



****For Immediate Release****

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

Proposal by Island Nations Aims to Solve 1/3 of Climate Change Problem Under Ozone Treaty

Washington, D.C., April 30, 2009 – Two island states, the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and Mauritius, filed a joint proposal today to amend the Montreal Protocol to phase down a chemical that could otherwise represent one third of total climate emissions by 2040.

The chemicals are hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), and while they currently make up only 2% of global climate emissions, their production and consumption for use in refrigeration and air conditioning equipment is growing so fast that they will produce up to 11 billion tonnes of CO₂-equivalent emissions per year by 2040.

“We can solve one third of the climate problem with a treaty that always succeeds,” said Durwood Zaelke, President of the Institute for Governance & Sustainable Development, a policy advocacy group in Washington D.C. and Geneva. “It shouldn’t take a prolonged debate to decide that this is a good idea, and we congratulate the island states for leading the way. This is the third year in a row Micronesia and Mauritius have teamed up to strengthen the Montreal Protocol to do more for climate protection.”

“Continuing to emit these super greenhouse gases is irresponsible when we have climate and ozone-friendly alternatives available,” said Ambassador Masao Nakayama, Permanent Representative of FSM to the United Nations. “Strengthening the Montreal Protocol can help save island countries like ours from extinction.” Nakayama added that “Micronesia and Mauritius, along with countless other islands and low-lying coastal regions, are already experiencing impacts from rising seas and are vulnerable to abrupt climate changes without aggressive reductions in greenhouse gases and other climate forcing aerosols like black carbon.” Ironically, while UNFCCC delegates were meeting in Poznan last year, islands of Micronesia were inundated by historically unprecedented oceanic wave actions that devastated homes and poisoned food crops with salt water. The damages are still being assessed, but are certainly in the range of many millions. “This is no longer simply a matter of scientific prediction,” said Nakayama. “It is happening now.”

HFCs, which do not affect the ozone layer, were introduced under the Montreal Protocol to replace ozone-depleting CFCs and HCFCs. In 2007, the Parties to the Montreal Protocol accelerated the phase-out of HCFCs to protect both the ozone layer and the climate system. This will result in avoided emissions of up to 16 billion tonnes of CO₂-equivalent by 2040.

UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner hailed the historic 2007 decision as, “perhaps the most important breakthrough in an environmental negotiation process for at least five or six years. . .” FSM and Mauritius were among several developing countries that led the campaign to accelerate the phase-out, and also submitted a joint proposal last year that the Parties adopted to avoid still more climate emissions by recovering and destroying “banks” of chemicals in discarded products, equipment and stockpiles. Their current proposal also calls for an amendment to address banks which, if managed quickly and properly, would result in up to 6 billion tonnes of CO₂-equivalent in avoided emissions by 2015, with the possibility of avoiding an additional 14 billion tonnes thereafter.

Targeting HFCs for fast reductions can produce critical climate benefits within decades, due to the relatively short atmospheric lifetime of these chemicals. “Even the most aggressive cuts in CO₂ emissions will not produce significant cooling for at least 1,000 years,” said Zaelke. “CO₂ reductions are absolutely essential, but in order to avoid abrupt and irreversible climate changes which could potentially occur in the next decade, we also need to reduce non-CO₂ forcers like HFCs, black carbon, methane, and tropospheric ozone.” Reducing emissions from these short-term climate forcers will not only save island nations from melting ice sheets and rising sea-levels, but will also protect melting Himalayan glaciers which provide water for billions of people in Asia.

With over two decades of experience and a track record of phasing out 97% of almost 100 chemicals, the Montreal Protocol is the ideal treaty to take effective action on HFCs. “The Montreal Protocol is a rare treaty that has always done its job brilliantly and on schedule,” Zaelke continued. “If we put HFCs in the Montreal Protocol, we can count on the treaty to do what it always does—succeed quickly and cost-effectively,” Nakayama added.

The U.S. Special Climate Envoy Todd Stern recently noted the potential for the ozone treaty to serve as a model for climate mitigation, highlighting the Montreal Protocol ozone treaty as one of the ‘building blocks’ for climate change.

“The Montreal Protocol is the most successful environmental treaty that we have, and one of the reasons for its success is its vision: not a series of short-term stopgaps, but a pathway to the elimination of ozone depleting substances over the course of many decades,” Stern remarked. “We can and should do the same when it comes to addressing greenhouse gas emissions.”

Congressmen Henry Waxman and Ed Markey wrote the Obama Administration on April 3, 2009, urging them to propose a similar amendment:

“We are writing to encourage the Administration to offer an amendment to the Montreal Protocol this year to regulate the production and consumption of hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), which are extremely potent greenhouse gases. To prevent catastrophic climate change, the United States and countries around the world will need to take a variety of steps. Although we strongly support a comprehensive international agreement on climate change, we believe that adding HFCs to the existing Montreal Protocol would be a sensible, cost-effective method of addressing a small but growing piece of the problem.”

Today, Senators John Kerry and Barbara Boxer sent their own letter to the Administration in support of an HFC amendment:

“By providing the Montreal Protocol with the authority to regulate HFCs, regulation of these gases could begin as soon as next year – significantly faster than any regulation of these potent greenhouse gases could occur under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. . .We believe that the U.S. should seize this opportunity to achieve a significant, short-term impact on global emissions of greenhouse gases.”

The U.S. EPA and U.S. State Department are leading a review process on such an amendment, with the May 4 deadline for filing fast-approaching.

###