

**International Union of Speleology Call to Action:
International Year of Caves and Karst:**

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This report is part of an annual series from the International Union of Speleology (UIS) to the newsletters of its member countries. The purpose of these reports is to reach all cavers in the member countries with important news from the Union. For more information about the UIS, visit www.uis-speleo-org, which includes the UIS Bulletin with much more news and details. This report focuses on what could be the most important speleological event ever! Please note that the Australian Speleological Federation Inc is Australia's representative for the UIS.

What is an International Year?

International Years are typically organized under the auspices of the United Nations (UN) or the United Nations Education, Science, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Their primary purpose is to educate the public and celebrate important aspects of life, such as Indigenous Languages (2019) and Planet Earth (2008).

As the name implies, International Years are a series of events that are held around the world by international teams that include partners from non-governmental organizations, government agencies, businesses, and interested individuals. There is always at least one major event, plus many other activities that are held throughout the year in multiple countries.

One other typical thing about International Years occurs when the year is over. There is a great increase in appreciation for the year's topic. This often appears as increases in funding, better regulations, protection of peoples and important areas, and new business opportunities, depending on the topic of the year.

Why an International Year of Caves and Karst?

On 16 June 2015, Dr. Kyung Sik Woo, then President of the International Union of Speleology (UIS), made a declaration proposing 2021 as the International Year of Caves and Karst (IYCK) to be recognized by the UN and UNESCO. This declaration was supported strongly by a vote of UIS member countries.

The UIS, its member countries, organizational partners, and individual cave explorers, scientists, managers, and educators have done tremendous work over many decades to improve the world's understanding and appreciation of caves and karst. However, despite all of our combined accomplishments, caves continue to be destroyed. Trash is still dumped underground. Karst aquifers are polluted. Many rare cave ecosystems are now endangered. Precious archaeological and paleontological materials in caves are still commonly lost and looted. And sadly, many government officials, educators, and even scientists and environmental managers do not understand caves and karst enough to prevent these tragedies, or even recognize that they are tragedies.

An IYCK is the next step to raise the level of understanding and respect for caves and karst as globally important physical, ecological, and cultural systems. A successful IYCK will lead to new caves opened for exploration, and more funds and other support for that exploration, as well as for research, management, and protection, at levels we've never seen before.

What is the Current Status?

Since Dr. Woo's declaration, the UIS has gathered the support of most of its member countries, as well as the support of four countries, nine international organizations and 21 national organizations in 13 countries. I thank them for their joining this vital effort.

Current Supporters of the International Year of Caves and Karst

Supporting Countries:

- Belgium
- Croatia
- Hungary
- Slovenia

International Organizational Partners:

- Bat Conservation International
- European Cave Protection Commission
- European Speleological Federation
- Fauna and Flora International
- International Association of Hydrogeologists, Karst Commission
- International Council for Science
- International Show Caves Association
- International Union of Geological Societies
- World Heritage Program of International Union for the Conservation of Nature

National Organizational Partners:

- Belgium (Belgium Union of Speleology, Flemish Belgium Speleological Federation, Walloon Commission for the Study and Protection of Underground Sites)
- Brazil (Brazilian Speleological Society, National Council of the Atlantic Forest Biosphere Reserve)
- Bulgaria (Bulgarian Federation of Speleology)
- China (International Research Center on Karst)
- France (French Federation of Speleology, Geoparks Group of France)
- Germany (German Speleological Federation)
- Italy (Italian Speleological Society)
- Japan (Speleological Society of Japan)
- Kyrgyzstan (Foundation for the Protection and Exploration of Caves)
- Myanmar (Myanmar Cave Documentation Project)
- Slovenia (Karst Research Institute ZRC SAZU, Slovenian Speleological Association)
- Ukraine (Institute of Geological Sciences of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, Ukrainian Speleological Association)
- USA (American Geosciences Institute, National Cave and Karst Research Institute, National Caves Association, National Speleological Society)

While it is clear we have broad support for the IYCK, it is also clear that we need more time. The UIS has always known that getting UN or UNESCO recognition would be difficult. It requires one of their member countries to submit the proposal created by UIS—outside organizations like UIS cannot make proposals to UN or UNESCO. Also, for an IYCK in 2021, the proposal must be made and approved in 2019 and that does not seem likely. Therefore, UIS

will continue to pursue support for 2021 but we are changing our strategy to assure success and are continuing ahead in three ways.

