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PRESS RELEASE

African Water Facility fights against desertification in Northern Africa

AWF supports Transboundary Management and Knowledge Improvement of Northern Sahara Aquifer System

Tunis, 10 January 2007: The African Water Facility (AWF) and the Sahara and Sahel Observatory (OSS) signed on Wednesday 3 January 2007 in Tunis a grant agreement worth € 487,800 to finance the GEO-AQUIFER knowledge improvement and the Northern Sahara Aquifer System (SASS) Project. The main objective of the project is to improve the living conditions of the population through the enhancement of knowledge and the sustainable management of transboundary groundwater resources thanks to the use of satellite data, in the perspective of increasing concerted action among Algeria, Libya and Tunisia.

The grant agreement, amounting € 487,800, signed by the AWF Director, Mr. Kordjé Bedoumra, and the OSS Executive Secretary, Mr. Youba Sokona supports an 18-month «GEO-AQUIFER» project. The specific objectives of the project include the extension to all the agencies in charge of the management of water resources in the ministries for water, the environment and agriculture, in the countries sharing the SASS aquifer (Algeria, Libya and Tunisia) of decision-tools and the reinforcement of the concerted actions among the three countries to achieve an efficient management of the shared non-renewable water resource, building the capacity of these same ministries and agencies, and ensuring replication of the system on other African basins.

The SASS (North-Western Sahara Aquifer System), shared by Algeria, Libya and Tunisia covers an area of over one million km². The North-Western Sahara Aquifer is one of the only water resources in the concerned basin area and the life of millions of people depends on it. This resource is aimed to provide water supply to a population which will double up, thus passing from a current 4 million to 8 million in 2030, but also to contribute to drinkable water supply and irrigation of the Northern regions through large-scale transfers, among which some are currently under construction. The project takes into account the preoccupation of the 3 countries to prevent water stress in the short term basis and to implement the lessons learnt from the previous sectoral studies. Thus, the priority dimension of the resource management and the transboundary aspect led Algeria, Libya and Tunisia to set up a specific Mechanism for Concerted Action, the first of its kind worldwide concerning groundwater, for the use and the rational and concerted management of shared groundwater resources.

The expected outcomes of the AWF support include the extension of digital cartography to land cover, surface water and development of land cover change maps in about fifteen pilot zones, the capacity building development of the countries through training in geo-scientific data management techniques as well as a support for research and the provision of specific computer equipments.

The implementation of the activities in cooperation with the 3 countries, and more particularly upon their request, will allow joint achievement of the objectives set. These objectives are quite in line with the intervention areas of the NEPAD and the African Water Facility. The management of transboundary water resources through awareness building, partnership, the reinforcement of knowledge and information systems and joint programmes of mutually profitable development will allow an efficient Monitoring and Evaluation of the water resource.

The sustainability of the project is ensured via the Mechanism for Concerted Action set up between the countries sharing the same resource, and the beneficiaries overcoming of the developed tools and techniques. The outcomes of the project will

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allow a sustainable development through a commanded and equitable access to the resource, as well as an optimal use of the available water resource for the population's water supply and for the agriculture. Moreover, the project will foster the financing of socio-economic and environment studies to be implemented in the future for a total amount of US\$ 1 Million.

The Sahara and Sahel Observatory (OSS) is an international intergovernmental organization operating at the regional level and based in Tunis. Its mission is to serve as a link and provide a framework for international partnership and dialogue. It also contributes to the management and the exchange of useful information in the fight against desertification and the mitigation of drought effects. Further information on the OSS is available at www.oss-online.org

The African Water Facility (AWF) is an initiative led by the African Ministers' Council on Water (AMCOW) to mobilize financial resources for water sector development in Africa. Created in 2004, the AWF is hosted and managed by the African Development Bank (AfDB). Further information on the AWF is available at www.africanwaterfacility.org

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