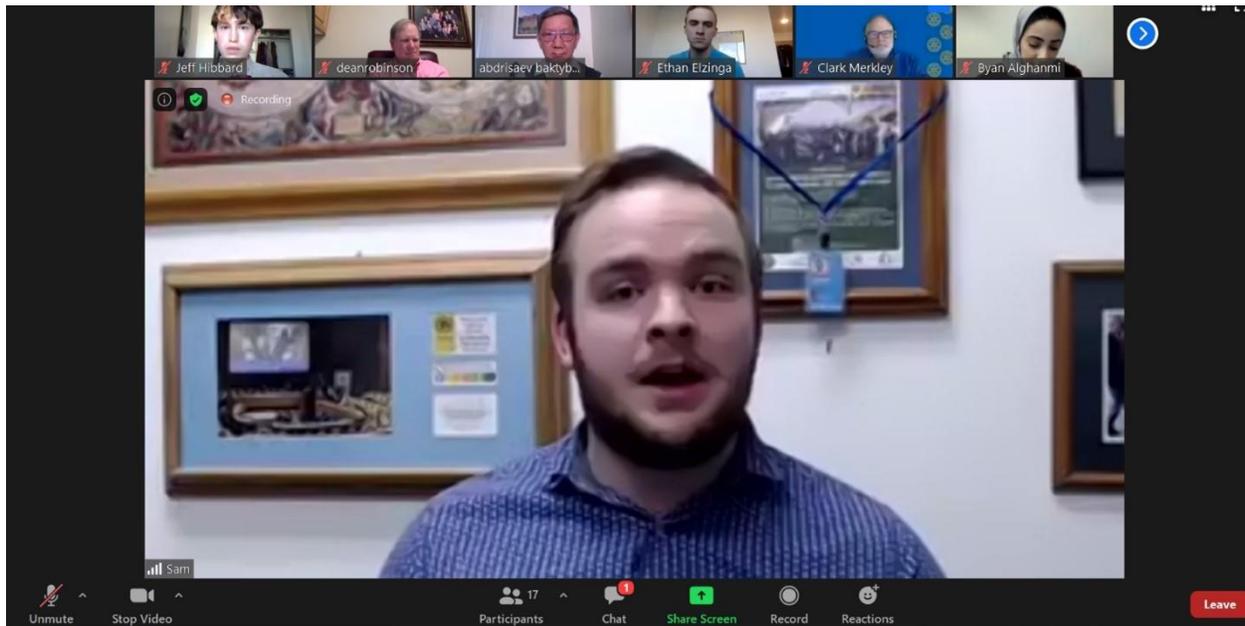


Participants of the IMD2020 observation at UVU

The event was hosted by the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), a coalition of clubs at UVU, which through student engaged learning (SEL), helps to raise awareness for impoverished people in mountain areas. It also provides information to the audience regarding Sustainable Mountain Development. This year's IMD theme was "Protecting Mountain Biodiversity."

The event was hosted and organized by Dallas Karren, Vice President of UIMF. He also gave the Welcoming Remarks. Following Dallas, we had speakers Mr. Samuel Elzinga, Dr. Rusty Butler, Mr. Dustin Liu, and Mr. Dean Robinson. Each speaker was introduced by a UVU student. This allowed the audience to get to know the speaker better. Furthermore, following SEL, it gave more students, including myself, an opportunity to participate.

UIMF President Sam Elzinga briefly talked about how he has been able to be directly involved in planning UVU's International Mountain Day event for several years and has been able to see it grow and improve. He also discussed some of the challenges faced in holding the event electronically this year and how students were adaptive to the issue and were able to resolve the situation.