- 1) **International Year of Caves and Karst for 2021.** The UIS has decided to conduct this important project on its own together with its partners in 2021, with or without UN or UNESCO recognition. Each UIS member country that voted to support the International Year agreed to organize events and programs in 2021 in their countries with the resources they have available. The UIS Bureau is asking everyone to begin to plan for that.

If the UN or UNESCO are not able to support us in 2021, nothing really changes for the member countries and our other partners. We can still celebrate the Year and hold our activities. In fact, in visiting with UN representatives a few months ago, they told me that if we can organize a successful International Year on our own, that would greatly increase our ability to get UN or UNESCO support in a future year (more on that below). So, in principle, nothing changes for UIS and its partners. We will hold the International Year and conduct the same events and activities.

- 2) **International Day.** The UIS is collaborating with the International Show Caves Association to get UN or UNESCO recognition for an International Day. The exact name of the day is being determined but it would support the same goals as the IYCK, only recognized on one day that will likely be in early June.

While international years are more difficult to achieve, Spain plans to propose an International Day to UNESCO. The advantages are that the International Day will be celebrated each year on the selected day in perpetuity. Additionally, it will make it easier for the UN or UNESCO to recognize an International Year, if not in 2021, then in another year—perhaps in 2025.

- 3) **International Year of Caves and Karst for 2025.** The UIS is talking to other countries about proposing 2025 or another year to the UN or UNESCO as the International Year of Caves and Karst. We are looking for our member countries and partners' support too if this proposal is made and accepted. If you think your country may be willing to propose the International Year, and if you are willing to contact your government for UIS to get their support, please let me know!

Some of you may wonder how this affects you, and hopefully how you can help. When the UIS member countries voted on the IYCK, it was with the understanding that those countries voting to support the IYCK would also conduct IYCK activities. If you are interested in working on the IYCK, ask your UIS delegates (listed on www.uis-speleo-org) on their status in organizing activities in your country.

If your country did not vote to support the IYCK in 2015, check with the leaders of your national organizations. Some countries did not vote, others were not members three years ago, and maybe others that were not ready to support the IYCK in 2015 may be ready now. If not, you can still organize activities with your local clubs and regional organizations, our other partners, or with new partners you find.

UIS Countries Currently Supporting the International Year of Caves and Karst

| | | | |
|------------|----------------|-------------|-----------------|
| Australia | Czech Republic | Japan | Serbia |
| Austria | France | Korea | Slovenia |
| Belgium | Germany | Kyrgyzstan | South Africa |
| Brazil | Honduras | Lebanon | Switzerland |
| Bulgaria | Hungary | Lithuania | The Netherlands |
| China | Iran | Mexico | Ukraine |
| Costa Rica | Israel | Puerto Rico | United Kingdom |
| Croatia | Italy | Romania | United States |

As I write this report in the final days of 2018, the UIS IYCK Committee just met. We approved a structure to build the IYCK website and other social media. We are nearly finished creating an IYCK logo, and we are beginning to write materials and collect photos for the website, circulars, and other materials. We expect to have the website ready sometime in Spring 2019. We will announce it widely through the UIS Facebook page, messages to our delegates, commissions, and partners, and by messages they send.

A UIS Call to Action

The UIS is the International Union of Speleology. What does that mean?

International—everyone in the world!

Union—working together, and for what?

Speleology.

For the IYCK to succeed, I ask everyone who enjoys and cares for caves to join the UIS in creating IYCK events for your town, region, and country.

The UIS will not make your participation difficult or beyond your abilities. We recognize you represent diverse cultures, skills, and resources. Therefore, as you read the following guidance, please remember that we ask you to do what will be most successful for your culture, appropriate to your skills, and within the limits of your resources. No single group can do everything, but together we will reach people across the world.

