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First Ozone and Pollution Monitoring Ground Station for West Asia

Qatar to Also Partner with UN Environment on Research Centre for Ozone and Climate-Friendly Technologies

8th Conference of the Parties to the Vienna Convention and 20th Meeting of the Parties to the Montreal Protocol

Qatar/Nairobi, 19 November 2008--An advanced cutting-edge monitoring station, able to gather crucial data on pollution linked with damage to the Earth's ozone layer is to be established in the Gulf state of Qatar it was announced today.

The station, the first in West Asia, will plug serious and significant ground and satellite-data gaps in the regional and global atmosphere monitoring networks.

Currently the nearest similar ozone monitoring stations are between 800km and 3,340km away in Esfahan (Iran) and Nairobi respectively.

For halocarbon measurements the nearest stations are in central Europe (more than 4000 km away) and China (more than 6000 km away).

Scientists believe the new, more advanced station will assist in understanding whether the ozone layer—the thin layer of gas that surrounds the planet and protects all life on Earth from the sun's harmful rays—is actually recovering after decades of chemical attack.

Under the UN Environment Programme's (UNEP) Montreal Protocol over 90 per cent of ozone damaging gases have already been phased out and it is predicted that the layer might have fully recovered by somewhere around the 2060s as a result of past, current and future actions.

But without direct scientific observations around the world governments cannot know whether improvements are genuinely taking place or whether there is a need to step up or re-focus the response.

The decision to establish the new ground station follows discussions between the Government of Qatar, UNEP's ozone secretariat and the Qatar Foundation.

The announcement on the station was announced by the Government of Qatar, during the high level segment of the 8th Conference of the Parties to the Vienna Convention and 20th Meeting of the Parties to the Montreal Protocol.

Nasa, the US space agency will be working with the Government of Qatar on the project too.

The ground station will assist space agencies to validate Earth Observing satellites proofing the data they gather on behalf of researchers right around the globe.

Ozone and Climate Friendly Advanced Technology Centre

Qatar also announced plans to establish a global centre of excellence for research and development of ozone and climate friendly technology, equipment and appliances.

Last year governments agreed to accelerate the freeze and phase-out of replacement chemicals known as HCFCs in large part because of their global warming potential.

Experts believe the maximum contribution of the phase out will come by introducing new, low or zero global warming gases backed by new, energy saving equipment—one of the issues which the new centre seeks to resolve.

The Government of Qatar and its ministry of the environment are to hold discussions with UNEP including its West Asia office in Bahrain on how best to design the centre and its research programme with a view to having the centre up and running in three to five years.

Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and UNEP Executive Director, said:" Sound science underpins sound decision-making. Big data gaps exist for a range of key issues, from climate and ozone to particles and aerosols in the air and atmosphere, in several regions. These include Siberia and large parts of Africa including the Congo River Basin'.

"However, the very welcome announcement by Qatar will help plug key data gaps relating to information gathering in West Asia and the Gulf to the benefit of the region and the world. In doing so, the Government is putting its commitment to boosting the globe's science-based firmly on the international radar," he added.

The data collected and analysed at the new observatory in Qatar will be archived at various international data centres, such as the World Meteorological Organization's World Ozone and UV radiation Data Centre (Canada) and World Data Centre on Greenhouse Gases (Japan). The data will thereby be available for the global scientific community.

Waleed Al-Emadi, a senior ozone expert at the Qatar Ministry of the Environment said:" The government of Qatar is committed to developing a knowledge-based, scientifically advanced society and one that echoes to the national and international challenges of the 21st century.

"Our commitment to atmospheric monitoring and to research on ozone and climate-friendly technologies is part of this evolution and diversification of the Qatari economy

both of which should prove a milestone in our country's scientific, cultural and environmental transformation," he said.

The Qatar Atmospheric Observation Station

Four instruments are being proposed. These are a MKIII Brewer spectrophotometer able to measure ozone, ultra violet light and aerosols which include particles such as dust and soot and tiny crystals such as sulphates.

Last week UNEP and a team of international scientists launched the findings from the atmospheric brown cloud (ABC) project—a more than three km thick band of pollution stretching from the Arabian Peninsula to China and the western Pacific.

The new instrument will track ozone levels thus providing valuable data on whether the gas is increasing in concentration in the atmosphere while also shedding light on brown clouds and their movements.

Another instrument is a micro pulse lidar which can monitor clouds and aerosols over Qatar itself.

The third is Cimel sun tracking photometer able to measure total column water vapour, ozone and aerosol properties.

The fourth instrument is an automated gas chromatograph-mass spectrometer able to measure concentrations in the atmosphere of the chemicals and gases linked with ozone layer damage and climate change such as the refrigerants CFCs, HCFCs, HFCs and halons from foams and fire-fighting equipment.

The instrument can measure more than 40 halogen-containing trace gases that exist in the atmosphere in very low concentrations, thus being able to provide an early warning if harmful gases build up in the atmosphere.

Notes to Editors

The 20th Meeting of the Parties to the Montreal Protocol is taking place at the Sheraton Doha Conference and Convention Centre.

Documents can be accessed at ozone.unep.org

- Issues before delegates include destruction of ozone damaging substances held in items such as fridges, fire-fighting equipment and foams.

Many of these banked ozone-damaging chemicals have climate change impacts too. Large amounts could, without action, be released as early as 2015.

This could lead to the equivalent of several billion tonnes of CO₂ being pumped into the atmosphere.

- Countries will also discuss the sixth replenishment of the Multilateral Fund-- which has so far spent over \$2 billion on assisting developing countries to phase out ozone-killing chemicals and switch to less harmful ones.

Countries are likely to discuss a range of replenishment figures from around \$338 million to close to \$630 million to cover the coming years including the costs of accelerating the freeze and phase-out of HCFCs— chemicals that can damage the ozone layer but are now also known to contribute to global warming too.

A significant agreement to the accelerated freeze and phase-out was made at the last meeting off the Montreal Protocol held in the Canadian city from where the treaty takes its name.

- Countries will again be seeking exemptions for a chemical known as methyl bromide used for fumigating soils against crop-damaging pests. However, the quantities of exemptions being sought are down by around 70 per cent from a few years ago.

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