

**Statement of
Samuel Elzinda, President, Utah International Mountain Forum,
a coalition of student clubs at Utah Valley University during the International
Mountain Day celebration
the United Nations, December 11, 2018**

It is truly an honor to present at this important side event on International Mountain Day (IMD) with such distinguished panel and by invitation of the Permanent Mission of the Kyrgyz Republic to the United Nations. IMD was established after the celebration by the UN of the International Year of the Mountains in 2002 and the Kyrgyz Republic was one of the major sponsors of that initiative.

I personally have been able to develop an interest in Central Asia since I was in middle school, which began through the Geography Bee when I was asked questions relating to lake Issyk-Kul and the Amu Darya River. Coming from Boulder, Colorado, that interest developed further when I regularly visited the Dushanbe Tea House.

When I became the President of the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), a coalition of student clubs at Utah Valley University (UVU) I was able not only to advocate for the UN Sustainable Mountain Development (SMD) agenda, but also to be involved in activities in Kyrgyzstan from two my colleagues, Dr. Rusty Butler and Dr. Abdrisaev. They established a partnership between the UVU and the International University of Kyrgyzstan (IUK) in 1999 to jointly advocate SMD in Utah and globally. Since 2011, the primary vehicle for this advocacy has been through student engaged learning, when UIMF members gain professional skills, networking opportunities and recognition globally by addressing real-world problems of mountain communities as a group with a faculty member serving them as a mentor. Students raise funds for that purpose by themselves as well, and we thank Dr. Lago, Chief International Officer and Rector on Global Engagement at UVU for providing funds for this trip on a such a short notice.

The IMDs are very important SMD activities for UIMF and we celebrated it for the 9th time, the only institution in North America to do so.

Today we are following in the footsteps of Jesler Molina, with his peers Carlos Alarco and Joseph McCain, who participated in IMD 2013 at the UN, and made a statement during the 6th session of the UN Open Working Group on SDGs. During IMD 2012, our other predecessors, Dallin Kauffman and Greg Haddock discussed the climate change impact on the mountain communities at the conferences titled: “Conflict and Peace in the Mountains” in Osh, and “Mountains, and Climate” in Bishkek during December 5-12, 2012. During IMD 2015, UIMF discussed at UVU with the Permanent Representative of Fiji to the UN, Mr. Peter Thompson joint

advocacy for mountain and island communities at the UN. The President of the 71st session of the UN General Assembly praised then UIMF efforts to collect 1,500 signatures for the MPS petition to include mountain issues to the agenda of the UNFCCC COP 21 in Paris. His visit highlighted UIMF's efforts to co-host PRs to the UN of 18 nations during 2013-2015 in advocating for mountain targets, including both co-chairs of the Open Working Group on SDGs and the 2015 President of ECOSOC, PR of Austria to the UN, Mr. Martin Sajdik.

Last week we celebrated IMD for the second time under the umbrella of not only the MPS but also the UN Department of Public Information (UN/DPI) and highlighted several initiatives of UIMF within 2018 to make **mountains matter**:

First, 11 of our members advocated for mountain women through a written statement and by hosting a side and parallel event during the 62nd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women; they also learned that the only other group worldwide which advocates for SDGs in similar way at ECOSOC forums is the International Relations Students' Association of McGill University in Canada.

Second, Andrew Jensen, Damon Ashcraft and I, advocated for the mountain targets in oral presentation during the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in July 19, 2018;

Third, Congressman John Curtis (R-UT) praised UIMF SMD advocacy actions in the Congressional Record on September 4, 2018;

Fourth, UIMF just officially became a partner with the United Nations Association of the USA;

Finally, UIMF will play a major role in helping host the 68th UN DPI/NGO conference in Salt Lake City in August 2019 with UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres in attendance.

We brought with us a folder with copies of the official invitation letter from Dr. Lago to Mr. Mastrojeni to host a side event on mountains during the conference, copies of statements made in 2018 at three ECOSOC forums as well as a copy of the Report on SMD in North America for RIO+20 with the UIMF contribution and the 2017 issue of the journal Youth and the Mountains.

I was happy through engaged learning to learn more and contribute to SMD promotion in North America. I will try next year to focus more on Central Asia, and Kyrgyzstan. I have been offered an internship with the Bureau of South and Central Asia of the U.S. State Department working on economic development while also building professional connections with Embassies of Central Asian countries in Washington, D.C.

UIMF members are confident that the engaged learning model to advocate the implementation of mountain targets will provide similar benefits to academic institutions elsewhere. We are glad to share experiences with any of them to jointly bring the mountain targets to the focus of 2030 Development agenda.