The IYCK will have three major themes:

- Sharing Cave and Karst Knowledge: International Scientific Conferences and Public Exhibitions
- Promoting the Value of World Heritage Caves and Karst
- Sharing Cave and Karst Knowledge: Show Caves – Karst Tourism

Start thinking about the best way that your organizations can participate. Here are some examples for each theme of what your organization might be able to do.

Sharing Cave and Karst Knowledge: International Scientific Conferences and Public Exhibitions. The UIS' 18th International Congress of Speleology will be held in Lyon, France, in 2021 (<http://uis2021.speleos.fr/>). It will be the major event for the IYCK, but any cave or karst conference can potentially be an official IYCK event too. This includes your annual conferences, sessions at other conferences, and symposia. Slovenia's annual International Karstological School "Classical Karst" is already scheduled as an IYCK event. What about your annual workshops and courses? You can also organize special events of all types, demonstrating cave science and caving techniques, public lectures, visits to classrooms, showing cave videos,

and giving interviews about the IYCK to newspapers, magazines, television, and other media. You are limited only by your imagination.

Remember, the main purpose of the IYCK is to educate the public so make sure to invite the public, non-caver scientists, land managers, politicians, and others who normally do not attend cave and karst events but would benefit from attending. And do not just invite them—give them special attention and support. Make it easy for them to attend, and also to participate in fun and interesting ways. The IYCK should educate, impress, and engage them!

Promoting the Value of World Heritage Caves and Karst. Do you work with or are you located near a UNESCO World Heritage Site or Global Geopark that was established at least in part because of caves and karst? If so, let us know! We would love your help to tell those sites and parks about the IYCK. The UIS needs them to participate. We will reach out to them directly, but many times your personal connections may be better.

Also, maybe you don't know what to do for the IYCK and they don't know either, but together you can find many things to do. Maybe once a month throughout the year some people can enter the World Heritage Sites and Geoparks for free. Focus on the special cave and karst features there with education programs for adults and kids. Create public participation projects. For example, maybe some research would benefit from extra public help. The same may be true of management work from repairing a trail to cleaning trash from a cave or repairing speleothems. Remind the public that these World Heritage and Geopark sites have such high recognition because they are special, and how caves and karst add to that specialness.

Sharing Cave and Karst Knowledge: Show Caves – Karst Tourism. The International Show Caves Association and national show cave organizations will encourage their member show caves to do some special things for the IYCK. Like with the World Heritage sites and Geoparks, this can include free entry and many special programs. It is estimated that about 150 million tourists visit show caves each year. Show caves and cave and karst parks have the ability to reach the greatest numbers of people. We encourage them to do all that they can and for you, our members and other partners, to assist them wherever possible.

As you think about activities for the IYCK, think about partners to assist you with programs, advertising, costs, and raising funds to cover any costs. Partnership is also important in getting more people involved, educated, and interested in caves and karst. If you have ideas and support for how the UIS can better promote and conduct the IYCK, we welcome partnering more closely with you. If your country or national or international organization is not listed as supporting the IYCK and wants to join us, please let me know.

We ask you to watch for the IYCK website and social media, which will be the primary locations for information on the IYCK, and how to participate and show its importance to the world. We will post news at these locations and encourage you to share your news and activities.

We are also in a delicate period. With this message we are asking that you begin thinking about what you can do to support the IYCK and begin some basic plans, but we ask you to not reach out to the public at this time. Because our message will reach across the world, our message and its appearance with the logo needs to be clear and consistent. Once the website is posted, you will have access to the logo and information to reach people in your communities and countries in a way where we send a unified message to the world.

In summary:

- 1) Get involved! This is a once-in-a-lifetime chance to greatly improve understanding and appreciation of caves worldwide.

- 2) Begin thinking about activities you can do in your community, region, and country to support the IYCK.
- 3) Begin reaching out to potential partners for assistance. They do not need to be from the caving community!
- 4) Wait until the IYCK website is posted for access to the logo and other information before reaching out to the public.
- 5) Begin planning now! It will be 2021 faster than you think.
- 6) Please contact me (gveni@nckri.org) or other members of the UIS Bureau at any time if you need assistance or have questions.

With your help, together we will educate the world through the International Year and International Day about our precious caves and karst areas. Together, we can save the world's caves and karst for the future.