



Institute for Governance & Sustainable Development

****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****

Contact: Alex Viets, IGSD: (213) 321-0911, aviets@igsd.org

G8 Commits to Action on Super Greenhouse Gases, Considers More Aggressive Stance on CO₂

Washington, D.C., July 9, 2009 – The Group of Eight recognized the “broad scientific view that the increase in global average temperature above pre-industrial levels ought not to exceed 2°C.” The leaders also committed to taking action to reduce the super greenhouse gases hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), as well as “taking rapid action to address other significant climate forcing agents, such as black carbon.” HFCs are used as refrigerants and foam-blowing agents, and have up to 14,800 times the global warming potential of CO₂. Black carbon soot is a short-term climate forcing agent that is responsible for half the warming in the Arctic and the Hindu-Kush-Himalaya-Tibetan Plateau, both of which are warming more than twice the rate of the global average. Black carbon comes primarily from diesel engines in developed countries, and the use of biomass cookstoves and agricultural burning in developing countries.

The G8 leaders also noted that these efforts “must not draw away from attention from ambitious and urgent cuts in emissions from other, more long-lasting, greenhouse gases, which should remain the priority.”

The only way to meet the 2°C goal is to pursue fast and big cuts in CO₂ emissions, which are causing half of the warming, and non-CO₂ emissions which are causing the other half. HFC emissions are predicted to be up to 45 % of CO₂ emissions by 2050 under a 2°C scenario to stabilize CO₂ at 450 ppm. In addition to black carbon, non-CO₂ emissions also include two other short-term climate forcing agents, methane and tropospheric ozone, or, ground level smog. They also include perfluorocarbons which have an atmospheric lifetime of up to 50,000 years and sulfur hexafluoride which has an atmospheric lifetime of 3,200 years.

Low-lying island states led by the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and Mauritius have proposed phasing down HFC production and consumption under the Montreal Protocol ozone treaty. “As the G8 leaders recognize, the ozone treaty’s phase-out of HCFCs is responsible for the dramatic growth in HFCs. The ozone treaty has the responsibility, and its expertise and experience make it the appropriate framework for eliminating these super greenhouse gases,” said Durwood Zaelke, President of the Institute for Governance & Sustainable Development.

FSM has asked the U.S. to support its proposal to phase down HFCs with high global warming potentials. “We welcome the news that the U.S. and the rest of the G8 countries are voicing support for more ambitious climate targets,” said Amb. Yosiwo George, FSM Ambassador to the

U.S. “Island nations and other vulnerable states depend on this strong leadership to help avoid the devastating effects of abrupt climate change that are sure to occur without aggressive action on both CO₂ and other emissions such as HFCs. We hope this leadership will translate into support for FSM and Mauritius’ proposal to phase down HFCs under the Montreal Protocol.” The Montreal Protocol negotiations open next week in Geneva and conclude the first week of November in Egypt.

FSM along with the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Papua New Guinea, and the Republic of the Fiji Islands, sent a letter to President Obama recently requesting U.S. support for the HFC phase-down proposal, emphasizing the importance of addressing these super greenhouse gases immediately: “Even if developed countries made significant mid-term cuts in CO₂ emissions, the continued growth of HFCs globally could trigger near-term abrupt climate changes that would destroy our way of life, our homes, and displace our populations.”

Congressmen Waxman and Markey also sent a letter to President Obama requesting that the Administration support amending the Montreal Protocol to phase down HFCs, as did Senators Boxer and Kerry. The Waxman-Markey climate bill that recently passed the House would phase down HFCs under a separate title.

The G8 leaders’ declaration states that:

“We recognize that the accelerated phase-out of HCFCs mandated under the Montreal Protocol is leading to a rapid increase in the use of HFCs, many of which are very potent GHGs. Therefore we will work with our partners to ensure that HFC emissions reductions are achieved under the appropriate framework. We are also committed to taking rapid action to address other significant climate forcing agents, such as black carbon. These efforts, however, must not draw away attention from ambitious and urgent cuts in emissions from other, more long-lasting, greenhouse gases, which should remain the priority.”

“A November victory on HFCs under the Montreal Protocol can take out a big piece of the climate problem that would be equal to 45% of CO₂ emissions by 2050,” added Zaelke. “This would provide great momentum going into Copenhagen.”

Climate negotiators are only recently acknowledging that half of global warming is caused by CO₂ and the other half by non-CO₂ emissions. “The non-CO₂ half of climate change is also the fast half,” said Zaelke. HFCs, black carbon, methane, and tropospheric ozone have short atmospheric lifetimes ranging from hours to days, up to a decade and a half. These fast-action non-CO₂ strategies, along with expanded bio-sequestration through better forest management and expanded biochar production, are essential complements to cuts in CO₂ emissions. Aggressive action on both CO₂ and non-CO₂ halves is essential to meeting the goal for keeping warming to 2°C.

The Alliance of Small Island States has called for an even more ambitious target of keeping warming below 1.5°C to avoid passing the temperature tipping points for abrupt climate change which would cause severe sea level rise that would devastate their island nations.

###

The mission of the Institute for Governance & Sustainable Development (IGSD) is to promote just and sustainable societies and to protect the environment by advancing the understanding, development and implementation of effective, accountable and democratic systems of governance for sustainable development. IGSD brings together professionals from around the world who are committed to strengthening environmental law and institutions to promote sustainable development. www.igsd.org