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**Small Island Nation Leads Push for Biggest Climate Opportunity of 2010
Goal is up to 209 billion tonnes of CO₂-equivalent,
Nearly 10% of total mitigation needed to stay below 2°C tipping point**

Geneva, Switzerland, June 21, 2010 – For the fourth year in a row, the small island state of Micronesia (FSM) has taken the lead to combat climate change by fighting to phase down the production and use of HFCs under the Montreal Protocol ozone treaty. Phasing down these super greenhouse gases could lead to over 200 billion tonnes of CO₂-equivalent in mitigation by 2050, according to calculations by Dr. Guus Velders of The Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency based on a paper published last year in the [Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences](#) (see [graph](#)).

The high point of the meeting was an inspirational speech by Micronesia’s negotiator, Tony Oposa, which received a rare ovation from participants agreeing with the importance of urgent action on controlling HFCs under the Protocol and destroying ozone- and climate-warming gases left in “banks” of old equipment that will otherwise vent into the atmosphere.

“Who do you call if a house is burning and the fire truck is far away – with the firefighters arguing over what to do – and a volunteer brigade is already at the scene, ready and able to put out the fire?” This is the question Mr. Oposa asked the rest of the delegates during his presentation. He made the point that the Montreal Protocol (the “volunteer brigade”) is ready and able to put out the “fire” that HFCs would cause with regard to climate change, and that the world cannot wait for the Kyoto Protocol (the “firefighters”) – where HFC emissions are included as one of the six gases in the basket – to take action. “We are not faceless diplomats meeting to talk, but climate firefighters trying to save our children and their Earth home.”

“This would be a major victory for the world, and especially for vulnerable nations like Micronesia that need fast, near-term climate mitigation to survive,” said Durwood Zaelke, President of the Institute for Governance & Sustainable Development, who attended the Montreal Protocol’s meeting in Geneva last week. “Opportunities for progress under the climate negotiations this year are uncertain, but we know the ozone treaty is ready to deliver. The Parties have the chance to solve a big part of the climate change problem by taking action to phase down HFCs this year, virtually eliminating one of the six greenhouse gases under the Kyoto Protocol.”

The Montreal Protocol Parties discussed the Micronesia proposal and a similar proposal submitted by the US, Canada, and Mexico. Although HFCs – used as coolants in air conditioning, refrigeration, and foam-blowing applications – only account for about 2 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions today, they are growing so fast that they could become up to 45% of global CO₂ emissions by 2050 under a scenario that stabilizes CO₂ emissions at 450 ppm, according to the Velders paper.

“The Montreal Protocol is a unique treaty, because all the delegations here this week are used to taking action and working together to move forward on protecting the environment,” said Oposa. “We island countries need all the help we can get to avoid the catastrophic impacts of climate change, and the Montreal Protocol is in a position to deliver the goods today, now. The Montreal Protocol helped create the problem of HFCs when we directed the accelerated phase-out of earlier chemicals – HCFCs – under the Montreal Protocol. We clearly have the responsibility to help.” HFCs were developed as substitutes for ozone-depleting substances (ODSs), HCFCs, which are rapidly being phased out under the Protocol.

The Parties made steady progress at the meeting, though issues remain. There was broad agreement by all but a few developing country Parties (namely China, India, and Brazil) on issues of funding, fair access to technology, HFC-23 mitigation, and resolving cooperation and coordination with the Kyoto Protocol and UNFCCC process. Developed country Parties expressed near-total agreement on issues of funding and the initial control schedule. Parties agreed to discuss the issue further in the coming months before the November Meeting of the Parties in Kampala, Uganda, when final decisions on the proposals will be taken.

Avoiding HFCs today by making the transition from HCFCs into low-global warming potential (GWP) alternatives, can avoid having to make another transition in the future. “If we can leapfrog over HFCs into ozone- and climate-friendly alternatives, it will save us from what will be an inevitable transition out of these potent greenhouse gases,” said Yahyah Pathel from Mauritius. Mauritius, another island nation vulnerable to the near-term impacts of climate change, announced that it would officially co-sponsor FSM’s proposal.

A complicating factor in the HFC proposal deliberations is the current discussion taking place under the UN Convention on Climate Change regarding HFC-23 credits under the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). The windfall profits firms are getting under the CDM are providing a perverse incentive to produce HCFC-22 solely to destroy its by-product, HFC-23, which has 12,000 times the warming potential of CO₂. Its high GWP means CDM credits can be obtained for its destruction, even though the actual process of destroying the gas is relatively inexpensive.

The HFC proposals under the Montreal Protocol call for mandatory destruction of by-product HFC-23, without providing the windfall profits – a likely reason that China and India (who profit most from destruction of HFC-23 under the CDM) expressed opposition to the proposals.

The Parties also discussed the “banks” of ODSs, with most Parties agreeing to the importance of addressing the problem. Remaining issues include financing and destruction certification.

Unfortunately, while the Parties continue to debate the banks issue, the banks are leaking more and more ODSs and greenhouse gases into the atmosphere with no way to recover them.

With the accelerating climate emissions, and the growing risk of passing thresholds for abrupt and irreversible impacts from climate change, the question is whether the most successful environmental treaty will be asked by its Parties to phase down the high-GWP greenhouse gases it originally promoted to replace CFCs and HCFCs.

“Micronesia started this round of leadership, and Mexico, Canada, and United States joined that leadership. Now there are dozens of countries urging the use of Montreal to protect climate, afraid that any further delay may push Earth toward tipping points of dangerous ecological and atmospheric impact” added Zaelke. “The big push is to find the fast action that can save Earth.”

The time is now. The treaty is Montreal.

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For more information on HFCs and the Montreal Protocol, see:

- Micronesia proposal: http://ozone.unep.org/Meeting_Documents/oewg/30oewg/OEWG-30-4E.pdf
- North American proposal: http://ozone.unep.org/Meeting_Documents/oewg/30oewg/OEWG-30-5E.pdf
- Graph showing the climate benefits and timeline of the Micronesia and North American proposals: <http://igsd.org/documents/2010MPHFCProposalgraph.pdf>
- Reducing abrupt climate change risk using the Montreal Protocol and other regulatory actions to complement cuts in CO2 emissions, by Mario Molina, Durwood Zaelke, K. Madhava Sarma, Stephen O. Andersen, Veerabhadran Ramanathan, and Donald Kaniaru. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 2009.
<http://www.pnas.org/content/early/2009/10/09/0902568106.full.pdf+html>
- <http://igsd.org/montreal/index.php>
- <http://www.youtube.com/user/igsdinece#p/a/u/1/kUnb27tuzcY>