

## My Story, Student Engagement, and work at the UN



*(L to R): Tony Medina, Munkhbat Batmunkh, Regan Warner, and Christian Jensen at the United Nations General Assembly Hall*

As a nontraditional student at UVU I have learned to balance family, work, and school, as well as make time to be a part of the of the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), a coalition of student clubs at Utah Valley University (UVU). The UIMF has advocated for Gender and the Sustainable Mountain Development (SMD) agenda of the United Nations in my own State of Utah and North America since 2011. This has motivated me to achieve what I've desired to do since I was a little boy – to help others. It is the greatest feeling in the world when you can do something that puts a smile on someone's face. I was able to promote the cause of mountain women and families and eventually to become the President of a coalition. Our visit to the United Nations and participation at the 61<sup>st</sup> session of the Commission on Status of Women (CSW61) on March 20-23, 2017 was a wonderful opportunity to share our experiences in gender and SMD advocacy. It also allowed us to collaborate with many dignitaries and participants from

around the world for future events with the focus on gender and SMD. In addition, it was my first visit to New York and I was able to see New York as a participant of the important United Nations forum.

As a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS), I spent two years of my life on a religious mission in Honduras. Those 2 years changed my life completely. I discovered myself, and learned how to work hard and I found ways to connect with people I have never met before. I believe the key to a better world is being genuinely kind and willing to work hard. Life is very difficult, which drives people to focus on themselves. When I arrived in Honduras, I didn't speak the language, and people looked at me like I didn't belong in their country. I worked hard to learn Spanish, and took the time to listen to people and their problems. With time, I was able to connect with people I never met or cared about. I developed a love for them and I genuinely cared about helping them succeed and overcome their hardships. Being there and seeing the way others lived gave me a different perspective on life. It helped me realize that there is a bigger picture, and there are people out there who need help. I discovered that people could only achieve true lifelong happiness when they worked for it themselves. I learned how to show people the steps to success, and encourage them to take the leaps.

My religion has shaped who I am, and how I think. This has led to a deeper sense of self-worth and optimism for a better world. One of the greatest examples I have found is that of Jesus Christ and what he taught about loving others even when they are different from you. Now, and throughout history, religion has had a negative connotation to those who are not of the same faith. Rather than have open discussions, people keep their hearts and minds closed. Everyone thinks that their way of thinking is the only way. From religion to politics, too many people are emotionally invested in their ideas. In order for great change to take place, we need to think logically and hear all perspectives. This ideally leads to greater compromise and change.

Looking back on my heritage, laid out by Mormon pioneers, I know that despite all odds, good things can come from anywhere. My great ancestors came to the mountainous region of Utah to avoid persecution with nothing but comradery and a collective idea and were able to build here one of the most successful models of sustainable mountain development in this nation. I believe SMD is such an important issue to discuss as well as plan for. If people were able to look, for example, at climate change in a different light, we may start to work together quicker. Many question climate change with a narrative similar to: "How can we prevent a world that is

supposedly changing rapidly. The world is always changing, it always has.” It isn’t about preventing the climate from changing, but rather taking care of what we love and preparing ourselves for the future. What happens when the glaciers in the mountains melt completely, and sea levels rise. How will we store water? What will we use for energy when we no longer have fossil fuels? These may seem like abstract questions now, but they are already causing major problems. People in Utah have started planning today to meet those challenges and both its citizens and students are very eager to contribute to that process.

During CSW61, Tony Medina, Munkhbat Batmunkh, Regan Warner, and myself, as leaders of the UIMF, planned to report how we, non-traditional students, hosted the international Women of the Mountains Conferences (WOMC) since 2007 and how we were able to advocate gender and SMD agendas in North America.

Throughout the 5 days we were in New York, we met with numerous dignitaries, and attended side and parallel events. As current President of the UIMF, it was my privilege to lead our group at the CSW61 alongside Tony Medina, as outgoing President of the UIMF, and provide a transition of power in our coalition as well. Some of the most important events were our meetings with diplomats at the Permanent Missions of Mongolia, Romania, Hungary, and the Kyrgyz Republic to the United Nations. I was able to present dignitaries with folders prepared for the meetings which included a letter from Dr. Rusty Butler, the main representative of the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences, NGO under ECOSOC, who provided us access to the CSW61, a copy of the 2016 United Nations Secretary General’s Report on SMD, highlighting UIMF as contributor to gender and SMD agendas, as well as the final document of the fourth international Women of the Mountains Conference (WOMC), the UIMF brochure and my business card. Foreign diplomats were reminded about the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the WOMCs and how the conferences became a major grass-roots forum to advocate for gender and SMD in North America through the efforts of non-traditional students. While it was important to share all of the hard work we had done, as well as what previous members of UIMF, including Tony Medina, before us have done with gender advocacy, we came to the diplomatic missions to seek collaboration with the representatives of mountain countries accredited at the UN on future endeavors. We discussed with them opportunities to arrange their visits to UVU and Utah as well as to co-host with their Permanent Missions a side event at the 62<sup>nd</sup> Commission in 2018. Each visit was an excellent step forward in building relationships as well as promoting the cause of

mountain women and families in our future joint efforts. This was an opportunity for me as well to follow in the footsteps of previous President Tony Medina and contribute to the further efforts that students can make in the advocacy of the gender and SMD agendas of the United Nations. Students, and non-traditional ones in particular, are often overlooked as contributors to the advocacy and implementation of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) of the United Nations. The emphasis on engaged learning at UVU has shown me what I can accomplish in the real world. It has given me leadership skills, and experiences I could not find anywhere else. Thanks also to the Engaged Learning in the Liberal Arts (ELLA) grant sponsored by the College of Humanities and Social Studies (CHHS), and the Grant for Engaged Learning (GEL) sponsored by the Office of Engaged Learning of UVU, we were able to participate and report about our practical contributions to the implementation of the United Nations SDGs and SDG#5 on gender in particular.



*(L to R): Christian Jensen presents UIMF folder to Mrs. Elisabeta David, the Deputy Chief of the Romanian Mission to the United Nations*

In conclusion, it isn't easy to think about future generations or the people all over the world you don't currently know. No one man, or a government can bring about change for a better planet.

The work needs to be done by the people living in each country. All the individuals living in the mountains, valleys, and oceans play an integral part in global change. If we take the time to get to know each other, and work to be the best we can, we will have a positive influence in the world.

*Christian Jensen V, President, UIMF*