

THE OPEN LETTER OF THE UKRAINIAN SPELEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION
REGARDING THE UIS BUREAU STATEMENT ON THE SITUATION IN UKRAINE

Dear UIS Delegates,

Dear speleologists and karst researchers,

We, the Ukrainian speleologists, cavers, and karst scientists, have taken the UIS Bureau statement on the situation in Ukraine, with a mix of bewilderment and disappointment. This statement contains some misleading and controversial key messages indicating that the UIS Bureau has chosen of sitting on the fence and doing “business as usual” in these dramatic times. Below we explain why we believe so, referring to these key points of the UIS Bureau statement.

The UIS Bureau expresses its deep dismay and concerns regarding the military invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation as conflict generates a grave humanitarian crisis.

Thanks for your deep concern, the UIS Bureau. We in Ukraine heard about deep concerns from numerous international organizations and governments since 2014 when Russia had annexed Crimea and invaded and established the puppet quasi-“republics” in the east of Ukraine. However, international actions to stop this obvious aggression were weak or absent. This aggression consumed almost 15.000 lives and 1.5 mln displaced people and a low-intensity Russia-supported war continued in Ukraine since 2014.

What is going on now is not merely a conflict but a full-size war of Russia to conquer and colonize Ukraine, demolish the Ukrainian nation, demoralize Europe and undermine democracy and freedom globally. It has led not merely to a grave humanitarian crisis but to true humanitarian disasters in several cities in Ukraine such as besieged city of Mariupol, where at least 3.000 were killed and where more than 300.000 people have been taken in hostage and remain already two weeks under massive bombing, without electricity, heating, fuel, water, and food.

Russia’s mortal invasion of Ukraine has unleashed an outpouring of condemnation from scientists and research organizations worldwide, from numerous public persons and organizations of all sorts around the world. However, the UIS Bureau only expresses its deep dismay and concerns but has not condemned Russian aggression and protests against it, leaving alone any actions.

Speleology is characterized by mutual respect and cross-border cooperation without reservations.

Really, without reservations? Does the UIS Bureau believe that involvement in speleology liberates people and their communities from any moral and ethical considerations? Should we keep respecting speleologists supporting V.Putin and the hostile politics of the Kremlin regime? Should we keep their right to vote in the coming UIS General Assembly, continue to go caving with them and perform joint research projects?

A great number of national and international organizations around the world, particularly those in science, sports, culture, and business, firmly said “No” to similar questions, but the UIS Bureau declares its adherence to “cooperation without reservations”.

The UIS Bureau strongly believes in speleology as a platform for dialogue even in times of war, and we are convinced that the isolation and exclusion of speleological communities is detrimental to all.

Russia is being excluded from practically every international organization. On 5 March, the European Commission said that it was suspending scientific cooperation with Russia. The International Union of Geological Sciences (IUGS) freezes all activity with the Russian Federation. A group of Germany's largest research funders, including the German Research Foundation, took a decision to freeze all scientific cooperation with Russia. In a 25 February statement, the Alliance of Science Organisations in Germany says that the country's research funds will no longer benefit Russia, that no joint scientific events will take place and that no new collaborations will begin. A great number of universities globally have strongly condemned the Russian aggression and cancelled cooperation with Russian institutions and researchers. These are only a few examples of numerous actions being undertaken around the world in order to force Russia to abandon its aggressive policy. The above point of the UIS Bureau is based on a misleading premise that only V.Putin and the Kremlin regime are responsible for Russia's aggressive behavior but not the society and "ordinary" people. This is a deeply wrong belief. "Not just Putin: Most Russians support the war in Ukraine" [<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/not-just-putin-most-russians-support-the-war-in-ukraine/>]. The people of Russia voted for Putin many times and the current war is enthusiastically embraced by a clear majority of Russians. Recent polling data provides the clearest indication of Russian popular support for the war in Ukraine (see the link above). These polls reveal six-seven percent increase of Putin's personal approval since the start of the invasion, bringing it to 71%. It was also found that around 58% of Russians approved of the invasion of Ukraine.

The academic community is no exception from this trend. The heads of 250 Russian universities published an official address by the Union of Russian Rectors on March 4 justifying the war and pledging support for president V.Putin. This address says: "It is very important these days to support our country, our army, which defends our security, to support our president who, perhaps, made the most difficult, hard-won but necessary decision in his life." We know and appreciate that some Russian scientist have signed a letter condemning the invasion, but they are clear minority in the respective community.

Speleological communities are parts of the respective national communities and, according to our close knowledge of the Russian speleological scene, the above figures of the Putin and war support are generally applicable to it. Most of Russian cavers applauded the annexation of Crimea in 2014. They were joined by some traitors such as Gennadiy Samokhin, a former Ukrainian caver who warmly welcomed the annexation and became enthusiastically collaborate with the occupation administration. He was instrumental in the theft of the database of the Ukrainian Cadaster of Caves and integrating it into the Russian cave inventory, a project sponsored by the Russian Geographical Society led by V.Putin (the Chairman of the RGS Board of Trustees) and S.Shoigu (the RGS President and the Minister of Defense of Russia). Probably for these roles of Gennadiy Samokhin, he received an award from V.Putin (in person) and was elected as a Chairman of the Russian Union of Speleologists (RUS). Needless to say, we do not see any condemnation of the current Russian invasion from the RUS and see only a few personal publicly released opinions of cavers against it in the social networks and speleo mailing lists. Instead, these networks and lists show many posts

supporting the war in Ukraine. We know only one karst researcher, out of many dozens working in the country, who have signed the open protest letter of Russian scientists.

We are strongly convinced that the Russian society, including the speleological community, bears a large part of responsibility for what V.Putin and the Kremlin regime commit. It should also pay its own price for supporting the rule of Putin.



Gennadiy Samokhin, a Chairman of the Russian Union of Speleologists, receiving an award from V.Putin for his theft of the Ukrainian Cave Cadaster and its integration to the Russian cave inventory.

With this formal statement, the UIS Bureau expresses its solidarity and affirms its intention to continue to support speleologists from Ukraine and Russia and to seek to maintain international speleological collaboration and communication amidst geopolitical tensions.

The UIS Bureau expresses its solidarity with speleologists from Ukraine and Russia... Equally, solidarity with those who are being killed every day under Russian bombing and those who are suffering from the escape of McDonald's and unavailability of iphones and pleasure products from the Western civilization. Equally, solidarity with those who withstood the Russian aggression for years and those who voted for V.Putin and received awards from him.

We believe that it is a shame that the UIS Bureau chose to demonstrate its solidarity with Russian speleologists and intention to support them in the context of this situation.

The Ukrainian Speleological Association calls the UIS and the national speleological organizations for an urgent suspension of the Russia membership and international collaboration with Russian speleologists affiliated with the RUS or other Russian groups of caving clubs. We call not to invite and register Russian speleologists to speleological conferences, meetings, and expeditions.

We expect the UIS Bureau to withdraw its current statement, rethink its position and issue a new, honest and moral statement on the situation in Ukraine.

The Presidium of the Ukrainian Speleological Association

The speleologists of Ukraine