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NGO community calls on Ministers to take action to eliminate one of six greenhouse gases

As Ministers meet in Copenhagen desperately seeking to find a set of meaningful mitigation actions negotiators have provided the ray of hope in the form of a draft agreement to work with the Montreal Protocol to eliminate a group of greenhouse gases called hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs).

Often referred to as 'super' greenhouse gases, many HFCs have global warming potentials thousands of times greater than CO₂, and have become the primary replacements for ozone destroying chemicals used in refrigeration and air-conditioning, which have been phased out under the Montreal Protocol.

Atmospheric concentrations of common HFCs are growing at over 20% per year. Recent estimates project that HFC emissions will increase to levels similar to the US's current total greenhouse gases emissions by 2050 (between 5.5 and 8.8 billion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent per year) if action is not taken, substantially destroying the reductions of other GHGs achieved under the UNFCCC. This is despite the growing availability of climate friendly refrigerants.

"In order to avoid the "tipping points" for catastrophic climate change predicted to occur in the next decades, rapid action to phase-out HFCs is the best available opportunity to produce significant, immediate and measurable benefits for climate." Mark Roberts of the Environmental Investigation Agency

The Montreal Protocol has successfully phased out the production and consumption of ozone destroying chemicals in the same industrial sectors now using HFCs. Its proven technology transfer and funding mechanisms are globally admired. In addition it has the scientific and technical expertise to immediately implement a phase-out of HFC production and consumption, while leaving HFC emissions in the UNFCCC basket.

"As demand for air conditioning and refrigeration grows worldwide, there is a clear opportunity for the developing world to leapfrog the mistakes of the developed world" said Paula Tejon of Greenpeace

"An HFC phase-out could prevent emissions equivalent to more than 140 billion tonnes of CO₂ between 2013 and 2050, or almost five years of current global CO₂ emissions. We are offering Ministers a solution to a perfectly avoidable problem on a silver plate." Said Svend Soyland of the Bellona Foundation.

Phasing out HFCs under the Montreal Protocol will provide emissions reductions at a fraction of the cost of other alternative measures. The cost of a phase-out of HFCs will also be substantially cheaper than the cost of HFC control projects under the UNFCCC Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), as only the incremental costs of

the transition to low-GWP alternatives will need to be funded.

“Ministers need to recognise the few opportunities available on the table to build trust and achieve tangible results. The UNFCCC can and must act at COP15 to eliminate HFCs.” Said Durwood Zaelke of the Institute for Governance and Sustainable Development

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