UIMF President Sam Elzinga speaks during IMD2020

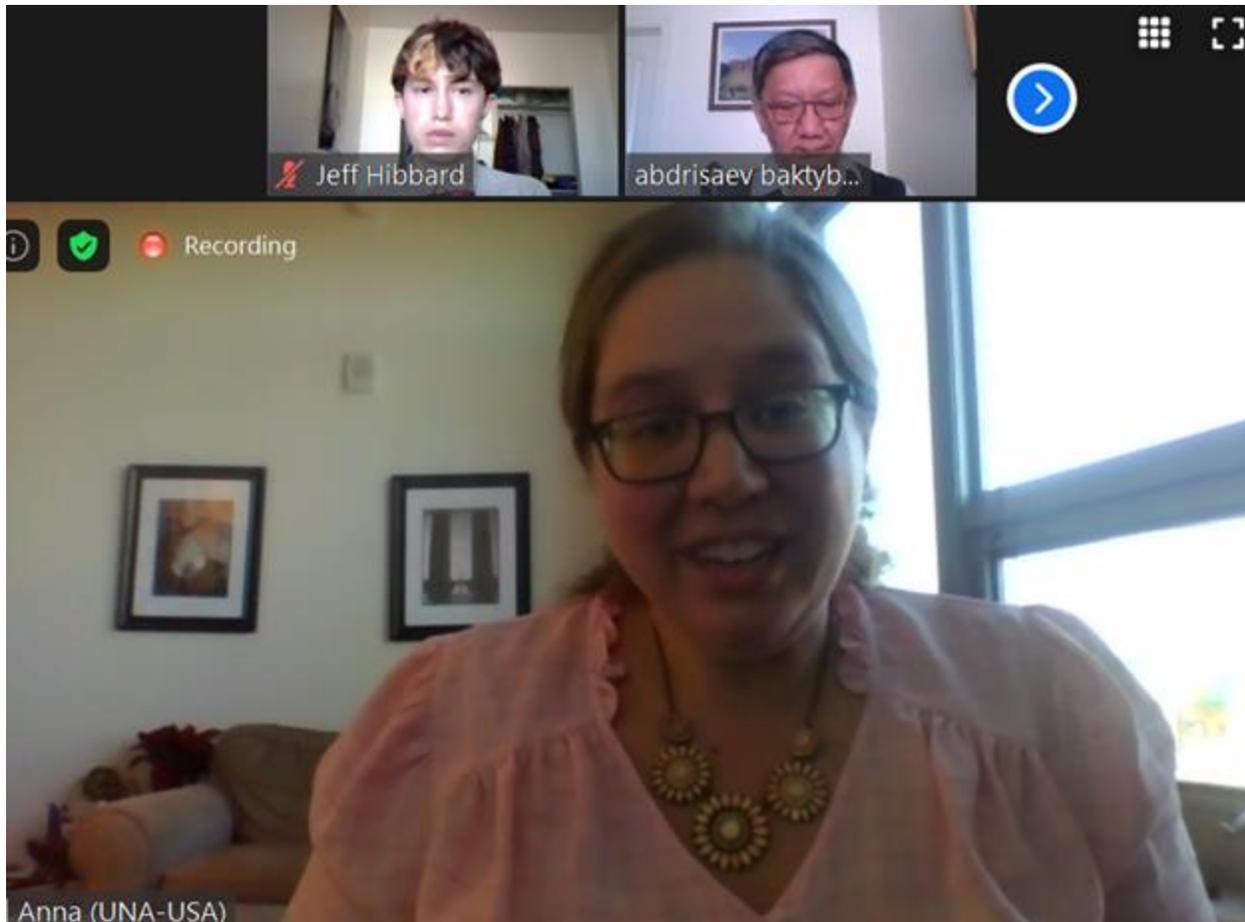
Dr. Rusty Butler, the main representative at the United Nations, for the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences, a non-governmental organization, was the second speaker on the event agenda. Unfortunately, due to some technical difficulties, he was unable to enter the Zoom event until later. Luckily, Dr. Baktybek Abdrisaev, a professor at UVU, was able to step in and speak about the experience of Dr. Butler as well as the support he has given to organizations like UIMF over the years. Since 1999, Dr. Butler has supported those activities related to UIMF and was one of the first people to speak at the first UVU observation of International Mountain Day in 2010. He has also helped students make their voices heard at the United Nations at events such as the annual sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women. Overall, he has been a great advocate for Utah and other mountain communities for many years.



Mr. Dustin Liu, the youth observer to the UN for the UNA-USA

This year the work of Mr. Dustin Liu, the youth observer to the UN for the United Nations Association of the United States of America (UNA-USA), was presented at the event. Mr. Liu was unable to directly attend the event because of other circumstances, but Anna Mahalak, who manages youth engagement initiatives for UNA-USA, was able to step in. Mr. Liu in his time as youth observer to the UN has been able to involve many people in his work regarding the importance of biodiversity. He has also helped to engage students with the United Nations. He has conducted over 100 listening sessions reaching people on a more personal level. His work emphasizes the importance of biodiversity and how interconnected humans are to the environment. One important focus part of his work is using the voices of local and indigenous people as well as engaging local communities.

Aside from presenting the work of Mr. Liu, Anna Mahalak spoke about the work that UNA-USA does such as involving students with the UN. She also took some time to answer questions from the audience.



Anna Mahalak, Youth Engagement Manager at UNA-USA speaks at the event

The final speaker at UVU's International Mountain Day event was Mr. Dean Robinson. Mr. Robinson is the Orem Rotary President. Rotary International is an organization that performs service throughout the world. Its six areas of focus are promoting peace; fighting disease; providing clean water, sanitation and hygiene; saving mothers and children; supporting education; and helping grow local economies. Over the years, Rotary has played a huge role in the eradication of polio. Mr. Robinson, through Orem Rotatory, has been a part of many service projects such as providing dictionaries to elementary schools and collecting coats. His presentation helped to demonstrate the importance that organizations such as this do internationally and in their own communities.

Finally, the event was concluded by presenting FAO-UN certificates to those who contributed to Sustainable Mountain Development in 2020. Usually, the certificates are given out physically. This year contributors were still recognized for their efforts, but the certificates were sent electronically due to COVID.

Events such as this at UVU showcase the value of the student engaged learning approach. It allows for students to take the lead in important events under the guidance of knowledgeable professors and faculty. It also gives students an opportunity to get in on the ground level and be directly involved rather than passive observers. This year's event was also able to showcase the passion and strength of students at UVU. The event flowed as smoothly as it has in past years despite challenges with doing it virtually.

Although my role in the event was minor, it was still a great experience for me. Being directly involved helped me feel more responsible for the success of the event and gave me insight into how events like this function.

Overall, the event was very successful. Although several speakers were unable to directly present either due to technical issues or other circumstances, others were able to step in and help present their work to those in attendance. Everything was carried out smoothly and the online nature of the event did not hinder the communication of ideas regarding the importance of biodiversity and other matters related to mountainous areas.

Jeff Hibbard, Vice President, Foreign Affairs Club