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VIENNA CONVENTION LAUDED - FIFTEEN YEARS AFTER SIGNATURE

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"The Vienna Convention helped to pave the way for the more comprehensive agreement that was to follow the Montreal Protocol", Klaus Toepfer, UNEP

Nairobi, 21 March 2000 - Wednesday 22 March, marks the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer With the adoption of that Convention, the foundation was laid for concerted efforts to protect the ozone layer.

The Vienna Convention and its Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer are now acknowledged as outstanding successes and as examples to be followed for the solution of global environmental problems through global cooperation and partnership.

"Though the steps that the global community took at Vienna were small compared to the challenges facing it, they symbolized a major psychological breakthrough in dealing with the threat of the depletion of the ozone layer, said KlausToepfer, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)". The Vienna Convention helped to pave the way for the more comprehensive agreement that was to follow - the Montreal Protocol", he said.

The Vienna Convention committed parties to protecting human health and the environment against the adverse effects of depletion of the ozone layer due to human activities. It set out broad principles of ozone layer protection,rather than establishing the detailed phase-out schedule of ozone depleting substances which were later included in the Montreal Protocol in 1987. The convention committed States to cooperate in researching the causes and effects of ozone depletion as well as alternative technologies; to cooperate on adopting legal and policy measures to counteract activities that are harmful to the atmosphere and to facilitate the transfer of technology and transmission of information, especially to developing countries.

Both the Convention and the Protocol allowed the Parties thereto, to progress step-by-step in building ownership of the process by all Governments, Industry, non-governmental organizations and academia among others. At its adoption on 22 March 1985, the Convention was signed by 28 countries. There are now 173 Parties to the Vienna Convention. These Parties have phased out 84 percent of consumption of the chemicals that destroy the ozone layer. This path must continue to ensure recovery of the ozone layer by the year 2050.

Note to Editors: Ozone is mainly found in the stratosphere and in the troposphere About 90 per cent of ozone resides in the stratosphere,approximately 10 to 50 kilometers above the Earth's surface. The stratospheric ozone, commonly known as the "ozone layer", plays a critical role in protecting living organisms from the harmful effects of the solar ultraviolet radiation.

When UNEP was conceived at the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, international efforts to deal with the problem of ozone depletion begun. The organization has been concerned with protecting the ozone layer ever since.

In 1970 Prof. Paul Crutzen pointed out the possibility that nitrogen oxides from supersonic aircraft and fertilizers might deplete the ozone layer. Four years later, in 1974, a paper was published by Mario Molina and Sherwood Rowland of the University of California, suggesting that chlorofluorocarbons(CFCs) might play a role in depleting ozone in the stratosphere. These links have since been repeatedly confirmed. The three scientists received the Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 1995. Last year Prof. Mario Molina won the UNEP Sasakawa Environment Prize.

Other chlorine- and bromine-containing compounds - carbon tetrachloride,methyl chloroform, halons and methyl bromide - have also been found to be detrimental to the ozone layer. Some of the substances developed to serveas interim substitutes for CFCs, known as HCFCs and HBFCs, are also potentially damaging to the ozone layer, but less so than CFCs. On the other hand, they have a very high global warming potential.

After many years of negotiation that started in 1977 under UNEP's "World Plan of Action on the

Ozone Layer" and with the scientific confirmation of the depletion of the ozone layer, the Framework Convention for the protection of the Ozone Layer was adopted on 22 March 1985 in Vienna and signed by the following 28 countries: Argentina, Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Burkina Faso,Canada, Chile, Denmark, Egypt, European Community, Finland, France, Germany,Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Mexico, Morocco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway,Peru, Russian Federation, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom, UnitedStates of America. Since then, 173 Parties have ratified the Convention.

On the 1985 occasion of the signing of the Vienna Convention, the then Executive Director of UNEP, Dr. Mostafa K. Tolba, remarked that "the stakes are too high. It is hard enough to cope with the permanent disappearance of a species,or the death of a lake, or the turning of fertile lands into desert; but in the case of ozone depletion, who could forgive us if we had reacted too late?".

The Convention provided for issuing appropriate protocols to fulfill the objectives of the Convention. In that connection, the international community agreed to adopt the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer in 1987 which regulates the production and consumption phase out schedules of ozone-depleting substances. The Montreal Protocol has been adjusted in London in 1990, Copenhagen in 1992, Vienna in 1995, Montreal in 1997 and in Beijing in 1999.

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Official documents and other materials are available on the Internet at
http://www.unep.org/ozone.

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