



Press Release

OPENING OF THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF CAVES AND KARST

26 January 2021

Karst terrains cover about 20% of the planet's land surface. They are best known for caves and spectacularly unusual landscapes. Unfortunately, they are poorly recognized for their great and many values to humanity. They provide:

- water to about 10% of the global population
- tens of billions of dollars each year to economies through tourism
- priceless sites of cultural heritage
- bats, which support the production of over 450 foods, medicines, and industrial products
- unique scientific knowledge for climate change, mineral resources, agriculture, and even the search for life on other planets.

Caves and karst are also highly vulnerable to pollution, overuse, destruction, and mis-management because they are poorly understood and often hidden underground.

The International Year of Caves and Karst is a worldwide project to teach everyone about these critically important and widespread natural resources. It is organized by the International Union of Speleology (UIS), the international organization for the exploration, study, and protection of caves and karst, comprised of 55 member countries. Over 100 national and international organizations are UIS partners in the International Year, creating educational but also fun opportunities to raise global knowledge of caves and karst.

The Opening Ceremony was planned for UNESCO Headquarters on 26 January 2021, but will instead be held virtually at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzSiErLj5x6viNbvAdehDvA> starting at 15:00 Central European (Paris) Time. It will be recorded for replay for those who cannot attend at that time. A celebration of the International Year will be held later in 2021 at UNESCO when the pandemic is over.

The UIS invites you to our Opening Ceremony. Our growing list of events is at <http://iyck2021.org/index.php/events/>. Please contact our President, listed above, for more information and to connect you with our representatives and partners in your areas.

Join the International Year of Caves and Karst, and learn about the "hole" world!

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