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De Organisatie van de Overeenkomst
voor Amazonische Samenwerking
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HIGH LEVEL EVENT:
“Sustainability in good governance of groundwater resources”
March 22nd, 2023 –12h30 - 13h45

Alexandra Moreira, Secretary General
Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO)

Good afternoon. Many thanks for the invitation to ACTO.

The importance of the Amazon Basin is given by its own natural characteristics. Not only is the Amazon the largest basin in the world but it also plays a fundamental role in the global water, biogeochemical, and climate cycles.

In this system, the rich Amazon surface drainage network is strongly and intrinsically connected to transboundary aquifer systems, which play a major role in the hydrological and ecological cycles, with large influences on the rainforest ecosystems, biodiversity protection and climate variability, and human wellbeing.

In recent years, the demand for good quality water has increased in the Amazon Basin and, despite the large volume of surface water available in the region, all countries use groundwater extensively. We cannot forget that approximately 48 million people live in the Amazon Region.

Aware of the strategic importance of groundwater for water security and environmental health in the region, ACTO member countries incorporated and prioritized groundwater issues in the regional IWRM strategy for the Amazon Basin through the agreed Strategic Action Program.

Nevertheless, the transboundary diagnostic analysis leading to the Program development, revealed the serious knowledge gap as a barrier to groundwater protection and sustainable management. While the available national studies show that the Amazon aquifer systems (AAS) lie beneath much of the Amazon basin, extending to parts of Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela, their actual extent and dynamics are not fully understood, and the AAS could extend much further than is currently known.

Faced with the urgency and need to know in greater scientific detail the groundwater reserve that we have in the Amazon Basin and manage it sustainably, the 8 ACTO Member Countries decided to jointly present a regional project to the next GEF 8 Work program, in April 2023.

The preparation of this project has taken us 4 years of permanent coordination with the 8 countries, and with their respective sectoral ministries. And to ensure the quality and robustness of the proposal, we have chosen two implementing agencies: the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB).

The new project seeks a common understanding of the Amazon Aquifer Systems to promote regional multi-level cooperation frameworks, governance and management of groundwater for its protection and sustainable use, and to improve water security and ecosystem resilience in the Amazon region.

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This project will also help to diagnose and address the current institutional inconsistencies and gaps in the region, by promoting a revision of legislation and an analysis of institutional capacities, advancing education and public awareness on groundwater management, and improving the technical capacity for groundwater assessment. Indigenous peoples, local communities and gender mainstreaming are main considerations on the Amazon transboundary cooperation agenda, and the project will also generate opportunities for more socially equitable groundwater governance and management.

Transboundary water cooperation through ACTO is catalytic for the protection and sustainable management of the Amazon Aquifer Systems, as groundwater is seldom the focus of national policy and decision-makers, being “invisible” and poorly understood in comparison to surface water resources.

Finally, we understand that this effort and commitment that the Amazonian countries have assumed to efficiently and sustainably manage their aquifer, requires significant public investments but also international cooperation. For this reason, it is urgent that the financial resources of multilateral funds and banks be available for water management at the basin and ecosystem level. In other words, there must be more regional financing available and not only national, since ecosystem connectivity in transboundary basins requires a coordinated and shared management, beyond national borders.

For this reason, as an Amazonian bloc, we would like to call for more financial resources and international cooperation directed to financing the protection and management of transboundary groundwater.

Thank you.