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## **Global Geoparks Network: a global partnership on geoconservation and sustainable development**

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The geopark concept was introduced in the late 90's aiming to protect and promote Earth heritage sites through the sustainable local development of their territories. The geopark concept adds a new dimension to the 1972 World Heritage Convention by highlighting the potential for interaction between socio-economic and cultural development, and the conservation of the natural environment.

The Global Geoparks Network (GGN) was established in 2004 under the umbrella of UNESCO, and operates as an international network, providing a platform of cooperation among geoparks, bringing together government agencies, non-governmental organizations, scientists and experts in a unique worldwide partnership. The GGN includes 120 geoparks in 33 countries working to protect geological heritage and to promote local sustainable development. The GGN mission is to influence, encourage and assist local societies all over the world to conserve the integrity and diversity of abiotic and biotic nature, to ensure that any use of natural resources is equitable and sustainable, and to support economic and cultural development of local communities through the valorization of their unique heritage and identity.

In 2014, after one decade of successful operation as a volunteer network, the GGN decided to gain legal personality, in order to become an official partner of UNESCO. The GGN General Assembly adopted new GGN statutes as an international organization, becoming a non-profit association operating under the French law and based in Haute Provence, France. The GGN also agreed that the new association will donate a sum totaling no less than 1,000 USD per Global Geopark to UNESCO annually, in order to assist the latter in capacity building activities for Global Geoparks.

Since the creation of the GGN in 2004, Global Geoparks have gained momentum and their achievements have attracted the attention of an increasing number of countries through the organization of six International Conferences on Geoparks, regional conferences and symposia, capacity building activities, publications, exhibitions and promotional activities.

Global Geopark activities have been part of the UNESCO work plan since 2001 and, since 2004, UNESCO has offered ad-hoc support to Global Geoparks upon request from individual Member States. However, the role of UNESCO in supporting the worldwide activities was limited as geoparks were not part of any UNESCO programme per se. On November 2015, the 38<sup>th</sup> UNESCO General Conference ratified the statutes of the new International Geoscience and Geoparks Programme and the UNESCO Global Geoparks Operational Guidelines, introducing the brand UNESCO Global Geopark as a label of excellence for areas that meet the criteria set by the above mentioned guidelines. In doing so, the GGN became the official partner of UNESCO for the operation of the UNESCO Global Geoparks programme, with a seat in the structure and specific duties regarding the geopark evaluation and revalidation process.



