



Union Internationale de Spéléologie

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Bärbel Vogel,
President of German Speleological Federation,
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Letter of support from the President of the International Union of Speleology (UIS)

To whom it may concern,

As President of the International Union of Speleology (UIS), I would like to express my strong opposition to the planned exploratory drilling by the Knauf gypsum company in the southern Harz gypsum karst. As the German Speleological Federation (VdHK) points out, this area is under severe threat despite its protection under the EU's Natura 2000 directives and its designation as a Biosphere Reserve. The South Harz region is unique in its geological and ecological significance, and any disturbance caused by mining will lead to irreversible damage to its natural heritage.

The UIS, as the leading international organization for the study and protection of caves and karst landscapes, stands in solidarity with the VdHK in its efforts to prevent exploratory drilling and future gypsum mining in this valuable region. The gypsum karst of the South Harz is not only of national importance, but also of global value due to its rare geological formations, including hypogene caves, and its rich biodiversity. The potential destruction of this landscape, especially in a protected biosphere reserve, sets a dangerous precedent for the exploitation of other protected areas in Germany and beyond.

The UIS emphasizes the following points in support of the VdHK resolution:

- The South Harz Gypsum Karst is home to one of the most remarkable and scientifically valuable karst systems in the world with its unique caves, springs and subterranean water systems.
- The destruction of this area will lead to a permanent loss of its rich biodiversity, including endangered bat species and rare plants such as *Gypsophila repens* and *Eriophorum gracile*.
- The ecological value of this region cannot be restored once it is destroyed, and future generations will no longer have the opportunity to enjoy this natural wonder.

UIS calls on the authorities of Saxony-Anhalt and the relevant decision-makers to reject any new mining projects that would further damage the gypsum karst landscape. UIS joins the international community in calling for the protection of the South Harz region in line with global conservation

goals and shares the concerns of Professor John Gunn of the IUCN/WCPA Caves and Karst Working Group, who has emphasized the critical importance of protecting this extraordinary area.

I strongly encourage all parties to reconsider the authorization for this exploratory drilling and to respect the protected status of this unique landscape. The preservation of this irreplaceable gypsum karst is a responsibility we all share in the interests of the environment and future generations.

Yours sincerely,



Nadja Zupan Hajna

President of the International Union of Speleology (UIS)