



## 41 Nations Join Island Effort for Fast Phase-down of Super Greenhouse Gases Under Ozone Treaty



11 November 2009, Port Ghalib, Egypt. On Sunday, 8 November, two small islands fighting rising seas and growing storm surges driven by climate change were joined by a growing army of nations in their battle to phase down super greenhouse gases. The weapon of choice for the Federated States of Micronesia and Mauritius is the Montreal Protocol ozone treaty. Their target is a group of super greenhouse gases known as hydrofluorocarbons, or HFCs.

The support from the coalition came in the form of an official declaration on phasing down HFCs issued by 41 countries at the conclusion of the High-Level segment of the annual meeting of the ozone treaty Sunday night. This is expected to lead to an amendment to the treaty next year.

“If we don’t control HFCs, they could warm the world almost half as much as CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 2050,” said Durwood Zaelke, President of the Institute for Governance and Sustainable Development. This assumes that CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are stabilized at 450 parts per million in this time frame. “We could win the battle against CO<sub>2</sub> and still lose the war against climate change if we let HFCs continue to grow,” he added.

“The declaration sends a clear signal to the world that the super greenhouse gases we are targeting will soon be gone,” said Antonio Oposa Jr., delegate from Micronesia. “We would have preferred even faster action to amend the treaty this year, but many of our fellow parties wanted more time to study climate-friendly alternatives and we respect that. A bit more time on the front end will help us at the back end when we’re implementing the HFC phase out, and keep the treaty’s record of perfect compliance with our commitments.”

Yahyah Patel, head of the Mauritius delegation, formally presented the declaration on behalf of the 41 sponsors. Pathel stressed that:

- Climate change is “occurring faster than previously predicted” and “will threaten present and future generations unless more stringent measures are adopted and implemented urgently”;
- HFCs are “powerful greenhouse gases” that the “Montreal Protocol is well-suited to phase-down..., having already phased-out similar chemicals in the same sectors”;
- All Parties should “urgently consider phasing-down the production and consumption of high-GWP alternatives” including HFCs, and “take appropriate measures ... as soon as practicable.”

The Parties directed their Technology and Economics Assessment Panel to study and report on environmentally friendly alternatives to HFCs as quickly as possible next year.

The 27 members of the European Union offered their support to Micronesia and Mauritius in a statement from the floor at the close of the meeting. Japan, Australia, and New Zealand also supported the islands from the floor.

“Fast HFC cuts can prevent a decade of warming and reduce the equivalent of up to 100 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide,” said Zaelke. “The question now is whether the rest of the world will move fast enough. Time is of the essence for the islands.” Zaelke attended the treaty negotiations in Port Ghalib to present evidence on the harm HFCs are causing. He

spoke at an official event on the role of the military in the Montreal Protocol organized by the United Nations Environment Programme.

“The Montreal Protocol is the best climate treaty to date, and has already delayed climate change by up to 12 years by reducing climate emissions by a net of 135 billion tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalent,” Zaelke explained to the group of generals and other senior military officials.

Micronesia and Mauritius launched their initiative against HFCs in April when they called on the ozone treaty to phase down these greenhouse gases. The United States, Mexico, and Canada followed with a similar proposal.

“Phasing out these super greenhouse gases would have immediate benefits for climate and entirely eliminate one of the six greenhouse gases responsible for global warming,” said Mark W. Roberts of the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA).

The Montreal Protocol Parties also took a formal decision to expand programs for destroying chemical stockpiles of ozone-depleting substances that damage the ozone layer and cause climate change. “This decision could lead to climate mitigation significantly bigger than the emissions targeted under the first phase of the Kyoto Protocol climate treaty,” said Sam LaBudde of EIA. Kyoto’s first commitment runs from 2008 to 2012 and is seeking five billion tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalent below 1990 levels.

HFCs are used primarily in refrigeration and air conditioning, and are known as ‘super’ greenhouse gases because the combined effect of their soaring use and high-global warming potential (GWP) threatens to cancel the benefits expected from reduction of other greenhouse gases.

“Despite the fact that it is already regarded as the most effective environmental accord in history, this week’s efforts illuminate the possibility that the Montreal Protocol’s best work lies in its future rather than in the past,” added Roberts.

The Montreal Protocol’s historic success in controlling and eliminating ozone-depleting substances means that it already has the infrastructure and experience necessary to phase down HFCs quickly and effectively.

Other Parties to the Montreal Protocol said they are looking to the climate negotiations in Copenhagen next month for further support for a fast HFC phase-down. The two treaties would address different aspects of HFCs. The Kyoto Protocol addresses downstream emissions of HFCs. The Montreal Protocol would phase down the upstream production and consumption of HFCs.

“The Montreal Protocol has already phased out nearly 100 other gases that harm the ozone layer and warm the climate,” Zaelke added. “The treaty’s compliance record is hard to top. The past phase-outs have cut production and consumption of targeted chemicals by 97%.” Zaelke heads the International Network for Environmental Compliance & Enforcement, a coalition of over 4,000 government officials fighting for stronger compliance.

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