

Dear Mr Jiang Daming, Minister of Land and Resources of the People's Republic of China,

Mr Zhong Ziran, Director-General of the Geological Survey of China,

Distinguished colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

On the occasion of the opening ceremony of the announcement of the proposal on "Resource and Environmental Effects in Global Karsts Dynamic Systems", I am delighted to send you this message of encouragement.

Our planet is facing many challenges: Climate change, population growth, access to fresh water, education for all to name but a few. Sometimes, taken together, these problems can seem insurmountable. But I believe in the ability and innovativeness of humanity not only to rise to these challenges but to surmount them.

Earth is home to many fragile environments, one of which is our precious areas of karst. Often the home of inspiring landscapes and mysterious caves and caverns that provide shelter to an enormous biological diversity, karst environments can however be very harsh places for local communities to make a living. Thin and often poor soils, the inability of the rock to hold surface water and quite often the remoteness of these areas are all challenges local people must face. I see that your proposal will research and help propose solutions for some of these issues.

I am delighted that many of our UNESCO Global Geoparks and natural World Heritage Sites are in karst areas and are also working through the UN Sustainable Development Goals to address some of the same problems. I would like to express my support for the international scientific cooperation envisaged in this project. I believe this kind of collaboration is essential to overcome the problems we all face as a global society. I am sure the project will be a great success and I look forward to hearing about its progress and successes.

Irina Bokova