

**STATEMENT TO THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FACILITY (GEF)
THIRD BIENNIAL INTERNATIONAL WATERS CONFERENCE
INTERNATIONAL WATERS CONFERENCE**

Scott Vaughan
Director/Office for Sustainable Development and Environment
Organization of American States (OAS)

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It is an honor and pleasure to join you this morning. Let me thank the Governor of Bahia, Governor Paulo Souto, the Mayor of Salvador, Joao Henrique, as well as Dr. Claudio Langone, the Executive Director of the Ministry of Environment of Brazil, Dr. Jose Machado, Director-President of ANA, Distinguished Representatives of the GEF Secretariat, World Bank, UNDP, UNEP, Ladies and Gentlemen.

This GEF International Waters meeting marks the first 10 years of on-the-ground experience of the GEF International Waters program. It provides an opportunity to share experiences of projects, help identify best practices, draw out practical lessons that can be replicated, and support an on-going learning network, particularly through the efforts of the IW-Learn and other networks.

For the past decade, the Organization of American States (OAS) has been privileged to work as an executing agency with the GEF on a large number of GEF International Waters projects, in close partnership with UNEP and more recently, the World Bank. I am pleased to be joined by several OAS colleagues today working on water issues: Jorge Rucks, the Chief of the South and Central American Office located in Buenos Aires, Nelson de Franca, the head of the OAS Sustainable Development Office in Brasilia, Pablo Gonzalez, Maria Apostolova and Michela Miletto.

This morning, I want to share some lessons from our work in the hemisphere of the Americas:

First, International Cooperation: The GEF has been an invaluable catalyst in supporting water management at the bi-national or international levels. Approximately 70 percent of all freshwater rivers and lakes in Central and South America are shared by two or more countries. Following the first GEF International Waters project in the Upper Bermejo River – which is currently in the implementation phase of its Strategic Action Plan – the OAS has been involved as the executing agency in a number of ground-breaking GEF-supported international waters projects. These include the Procuencia San Juan, the La Plata and Pantanal, as well as projects involving multi-jurisdictional water management, such as the San Francisco River Basin within Brazil. These projects have not only improved the international management of water resources, but have helped create a broader foundation upon which to build other kinds of international cooperation.

Second, Integrated Approaches: The GEF has been instrumental in helping countries translate the principles of integrated water resources management (IWRM) into practice. Projects have enabled countries the flexibility to set their own IWRM sequence of priorities, based on domestic needs. We all know that the goal of IWRM is to support a multi-disciplinary approach to the management of water resources; to strike a balance among potentially competing sectors and interests – including agriculture, urban water uses, industrial sectors, hydro-power, wildlife protection, freshwater and coastal navigation, fisheries and wetland protection, to name just a few

– as well as avoid policy fragmentation. Despite broad-based acceptance of IWRM in arenas such as the 2002 Johannesburg Summit and targets such as the Millennium Development Goals, translating IWRM norms into practice remain difficult.

Third, Wide Basin Management: A key reason why the GEF is making progress in IWRM is because of reference to wider basins (or watersheds) as the unit of management planning. By using a wider definition of water basins, the GEF is enabling countries and practitioners to link IWRM with other priorities, including land-degradation, the conservation of biodiversity, climate adaptation, and the relationship between water and the management of chemicals. More recently, the GEF IW program is supporting – with the World Bank as the implementing agency and OAS as the executing agency – the Guarani aquifer involving Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay. This is the largest groundwater aquifer under management in the world. It is already providing important insights not only into legal and institutional issues, but it is also helping to identify the complex relationship between surface and groundwater management challenges. In addition, other GEF projects – notably in the GEF La Plata and Upper Paraguay projects – are identifying groundwater management as possible pilot projects. In this work, we are extremely grateful to work with UNESCO’s ISARM project.

Fourth, Institutions and Public Participation: The GEF has been an important catalyst in supporting good governance and meaningful public participation. All projects have helped identify institutional needs, including creating new basin-wide national or binational basin committees, or, as in the case of the Secretariat for the Amazon Treaty Cooperation Organization, enabling the eight countries of the wider basin to provide on-going interaction through institutions. As in the case of the San Francisco, membership in these newly-formed committees is based on democratic elections, as well as the direct input of over 12,000 individuals, municipal organizations and civil society groups. Indeed, the GEF is helping to define meaningful public participation. In addition, through the leadership of Joao Bosco Senra, the Secretary of Hydrological Resources of Brazil, the GEF Deltamerica project is helping to build the convergence of water laws and policies, as well as codify public participation.

In reviewing these four areas – international cooperation, integrated water resource management, wider water basin approaches, and public participation – it is clear that after its first decade, enormous progress has been made. At the same time, the challenges in this hemisphere are profound, demanding urgent action. In a report released by UN CEPAL/ECLAC on the status of implementing the MDG goals thus far, the report is mixed at best. Clearly, progress continues in ensuring universal access to clean drinking water. At the same time, the report warns that 222 million people in the hemisphere continue to live in “extreme poverty.” Rates of deforestation in some countries are the highest ever recorded. Public trust in government institutions is among the lowest in decades.

These and other challenges demand urgent action. This conference provides the opportunity to learn from one another, improve the design and delivery of projects, and move forward. Thank you.