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International Water Management Institute (IWMI)

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Groundwater in Peril – IWMI joins 700+ scientists and practitioners in urgent call for action on global groundwater

COLOMBO, SRI LANKA – Mismanagement of groundwater threatens our drinking water, food production, and climate change adaptation prospects, warns a statement endorsed by the International Water Management Institute's (IWMI) and signed by 700+ global experts.

The call to action highlighted in *Nature* this week cites recent scientific breakthroughs on groundwater's vital role in supporting rivers globally. It supplies more than 40 percent of the water used for the world's agricultural irrigation, drinking water to two billion people, and helps regions cope with worsening droughts. Millions of low income smallholder farmers, in particular, rely on groundwater in arid and semi-arid areas and during times of drought, making it one of nature's best solutions to beat climate variability.

Groundwater makes up 99 percent of the Earth's liquid freshwater. But in many places, warn the experts, groundwater is under threat from overexploitation and contamination, mostly due to poor understanding, land use planning, and management.

IWMI Director General Claudia Sadoff and groundwater lead researcher Karen Villholth**,** who coordinates GRIPP – the Groundwater Solutions Initiative for Policy and Practice – joined the 700+ signatories along with many individual experts and practitioners from IWMI's partners. GRIPP is a key global partnership on groundwater science and policy, bringing together nearly 30 international institutes to strengthen groundwater initiatives and solutions.

"Groundwater is often out of sight, so we take it for granted, or misuse it in ways that impact the most vulnerable people and ecosystems." says Sadoff. "IWMI is joining global experts, because if we allow groundwater to be further degraded or depleted, it threatens our ability to respond to increasing droughts and floods. And we're closing in on real dangers to food and drinking water due to over-exploitation and mismanagement. The impacts could be global."

The call to action comes as the world eyes the United Nations (UN) Climate Change Conference in Madrid (COP 25) and begins the Decade of Action on the UN Agenda 2030. Recent evidence points to the potential for groundwater as a major solution for helping the world – especially the Global South – adapt to droughts and climate extremes.

Over 700 scientists, practitioners and experts from over 75 countries around the world have now signed the call. The statement highlights the risks for 1.7 billion people who live above groundwater reserves that are stressed by overuse.

The statement calls for three actions:

1) **Put the spotlight on global groundwater sustainability** through a UN World Water Development Report and a Global Groundwater Summit in 2022, the year when groundwater will be the UN World Water Day's key focus.
2) **Manage and govern groundwater sustainably from local to global scales** by applying sustainability guiding principles locally, regionally and globally by 2030.
3) **Invest in groundwater governance and management** by implementing groundwater sustainability plans for stressed aquifers by 2030. This means investing in nature-based solutions supporting groundwater, capacity building, awareness raising and developing better monitoring, reporting and management systems.

"Groundwater is so fundamental to our food and our drinking water, and critical to our ecosystems, but it's still overlooked and mismanaged," says Villholth, whose work is supported by the CGIAR Research Program on Water, Land and Ecosystems (WLE). "Our call to action will ensure groundwater stays on the radar following this week's COP25 climate meetings. We're stressing the critical importance of managing water properly for climate resilience, and under that the key role of groundwater. We are pushing hard now to get it on the global agenda to sustain these benefits and avoid widespread crises – in keeping with the Sustainable Development Goals horizon of 2030."

For more information:

Visit:

- https://www.groundwaterstatement.org/
- http://www.iwmi.cgiar.org/what-we-do/building-resilience/groundwater/gripp/
- https://wle.cgiar.org/solutions/groundwater
- https://wle.cgiar.org/thrive/photo-stories/infographic-groundwater-critical-sustainable-development

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