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Re: Brazil cave protection legislation

Dear Leaders of Brazil's Natural and Environmental Resources;

I am the Executive Director of the US National Cave and Karst Research Institute (NCKRI). The institute was created by the US Congress to conduct, support, facilitate, and promote cave and karst research, education, management, archiving of data,

and collaborations to support those activities nationally and internationally. I am also the President of the International Union of Speleology (UIS), a nonprofit organization comprised of 55 countries that support and work toward the same goals worldwide.

For many years I have used Brazil's Decree 6640/2008 as one of the world's best examples of legislation to protect caves and the karst areas in which they occur. Although caves are hidden underground, they are incredibly valuable resources for a country's economic and environmental health. This is why the US created NCKRI and why the UIS exists worldwide and next year will celebrate the International Year of Caves and Karst with governments and organizations around the world.

Sadly, as the international community is preparing to celebrate the many values of caves, I have learned of new legislative activity in Brazil that will remove or decrease the protections offered by Decree 6640/2008. I am writing to urge you to prevent any weakening of Decree 6640/2008.

The social and economic benefits from Brazil's caves are too many to describe fully in this letter. To highlight a few, caves:

- provide valuable water resources to many communities;
- contain many of Brazil's most important archaeological sites to preserve and understand the country's cultural heritage;
- hold the most diverse and valuable records of past climates to help scientists predict modern climate change;
- grow unique ecosystems that are producing new medicines for people; and
- build local economies through tourism in show caves and karst landscapes.

The benefits also extend beyond Brazil's karst areas. For example, bats are one of the most important factors in the restoration of tropical forests.

Supporting Decree 6640/2008 protects Brazil from the loss of these and other benefits, but also from serious damages. Karst aquifers are the most vulnerable to pollution and sinkhole collapse causes billions of dollars in destruction to homes, businesses, and roads around the world each year. Both result in the loss of lives.

I urge you in the strongest terms to maintain Decree 6640/2008. If you have questions or other needs in regard to caves and the karst areas in which they occur, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Respectfully,



George Veni, PhD
Executive Director, US National Cave and Karst Research Institute
President, International Union of Speleology