

My First International Mountain Day

International Mountain Day was something new that I had never heard of before. I was asked to participate in the planning and organizing of the event by my instructor, Dr. Baktybek Abdrisaev, who was looking for student volunteers, as the event was completely put together by students. I agreed to help advertise the event through a mass email which I coordinated with John MacFarlane, academic advisor for History and Political Science. Additionally, I acted as the liaison between the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF) and Dr. Patience Kabamba, who would present at the celebration.



(L to R): Munhbat Batmunkh, Vice President, UIMF presents FAO-UN Certificate of Appreciation to Tenika Ray for her Contribution to 2016 IMD

Dr. Patience Kabamba began the International Mountain Day celebration by presenting his research on the Nande, a Congolese tribe who live in the mountains of North Kivu. The thing

that stands out about these people is that in the midst of the country's war-torn turmoil, they have managed to remain peaceful and economically thriving. They were able to create a culture apart from the State, and fostered their independence from it. When the State dissolved, they not only survived, but thrived. This group of people has also thrived because early on they learned the importance of trans-national trade. They primarily export coffee, potatoes, beans, and gold and import textiles, cars, motorbikes, and medicine. They have also thrived and created a self-sustaining and prosperous bubble within Congo. They also succeeded based on the main Protestant values they hold (hard work, to not waste their earnings on alcohol and prostitutes, and delayed gratification), internal cohesion, and their partnership with the militias.

Internal cohesion has contributed the most to their success. For example, each trader manages 15 kilometers of road, ensuring that the roads are safe and accessible. In addition to this, they also have an agreement with the militias. The Nande stay clear of the militias and the militias stay out of the Nande center and do not disrupt the Nande capitalists' prosperous sphere of control and stability. Ultimately, each group benefits. The militias have access to food, and are provided guns by the Nande, and the Nande have the protection of the militias from the rebel forces in the country.

Following Dr. Kabamba's presentation, Mehak Asad screened her film "Daughter of Kalash." The film details Kalash culture who are an Indo-Aryan Dardic indigenous people that live in the mountains of northern Pakistan. The main point Ms. Asad made was that the culture of the Kalash people is in danger of dying out. There are only 3,500-4,000 people who still identify as Kalash, as they are surrounded by Islamists who have forced many of them over the years to convert to Islam. The Kalash culture is very strict: either you adhere to the culture or you are outside Kalash. One of the largest problems facing the culture is that there is no written

scripture nor textbooks for the education system. This makes it hard to preserve and pass on the culture to the next generations.

That is one of the things that the main actress, Gul, in the film was trying to accomplish. She has set up programs and classrooms to teach people about Kalash culture. From her own experience, she understands the value of education. The fear for many is that if their children go away for school, they will end up leaving Kalash. However, Gul is using her education to preserve and promote Kalash culture. She is also using her degree in archeology to research and find the origin of the Kalash people. Despite many challenges facing the Kalash culture, and no major attempts being made to preserve the culture, the Kalash are still surviving within a Muslim country. Their strong beliefs may have contributed to the survival of the culture, but have also proven to be part of their demise.

This was my first International Mountain Day celebration, and I found the experience both rewarding and interesting. The fact that students were able to put on such professional level celebration with coordinated presentations is amazing. I look forward to helping out again in the future.

Tenika Ray, UVU Student