



For Immediate Release

Island Nations Honored for Taking Stand on Climate Under Ozone Treaty

Washington, D.C., April 21, 2009 – Mauritius and the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) will be honored this evening with a Climate Protection Award from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for their outstanding contribution to climate protection under the Montreal Protocol ozone treaty. Last year, representatives from both countries were instrumental in advocating and building support for collection and destruction of “banks” of ozone-depleting substances (ODSs) that reside in old equipment, and that would otherwise leak out and contribute to the ozone hole and climate change.

Ambassador Masao Nakayama, Permanent Representative of FSM to the United Nations and Sateeaved Seebaluck, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Environment of Mauritius, collaborated on a joint proposal addressing these ODS “banks” which would result in up to 6 billion tonnes of CO₂-eq. by 2015 in avoided emissions – a significant amount compared with the 5 billion tonnes of CO₂-eq. in reductions that the Kyoto Protocol seeks from 2008-2012. Both Parties worked hard to promote their proposals and Antonio Oposa Jr.’s work as a special advisor for FSM was crucial in moving the discussions forward. In November 2008, the 193 Parties agreed on the urgent need to address ODS banks and included funding for pilot projects in the US \$490 million agreed upon by developed countries to finance projects under the Protocol for the next three years.

“The Federated States of Micronesia is honored to be receiving such a prestigious award from the US EPA,” said Amb. Nakayama. “The Montreal Protocol is one of few international treaties to have enjoyed such success and we would do well to continue to strengthening it to protect the ozone layer and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.” For small island countries with limited funds and limited contributions to global emissions, putting forth these formal proposals was an innovative strategy that helped catalyze the rest of the world to stretch its climate goals.

“Promoting climate protection under the Montreal Protocol makes a lot of sense and, although it required hard work, was a relatively easy decision for us,” said Sateeaved Seebaluck. “Climate change is such a serious threat to small island countries that every effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions is not a choice, it is a MUST, particularly when you know your efforts are sure to bring results, as the Montreal Protocol has done for over 20 years.” Because many of the ozone-depleting gases regulated under the Montreal Protocol are also powerful greenhouse gases, it is the most successful climate treaty to date, having delayed the effects of climate change by 7 to 12 years.

“If we had not taken action to get the ball rolling last year to begin collecting and destroying

these potent substances from old equipment, we would have lost a unique opportunity to avoid a significant amount of climate emissions,” said Antonio Oposa Jr. “If we want to save the world from climate change, we need to start now, with actions that will bring quick results. Using the Montreal Protocol to reduce greenhouse gas emissions is one such strategy.”

FSM and Mauritius have been part of a group of developing country Parties leading the discussions on climate under the Montreal Protocol for the second year in a row. Other countries taking action include Argentina and Mexico, both of which have negotiators Laura Berón and Agustín Sánchez, respectively, receiving U.S. EPA awards today for promoting climate protection under the Montreal Protocol. Former environment minister of Argentina Romina Picolotti and her colleague in charge of international environmental issues, Ana Maria Kleymeyer, were recognized last year for their dedicated work in garnering support for the agreement to accelerate the phase-out of HCFCs which would result in up to 16 Gt CO₂-eq. of avoided greenhouse gas emissions through 2040.

However, in order to achieve this level of avoided emissions, another group of greenhouse gases must be targeted: hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) with high global warming potentials. HFCs were introduced under the Montreal Protocol as a substitute for HCFCs because they do not harm the ozone layer. Unfortunately, HFCs can be up to 11,000 times more powerful at warming the atmosphere than CO₂. Low-GWP alternatives exist, and the next step is to start phasing down high-GWP HFCs. Discussions have already begun between the Montreal Protocol and the UNFCCC (where HFCs are currently controlled) to address the issue.

“HFCs are serious contributors to climate change,” said Durwood Zaelke, President of the Institute for Governance & Sustainable Development. “We need to realize that CO₂ is only half the problem and that we need to step up efforts to reduce emissions of HFCs and other non-CO₂ climate forcers.”

Zaelke continued, “The Montreal Protocol has over two decades of experience in successfully phasing down almost 100 chemicals by 97%, and is an ideal treaty to bring the HFC problem under control.”

Representatives from the UNFCCC and the Montreal Protocol will meet this summer to discuss possible collaboration on mitigation of HFCs and steps for moving forward. Congressmen Waxman and Markey recently requested that the White House propose an amendment to move HFCs to the Montreal Protocol to phase down those with high-GWP.

###

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