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US and China Agree to Use Montreal Protocol to Cut Super Greenhouse Gases *Agreement on HFCs Opens Door to Biggest Climate Mitigation Through 2020*

13 June 2013 Washington DC –President Obama and President Xi concluded their first-ever summit June 8th with two successful outcomes: an agreement to work together to reduce the threat from North Korea, and an agreement to “work together and with other countries through multilateral approaches that include using the expertise and institutions of the Montreal Protocol to phase down the production and consumption of HFCs....”

HFCs are known as super-greenhouse gases because many of these man-made chemicals have a global warming potential hundreds to thousands of times greater than CO₂.

“Reducing factory-made HFCs under the Montreal Protocol is the biggest, fastest, and cheapest climate mitigation available to the world today, and is essential for slowing down the punishing climate impacts the world is already experiencing, including super storms like Sandy,” said Durwood Zaelke, President of the Institute for Governance & Sustainable Development and an expert on the Montreal Protocol.

“The Montreal Protocol has already phased out 97 similar chemicals by nearly 100% and has the expertise and experience to immediately phase down HFCs”, Zaelke added. “Phasing down HFC will avoid the equivalent of 100 billion tonnes of CO₂ emissions, ten time more than the CO₂ the Kyoto Protocol has avoided to date. This will avoid 0.5C in warming by the end of the century, a significant part of what the world needs to stay within the 2C red-line for irreversible climate change.”

HFCs are the fastest growing greenhouse gases in the US, China, India, and the EU. If left unchecked, emissions of HFCs could grow to nearly 20% of CO₂ by 2050 and 45% if CO₂ emissions are limited in line with present international goals.

The first proposal to phase down HFC under the Montreal Protocol was submitted in 2009 by the Federated States of Micronesia, to protect countries most vulnerable to climate impacts, including low-lying islands and coastal countries already suffering from accelerating sea level rise, and agriculture-dependent countries of Asia and Africa already suffering drought and shifting rainfall. The United States, Canada, and Mexico followed with a similar proposal.

More than 100 countries have signed on to declarations supporting action to reduce HFCs. Until the agreement between Obama and Xia, however, China had been one of the few countries blocking the consensus needed to pass the amendment. India and Brazil are the other blocking countries.

A recent study led by Professor V. Ramanathan of Scripps Institution of Oceanography found that cutting HFCs and the other short-lived climate pollutants, including black carbon, methane, and tropospheric (ground-level) ozone, can cut the annual rate of sea-level rise by a quarter and cumulative sea-level rise by 22% by the end of the century.

“The Obama-Xi deal provides political momentum that makes the HFC phase down under the Montreal Protocol all but inevitable,” said Zaelke. “The HFC agreement also sets up the US and China to run the table on other short-lived climate pollutants.”

- The White House statement on the US-China HFC agreement is [here](#).
- Zaelke’s interview on NPR is [here](#) and on Minnesota Public Radio is [here](#).
- Zaelke & Bledsoe, Op-Ed, “A climate victory waiting for presidents Obama and Xi”, is [here](#).