

To: All National Speleological Organisations
CC: UIS Country Delegates

UIS-WikiCaves sub-commission
UIS Informatics Commission
2022-06-10

Dear fellow cavers,

Data protection for sensitive caves

As you may know, UIS has been co-operating with the WikiCaves GrottoCenter global cave database since the International Congress of Speleology (ICS) in 2013, and then in 2016 the UIS General Secretary sent you a letter asking you to advise GrottoCenter of any restrictions that your country needed on the display of data for any caves of your country in its database, particularly for sensitive caves. Only a few countries responded, and currently no countries have restrictions on the display of their data. We are therefore sending this reminder letter to you (apologies if you already responded in 2016).

One of the aims of UIS is the responsible sharing of cave and karst data for the furtherance of speleology. GrottoCenter is helping that aim, and to do so responsibly GrottoCenter has been given a grant by UIS to modify its software so that it can better accommodate country requirements for caves with locations that need to be protected for legal, scientific or cultural reasons. The initial modification work has already been done, the aim being to have something useful working for this year's ICS.

In the interests of effective cave protection, we would appreciate your prompt response to the following :

- **Your country's protection requirements, if any, for the location and/or publication of information for *all* caves from your country that are in the database.**
- **Your country's requirements for caves that need some protection for legal, scientific or cultural reasons by restricting location and/or other information about them in the database.**
- **Your advice of any sensitive caves already in the database that should be removed or their information changed.**

Some countries have more than one national organisation so we ask you to consolidate your requirements through your UIS Delegate who can then send them to GrottoCenter via Didier BORG <dcborg@aol.com>. We have set up a forum where any issues related to this updating of GrottoCenter can be discussed, and you are encouraged to join, even if just to keep up with developments: <https://www.uisic.uis-speleo.org/forum/viewforum.php?f=10>

Wikicaves would aim to set up an MOU with your national organisation to take into account the specific data protection requirements of your country.

Initially, the protection method adopted on the GrottoCenter site will consist of NOT displaying or providing location data for caves which you have listed as 'sensitive', but other solutions may be adopted later.

We would also encourage you to send us data of your caves while, if necessary, removing or adapting any sensitive data before you send. This will allow the whole caving and scientific community to benefit from your hard-won data. We accept bulk data as well - please contact Didier. Conversely, if there is any data already in the database that you want removed or changed, please let Didier know.

In addition to the above immediate work on GrottoCenter for its existing caves, the UIS Informatics Commission is commencing a project to establish and publish "UIS guidelines for responsible cave data sharing". This will cover both sharing of data for the benefit of speleology, and how to protect the data of sensitive caves. It is important that this document accommodates the needs of your country, so you are encouraged to participate in this project too. Join up via its discussion forum on the UISIC website : <https://www.uisic.uis-speleo.org/forum/viewforum.php?f=8>. The GrottoCenter project in this letter is for *immediate* commonsense changes to its database for existing caves, while the Guidelines project aims to formalise and publish UIS recommendations for techniques and organisation after wide canvassing of opinion and needs. Obviously GrottoCenter would then adapt to these Guidelines. In addition, the UIS Karst and Cave Protection Commission have a cave and karst legal status worldwide assessment in progress.

For further information and inquiries please contact the UIS-Wikicaves sub-commission leader, Didier Borg <dcborg@aol.com>, who will be happy to answer your questions. We are looking forward to your collaboration in order to promote responsible sharing of speleological information among the global cave and karst community.

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