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Conference sets global agenda for protecting ozone layer

Colombo/Nairobi, 19 October 2001 - Officials from over 100 countries are adopting formal decisions here today that will guide international efforts to phase out CFCs and other ozone-depleting substances under the Montreal Protocol over the coming year and beyond. The meeting has been the first international gathering on the global environment since the 11 September attacks.

During the high-level segment, delegates were addressed by Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickremanayake, who announced his country's plan to phase out CFCs by 2005, five years earlier than required by the Protocol.

Completing the CFC phase-out schedule for developing countries is of particular importance for the recovery of the earth's stratospheric ozone layer. These countries are committed to a 1999 freeze in their production and consumption of CFCs, to be followed by a 50% reduction by 2005, an 85% cut by 2007, and a complete phase out by 2010; they will also be required to freeze halons and methyl bromide in 2002. Developed countries almost completely phased out CFCs in 1996.

The meeting reviewed national data on the consumption and production of CFCs by developing countries for the first time. The data indicates that most developing countries are in compliance. However, some 25 out of 136 increased their consumption of CFCs in 1999, and one increased its production. Fortunately, these countries can call on the Protocol's Multilateral Fund, which provides financial support to help governments make the transition to ozone-safe technologies.

The Colombo meeting agreed the terms of reference for a study that will help governments determine the level at which the Fund should be replenished for the 2003-2005 funding period. They also agreed to conduct an evaluation study of the Fund's performance. The Fund has disbursed more than \$1.2 billion since 1991 for phase-out projects in some 120 developing countries.

The meeting also considered the problem of illegal trade in controlled substances. As a next step, it requested the Protocol's secretariat to prepare a report on monitoring and preventing illegal trade in time for the next meeting of the Protocol's Open-Ended Working Group in mid-2002.

Another decision addressed the need for more analysis of the technical options for manufacturing CFC-free metered dose inhalers used to treat asthma. CFCs used in the manufacture of inhalers are exempt from the CFC phase-out on medical grounds. The Technology and Economics Assessment Panel was tasked with conducting the analysis.

The 14th Meeting of the Parties to the Montreal Protocol on Substances That Deplete the Ozone Layer will be held at the headquarters of the United Nations Environment Programme in Nairobi from 25-29 November 2002. The Vienna Convention, which meets every three years and is the framework treaty under which the Protocol was negotiated, will hold its 6th Conference of the Parties at the same time.

Note to journalists: For additional information before or after the meeting, please contact Michael Williams at +41-22-917-8242/9244/8196, +41-79-409-1528 (cell phone) or michael.williams@unep.ch. See also www.unep.org/ozone/. In Nairobi, please contact: Tore J. Brevik, UNEP Spokesman/Director of Communications and Public Information, P. O. Box 30552; tel.: (254-2) 623292; fax 623692; email: cpiinfo@unep.org

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