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BREAKTHROUGH FOR CLIMATE IMMINENT AS MONTREAL PROTOCOL CONSIDERS ACTION ON SUPER GREENHOUSE GASES

Washington DC – The biggest news this year for climate protection could come this week when delegates from around the world meet in Port Ghalib, Egypt to weigh action on phasing out hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs). Used primarily in the world's more than 4 billion refrigerators and air conditioners, soaring HFC use threatens to negate efforts to offset CO₂ and other greenhouse gas reductions being negotiated within the Copenhagen talks.

"By some estimates, action to freeze and then reduce this group of gases could buy the world the equivalent of a decade's-worth of CO₂ emissions," says U.N. Under-Secretary General and UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner. The annual meeting of the Montreal Protocol, widely considered the most successful environmental accord in history for its role in eliminating the threat to the ozone layer, will consider two amendments aimed at freezing and phasing out HFCs - just as was done for ozone depleting substances.

According to Dr. Guus Velders of the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency, the lead author of a recent scientific paper on HFCs, "Because of the projected growth of these climate-warming chemicals, they could represent up to 45 per cent of the total global CO₂ emissions by 2050 under a scenario that stabilizes CO₂ emissions at 450 parts per million. Preventing strong growth in HFC use is an important climate mitigation option the world has now".

The first of the proposed amendments was introduced by Micronesia and Mauritius in May, and subsequently endorsed by a number of island nations that are at acute risk from rising sea level. "The will is there. Our job now is to turn that will into a way," Grenada's U.N. ambassador, Dessima Williams, current chairwoman of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), wrote about the HFC amendment. She feels the prospect for success this year is excellent, and recently there has been growing support from the EU and most island nations as well as within Latin and Central America, and Africa to take action on HFCs.

The second proposal was submitted by the United States, Canada and Mexico in August and also aims to eliminate HFCs and replace them with climate friendly alternatives that already exist for almost all HFC uses. Deputy Assistant Secretary for Environment at U.S. Department of State Dan Reifsnnyder commented, "This North American proposal represents a significant down payment on efforts to be pursued at the United Nations

Framework Convention on Climate Change in Copenhagen, Denmark, this December”.

“The world’s leaders have the opportunity to prevent some 200 billion tons of greenhouse gas emissions in a single stroke”, said Samuel LaBudde, U.S. Senior Climate Campaigner for the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA). “An HFC phase out is not something that can be done instead of reducing CO2. It’s something that has to be done to make all the other greenhouse gas reductions meaningful, and the time for it is now”.

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For more information on HFCs: www.eia-global.org or www.eia-international.org