

We need to advocate for the mountain women

On Monday, October 2nd, 2017, Utah Valley University (UVU) held a forum to help and inform students on how they can be involved with the United Nations through NGO's support of women in mountainous regions. The conference was led and directed fully and completely by students of the university who helped to coordinate the time, place, speakers and short biographies to introduce each speaker. At the end, they also shared their appreciation for their attendance and preparation with gifts for each speaker.



All five speakers have history in their fields for working with and inside NGOs as well as in the UN, thus making them experts. The speakers are as follows, and in order of presentation pieces: Dr. Baldomero Lago, Dr. Andrew Taber, Dr. Jed Shilling, Dr. Rusty Butler, and Mrs. Wendy Jyang. All five highlighted specific areas of why and how students and individuals can become involved in advocating for women in mountain conditions.

Dr. Baldomero, Vice-rector for global engagement at UVU began the discussion mainly by emphasizing the rare and unique experience offered here at the university to be involved with the UN. Of all universities nationwide, Dr. Baldomero emphatically stated that, "This is the place

to be”, not only to help advocate for a cause such as women of the mountains, but also to begin involvement in international relations. The UVU applied for status of the associated member of the UN Department of Public Information which will give students the opportunity to experience first-hand how and what we can do to make issues such as the importance of the advocacy for mountain women known not only here in Utah, but also to the entire world.

Following Dr. Lago’s presentation, Dr. Jed Shilling from the Mountain Institute NGO from Washington, D.C. was introduced and began his presentation on why mountains are an important resource. While showing us a PowerPoint presentation, he explained how important mountains are to our earth and to the different nations’ economies. By advocating for specific mountain regions, he further explained why the conservation of these mountains is important. Examples that he gave were that plants and herbs necessary to the survival of the community and culture of these mountain people and can only grow in conditions of high altitude; and how construction projects for the buildings of new roads are harmful to not only the mountains, but also to unexpected jobs that can distract from utilizing all the resources these mountains have to offer.

In conjunction with Dr. Shilling’s remarks, he was followed by Dr. Andrew Taber. Dr. Taber supported much of Dr. Shilling’s remarks by emphasizing that in order to help advocate for mountain women, it is important to work with the local and national governments within these mountain regions. His organization, the Mountain Institute, focuses on creating lasting relationships and figuring out ways to help those who live in the mountains. He explained how because of the competitive nature of their countries’ economies, most of the men leave their families and migrate to the cities for jobs to support their wives and children. This however forces women to then assume the role of tilling and taking care of the farmland on their properties. By working with governments, Dr. Taber’s organization looks to help preserve this farmland and increase their trade opportunities, allowing for an increase in the annual income of mountain women and their families.

Dr. Butler spoke mainly about the role which his NGO, the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences plays at the UN ECOSOC, or Economic and Social Council held by the UN to know how to help financially and increase sustainable development opportunities among its member countries. RANS by working with UVU focused on identifying how economic development in mountainous areas such as Utah could provide an example to the world of how mountain regions

can provide for its inhabitants and increase their standard of living. ECOSOC is an important platform by which Dr. Butler explained advocating for women of the mountain can be attained.

Then Ms. Wendy Jyang, President of the NGO from Utah accredited under ECOSOC spoke to us. Her remarks were short, but powerful. She spoke of the friendship she formed with Utah Valley University's president Matthew Holland, and how this affected her decision to establish her organization. She wanted to make a difference in the lives of women and families who struggle, and went about educating herself on what their issues were and began to look for solutions. By doing so, she found other individuals who were just as interested and was able to formally organize as a group. She strongly encouraged students to always remember who they are and when they find something to fight for to go at it with all you have and take others who believe in it with you.

In conclusion, I have to say that the conference was a success. The speakers were not only informative, but inspiring. As a student who was not very educated on advocating for mountain women, it was an eye opening experience. It also helped me to see how important NGOs are in advocating for specific individuals who need help. To reiterate Dr. Baldomero's statement, Utah Valley University truly is, "the place to be."

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