



Institute for Governance & Sustainable Development

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## **U.S. Leadership Needed for Critical Cuts to “Super Greenhouse Gases”**

### **Small Island Nations Ask for U.S. Help to Battle Rising Seas**

GENEVA, July 18, 2009 – After a week of discussions among the 195 Parties to the Montreal Protocol ozone treaty, a coalition of small island nations fighting for their survival in the face of advancing sea-level rise was unable to convince the United States to lead the battle for aggressive climate mitigation that could help stem the rising tide.

The islands have proposed using the Montreal Protocol to phase down production and consumption of a group of super greenhouse gases known as hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs).

HFCs are projected to grow so fast that they could represent up to 45% of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in 2050, assuming the climate treaty is able to stabilize CO<sub>2</sub> emissions at 450 ppm by that date. The Montreal Protocol’s 2007 decision to accelerate phasing out production and consumption of hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs) is contributing to the rapid growth in HFCs, which are being used as replacements for HCFCs. HCFCs cause both ozone destruction and climate warming.

“U.S. action on HFCs presents the biggest near-term climate victory now available,” said Durwood Zaelke, President of the Institute for Governance & Sustainable Development. “Phasing down HFCs under the Montreal Protocol would provide mandatory climate mitigation by China, India, and other developing countries,” he added, as well as the U.S. and other developed countries. “But until the U.S. leads the fight on HFCs they won’t have the moral or political standing to compel global action.”

According to an Associated Press story July 17, 2009, Daniel Reifsnyder, the lead U.S. negotiator, stated, “This is the first real discussion we’ve had internationally, and it takes people a period of time to reflect on these things, to hear the views of others. But from our perspective, we’d like to do the best thing we can and do it as quickly as we can.” The final Montreal Protocol negotiations will take place 4-8 November in Egypt.

But the preliminary position of India and China starts in opposition to the low-lying islands, even though both countries are already feeling impacts of climate change, including loss of snow and ice in the Hindu-Kush-Himalaya-Tibetan Plateau, which provides dry-season flow for virtually all of the major rivers of Asia. Both India and China have reaped large profits from selling emissions of HFC-23 for climate credits in Europe. The Europeans’ preliminary position is to defer the HFC issue so they can discuss it first as part of the climate negotiations, which are expected to conclude at the earliest in December 2009, though many observers believe they will drag on well into 2010.

At the moment, no treaty regulates the upstream production and consumption of HFCs. Downstream emissions of HFCs are included as one of the 6 tradable gases in the Kyoto Protocol basket.

The island proposal was submitted jointly by Mauritius and Micronesia. It would harmonize the ozone and climate treaties by having the Montreal Protocol phase down HFC production and consumption, just as it has done for 96 other dangerous ozone-depleting substances, which it has phased out. The climate benefit from the Montreal Protocol is 5 to 6 times more than the Kyoto Protocol is seeking. The Montreal Protocol's experience and history of success makes it the appropriate framework for reducing HFCs.

Eight other island States just joined the FSM-Mauritius proposal as formal co-sponsors: the Seychelles, Kiribati, Samoa, the Cook Islands, Papua New Guinea, Comoros, Madagascar, and Palau. South Africa, on behalf of the African Group, also supported continuing discussions of the issues raised by FSM and Mauritius.

“Getting a decision to phase down these gases this year will be a key indicator of success that we are committed to doing everything in our power to slow global warming and sea-level rise,” said Sateaved Seebaluck, lead delegate from Mauritius. “The Parties signaled a willingness to expand the role of the Montreal Protocol to tackle this problem that is, partly, of its own doing. We need to use the time leading up to the final negotiating session in November to resolve certain details.”

“Without immediate HFC reductions, we may win the battle against CO<sub>2</sub>, but lose the climate war,” said Zaelke. “With tipping points for catastrophic climate changes just around the corner, we need fast action on HFCs under the Montreal Protocol—a treaty that never fails.”

“This is not only an issue for islands, but all countries, including those with low-lying coastal areas or facing desertification and diminishing water supplies,” said Tony Oposa, lead delegate of Micronesia. “I hope that future generations will be able to look back at our efforts on HFCs and see that we were up to the task, that we were serious about using all tools available to combat climate change.”

“The islands have the heart in this battle, but they’ll need the muscle of the U.S. to win,” Zaelke added. “Success on HFCs in November would be a shot in the arm for the climate negotiations.”

In addition to phasing down HFCs, the islands propose addressing emissions from the “banks” of refrigerants and other ozone- and climate-damaging gases in discarded products and equipment, such as refrigerators and air conditioners. These emissions from landfills could cancel the climate mitigation under the Kyoto Protocol unless quickly addressed under the Montreal Protocol.

The Parties directed the ozone treaty’s technical body, the Technology and Economic Assessment Panel (TEAP), to quickly analyze outstanding issues.

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