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Call for Climate Protection Under Ozone Treaty

Bangkok, Thailand, November 12, 2010 – At the 22nd annual meeting of the Montreal Protocol in Bangkok, a growing number of parties—expected to soon surpass a majority-- supported a proposal to use the ozone treaty to address super greenhouse gases known as hydrofluorocarbons or HFCs.

Earlier this year the Federated States of Micronesia along with other vulnerable island countries proposed a formal amendment to the ozone treaty to phase down the production and use of HFCs. Once agreed, the amendment would ensure climate mitigation of up to 100 billion tonnes of CO₂-equivalent by 2050, many times more than the Kyoto Protocol climate treaty. The United States, Mexico, and Canada also proposed a similar amendment.

“This is the biggest, fastest piece of climate mitigation available to the world in the next few years,” said Durwood Zaelke, President of the Institute for Governance & Sustainable Development, who attended the meeting this week in Bangkok.

China, India, and Brazil argued for further discussions of the amendment at the treaty’s open-ended working group meeting in mid-2011, a position the parties ultimately accepted. It is not yet clear whether this is merely a delaying tactic or whether these countries will assume a leadership role, which would in turn allow them to shape the form of the amendment. China, India, and Brazil have until now been enthusiastic supporters of the ozone treaty, and have fully complied with all of their obligations.

“Phasing down HFCs under the Montreal Protocol is a brilliant and necessary climate mitigation strategy,” added Zaelke. “This may be the only climate strategy with support from industry, environmental groups, and a majority of parties. We owe it to the world to take advantage of this unique opportunity.”

Ninety one parties had signed the declaration by the close of the meeting, with others expected to follow in the weeks leading up to the climate negotiations in Cancun, Mexico in December. The signers declared their “intent to pursue further action under the Montreal Protocol aimed at transitioning the world to environmentally sound alternatives” to the chemicals already being phased out under the treaty. The coalition of 91 Parties includes Micronesia and other small island nations, the Philippines, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Egypt, Congo, Nigeria, the 27 countries of the EU, as well as Japan, the U.S., Canada, and Mexico.

Mexico also announced that Nobel Laureate, Mario Molina, will present the case for regulating HFCs under the Montreal Protocol at the upcoming Cancun climate negotiations. In a recent science paper, Molina explained that using the Montreal Protocol to regulate HFCs would be the most effective way to eliminate these super-greenhouse gases. The treaty would control upstream production and consumption of the climate warming gases, leaving downstream emissions under the Kyoto Protocol, where parties to the climate treaty would get credit if they chose to reduce their HFCs.

Island nations including Micronesia will face the brunt of climate change impacts and have begun aggressively pursuing near-term climate mitigation strategies like reducing HFCs. Their argument is that reducing HFCs – which only remains in the atmosphere for several decades, in contrast to CO₂ which can continue impacting the climate system for thousands of years – can help delay some of the damaging impacts that will come as temperatures rise. Micronesia will be hosting an official side event in Cancun on near-term climate mitigation, which will include discussion on HFCs and the Montreal Protocol, as well as other fast climate strategies such as reducing black carbon soot and other short-lived pollutants.

“Climate change is advancing faster than the policies to address it. We’re losing ground every day and we need the Montreal Protocol to get back in the game,” added Zaelke. “Very few opportunities exist to effectively target such a significant amount of mitigation, so cheaply, and with 100 percent assurance that it will get done. That’s the beauty of the Montreal Protocol. We know it will work because it has already worked for 96 other chemicals.”

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For further information, see Mario Molina, Durwood Zaelke, K. Madhava Sarma, Stephen O. Andersen, Veerabhadran Ramanathan, and Donald Kaniaru, [*Reducing abrupt climate change risk using the Montreal Protocol and other regulatory actions to complement cuts in CO₂ emissions*](#), Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (2009).