

## **EVOLVING ROLE OF GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES TO PREVENT ENVIRONMENTAL CRIME**

BUDAPEST/NAIROBI, 18 May 2000 - A regional meeting of Customs Officers and Officers in charge of National Ozone Units of countries in Central and Eastern Europe and the Baltic, was held from 15 to 17 May 2000 in Budapest. Participating countries were Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia.

The meeting was the first of its kind and was convened in efforts to end the growing illegal trade in Ozone Depleting Substances (ODS) which is threatening to jeopardize the success so far of the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer. Such trade is likely to be as serious in some countries as traffic in narcotic drugs.

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has stimulated a regional response to the challenge of illegal trade. "We are determined to halt this increasing trend of illegal trade and environmental crime. Regional Cooperation is the key to success that will lead us to our final goal of protecting the Ozone Layer" said Lt. Gen. and Commissioner of Hungarian Customs Administration, Mr. Mihaly Arnold at the opening event.

Effective deployment of detection equipment, intensive public awareness campaigns, tightening controls within borders and across borders, and heavy penalties including jail sentences are some of the measures that countries intend to take, depending on national circumstances.

One of the most significant outcomes of the workshop is the establishment of the informal network among the customs authorities in the region and outside the region through the internet, in order to exchange vital information related to the illegal trade in ODS.

Three of the ten countries in the region have already phased out the production and consumption of ODS and the remaining countries will achieve the phase out within a year or so. They have received financial and technical assistance from the Global Environment Facility and the Multilateral Fund for converting their factories to ozone-friendly products. All the countries have a licensing system in place to control the trade and to help curb illegal trade. However, their challenge now is to implement and enforce the system .

It is the first time in the history of the Montreal Protocol that Customs Authorities have come together to take steps to prevent environmental crime. The workshop was organized jointly by the Hungarian Customs and Finance Guard and the OzonAction Programme of UNEP's Division of Technology, Industry and Economics in Budapest from 15-17 May 2000. It was assisted by experts on environmental crime from the United Kingdom, Ukraine, Poland, European Commission, and Dept of Justice, United States of America.

The event was part of the project funded by the Global Environment Facility promoting Compliance with the Trade and Licensing Provisions of the Montreal Protocol in Countries with Economies in Transition (CEIT) being implemented by UNEP.

"Environmental crime is a looming threat to the hard work being carried out by the world community. Illegal Trade in ODS is an environmental crime and has to be stopped to achieve early recovery of the Ozone Layer", commented Mr. Klaus Toepfer, Executive Director of UNEP.

Note to journalists:

About the Montreal Protocol: The Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer is the international environmental agreement that has galvanized global co-operation to protect the stratospheric ozone layer. The Protocol was signed by 24 countries in 1987 and as of March 2000, has been ratified by 173 countries, or Parties to the Protocol.

A number of ozone-depleting substances (chlorofluorocarbons, carbon tetrachloride, methyl chloroform and halons) have already been phased out in developed countries, except for about 10,000 tonnes used as essential uses.

As the phase out proceeds in developed countries and in the Countries with the Economies in Transition, there are growing incidences of the illegal trades in the Ozone Depleting Substances. Parties to the Protocol are concerned on this development and have taken number of decisions to prevent the incidences of such trade.

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