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Developing countries to take centre stage in the battle to save the ozone layer 16 September - International Day for the Preservation of the Ozone Layer

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NAIROBI/GENEVA, 7 September 1998 - The Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, the international environmental agreement that "Ozone Day" on 16 September commemorates, is working - a cause for some celebration. According to Klaus Toepfer, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Protocol is a shining example of how a legal convention can help solve an environmental problem. "In 1986 the consumption of CFCs in the industrialized countries was about 1 million tonnes", he said. "Today, thanks to the Protocol, CFC consumption in these countries has been completely phased out apart from about 15,000 tonnes for permitted essential uses only".

But the global battle is far from over and the ozone layer will only recover if we remain vigilant. There are still many challenges to be overcome, particularly in developing countries and the Russian Federation where the fight to save the ozone layer will have to be won.

The Montreal Protocol, adopted in September 1987, allowed developing countries a grace period to phase out their consumption and production of ozone depleting substances such as chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and halons, in recognition of the fact that they needed time to obtain and introduce alternative technologies. Today, this grace period is almost over. The developing countries must begin a phase-out of CFCs, halons and carbon tetrachloride with a freeze starting 1 July 1999.

Ten years ago, the share of the developing countries and the Russian Federation (then USSR) in the total production of CFCs was 15 per cent. In 1996, it was 80 per cent. For halons, the share was 7 per cent ten years ago. Today, it is 100 per cent.

"The responsibility for saving the ozone layer is now to a large extent with the developing countries. The ozone hole will recover but only if they implement the control measures next year and complete their phase-out according to schedule", said Toepfer. "At the same time, the Multilateral Fund, set up to help pay the costs incurred and to promote the transfer of alternative substances and technologies, must be adequately financed by industrialized countries. A case of common but differentiated responsibility", he said.

The Multilateral Fund of the Protocol has disbursed about \$US 760 million to more than 100 developing countries to phase out more than half of their CFC consumption. The replenishment for the three-year period of 2000-2 will be negotiated in late 1999.

Recognizing that the developing countries must now take centre stage in the battle to save the ozone layer, the theme for this year's Ozone Day is For Life on Earth: Buy Ozone-Friendly, a message directed to their governments, businesses and consumers alike. "The developing country phase-out will be a crucial challenge for the next 10 years", said Madhava Sarma, Executive Secretary of the UNEP Ozone Secretariat. "Ozone Day is an occasion to raise the awareness of all sections of society to the urgent need to promote ozone-safe products and the importance of meeting the freeze goal".

Developing countries are concerned about increased imports of CFC products, such as refrigerators, from countries that have already adopted ozone-safe products. This will increase their demand for CFCs for maintenance of these products.

Other issues of concern:

- The illegal export of CFCs to the industrialized countries has to be curbed. In response, a licensing system for imports or exports of CFCs has been made mandatory for all the Parties to the Montreal Protocol. UNEP is assisting with exchange of information.
- Global warming could increase ozone depletion. Also, HFCs, now used as alternatives for CFCs in some applications, have global warming potential and are controlled by the Kyoto Protocol. The interconnections need to be studied.
- Many parties are yet to ratify the Amendments to the Montreal Protocol, which include controls on more chemicals. To date, 168 parties have ratified the protocol. But only 123 have ratified the London and 80 the Copenhagen Amendment.

- The Russian Federation and other countries of the former USSR are yet to implement their obligations. They promised to do so by the year 2000. The Global Environment Facility is providing financial assistance to countries in the region.
- The potential for the spread of methyl bromide to more countries and more applications. It is currently only used in some countries for a small number of crops.

"Ozone Day is a time to reflect on both the achievements and the problems that lie ahead", said Toepfer. "The Montreal Protocol is a great success and provides many important lessons - the benefits of the precautionary principle, of working with industry, of integrating science and policy, of recognizing the special situation of developing countries and the flexibility to take into account scientific and technological developments over time".

"But, before we celebrate we must confront the remaining challenges", he continued. "The next 12 months will be a critical period in our efforts to save the ozone layer".

The main objective of the Montreal Protocol is to protect the thin layer of ozone in the stratosphere, located between 10 and 50 kilometers above the Earth, that absorbs all but a small fraction of the harmful ultraviolet radiation (UV-B) from the Sun and protects all life on Earth. Scientific assessments show the abundance of ozone-depleting chemicals in the lower atmosphere are declining thanks to the Montreal Protocol and that the production of CFCs and halons have declined by 86 per cent in the last ten years.

Given full implementation of the Protocol by all countries, the ozone layer will recover by the middle of the 21st century. If there were no Protocol, the ozone depletion by the year 2050 would be about 10 times larger than today. The implications would be terrible - 19 million more cases of non-melanoma cancer, 1.5 million of melanoma cancer and 130 million more cases of eye cataracts.

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