Ladies and Gentlemen,

- I am indeed honoured to address you this morning on behalf of the Steering Committee of the GEF project on Groundwater Governance on the occasion of the opening ceremony of the Regional Consultant”.

- I wish to express the gratitude of FAO, GEF, IAH, UNESCO and the World Bank, to the Government of Kenya for hosting this Regional Consultation. Allow us also to express, our pleasure to be in this wonderful city and in this part of the world of great natural environment beauty. We are here to learn and to share. Learning lessons from your experience and share your contributions with experts in other regions is one of the objective of the project.

Ladies and Gentlemen

The debate that you will conduct over the next three days is both timely and crucial. Your work on groundwater governance will have a significant impact on the way water resources will be managed in the near future. Your debate will contribute to identify the most realistic and appropriate definition for the “3 Gs” - Good Groundwater Governance”. We hope that policy-makers in the future will be able to make more informed and responsible decisions capitalizing on the recommendations of the project.
The UN Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) will take place in Rio de Janeiro in June. Since we are aware that without a good governance of water resources, no human, social or economic development is possible we hope that Politicians and leaders of countries will convey a strong message to Rio+20 on the significance of protecting and manage adequately the groundwater resources of the planet.

Ladies and Gentlemen

- It is also imperative that we place people, in particular the poorest, at the heart of our efforts to attain sustainable development. Achieving sustainable development calls for policies that take into account not only economic but also scientific, social, educational and environmental considerations. It requires us to grasp the human and cultural dimensions of development and acknowledge their importance for effective social and economic transformations.

- We are currently faced with unprecedented environmental and global challenges - population growth - that is expected to level at 9 billion people within four decades, requiring a doubling of food production in three decades, and adequate energy for basic needs. Superimposed on these global drivers we have the additional risks generated by climate change, biodiversity loss and the limits to natural resources. These risks include hydrological extremes that can lead to floods and severe droughts. In both cases, formulating good water governance strategies is pivotal for ensuring the survival of the planet.

In 1992, Chapter 18 of Agenda 21 identified Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) as a requirement for sustainable development. In most
cases achieving IWRM, which means the integration of surface water and groundwater data, is hampered by a lack of knowledge about aquifers.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me confirm that UNESCO is deeply committed to bringing freshwater issues to political agendas worldwide. UNESCO, through its flagship programmes dedicated to freshwater resources, has been a longstanding partner of the African Ministers’ Council on Water (AMCOW). I wish to recall the preparation of the African map of transboundary Aquifers. There are 4 transboundary aquifers in the region shared by more than 2 countries. Moreover, a number of Targets and Priorities for Action were coordinated by IHP, in particular those related to ground water governance, transboundary aquifers and climate change.

Ladies and Gentlemen

The UN General Assembly has declared 2013 as the UN International Year of Water Cooperation, for which UNESCO has been assigned a leading role. We are asking all countries to contribute to the organization of this important Year, which will prove that water can be a catalyst for cooperation. Water is indeed a powerful driver in the overall goal of building cooperation between countries and peoples.

Ladies and Gentlemen
Your recommendations will be shared with the experts of the other regions during the coming regional consultations. Thanks to your contribution the consultations will bring new elements to build good groundwater governance.

Let me say that now more than ever we need your support in the next years.

Before I end my talk I must thank, the scientific regional committee, and the local organising committee, particularly Ambassador Khimulu who played a pivotal role in the success of this meeting.

Thank you

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