Official recognition of 2016 UNESCO Global Geoparks applications geological section evaluation

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A UNESCO Global Geopark is a unified area with geological heritage of international significance with a strong management structure and sustainable economic development strategy already in place. UNESCO Global Geoparks use the local and regional geological heritage with its strong relation to the technical and cultural heritage in the area to promote awareness of key issues facing society; to educate visitors and local communities; and to link these local and regional peculiarities to the broader aspects of the area's natural and cultural environment in the context of the dynamic planet we all live on.

UNESCO Global Geoparks promote awareness of geological hazards, help prepare disaster mitigation strategies among local communities, educate on current climate change, promote best practice approach to utilising renewable energy and employing the best standards of "green tourism", inform about the sustainable use and need for natural resources, whether they are mined, quarried or harnessed from the surrounding environment, promote respect for the environment and the integrity of the landscape.

The Global Geoparks Network (GGN), supported by UNESCO, provides a global platform of active cooperation between experts and practitioners in geological heritage. Through the partnership with UNESCO and through regional network partners, significant national geological sites gain worldwide recognition and visibility through tourism as well as best practices within the scientific and education community. Within a designated UNESCO Global Geopark area, models of best practice are developed, setting high quality standards in all aspects of their operation. The GGN continues to expand each year, in May 2016 comprising 120 UNESCO Global Geoparks in 33 countries from five continents.

The International Union of Geological Sciences (IUGS) is a partner with UNESCO and the GGN and assists in finding geoscientists – volunteer experts in the fields relevant to the aspiring UNESCO Global Geopark applications – who are willing to evaluate the geological sections of each new UNESCO Global Geopark application for their international significance. Given the fact that unique geological settings and their globally recognised importance are the foundation on which a UNESCO Global Geopark is first established the evaluation of the geological section of a UNESCO Global Geopark application follows high quality standards of and is of quintessential importance, a critical part of the UNESCO Global Geopark evaluation process, and helps maintain the high global standards of the UNESCO Global Geoparks.

In 2015, 18 new applications were submitted to UNESCO and these were evaluated in the first half of 2016. The 2016 aspiring UNESCO Global Geoparks were (in alphabetic order):

Arxan (PR China), Black Country (United Kingdom), Cheongsong (Republic of Korea), Conmarca Minera Hidalgo (Mexico), Tremp-Montsec (Spain), Iron Mountains (Czech Republic), Keketuohai (PR China), Las Loras (Spain), Leiqiong (PR China), Lochaber (United Kingdom), Mixteca Alta (Mexico), Qeshm (Iran), Causses du Quercy (France), Rinjani Lombok (Indonesia), Saga (Iceland), Trollfjell (Norway), Tungurahua (Ecuador), Zigong (PR China).

The evaluators for these 18 aspiring UNESCO Global Geoparks were (in alphabetic order starting with evaluators' names):

Adriana Edith NIZ, Corina RISSO, Dong-Chan LEE, Enrique DÍAZ-MARTÍNEZ, Hassan MOHSENI, Jose Pedro CALVO, Lesley DUNLOP, Marekazu OHNO, Meng WANG, Michiel van den MEULEN, Mike KATZ, Nina ZUPANÈIÈ, Poppe L. de BOER, Patricia VICKERS-RICH, Patrick De WEVER, Petr BUDIL, Philip D. GINGERICH, Polona KRALJ, Steve DRURY, Susan TURNER, Tea KOLAR JURKOVŠEK, Uwe ALTENBERGER, Vivi VAJDA, Wolfgang EDER, Yujiro OGAWA and those other geoscientists that helped in the process, but choose to remain anonymous.

IUGS, UNESCO and the Global Geoparks Network would like to extend their sincere gratitude to each of the evaluators for the excellent job and the time they dedicated to evaluate the 2016 aspiring UNESCO Global Geoparks. With their valuable contribution it is assured that the concept of the UNESCO Global Geopark is built on expert geoscience knowledge of the geological heritage of global importance. Thank you all for helping to preserve the global geoheritage!

The results of desk evaluations and the subsequent field evaluations have been discussed by the newly established UNESCO Global Geoparks Council, which met at the end of September 2016 and who have made recommendations on all 18 applications. These recommendations will go forward to the Executive Board of UNESCO at its 201st session in Spring 2017 where the final decisions will be made and these will be made public only after the meeting.