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National Environment Commission Royal Government of Bhutan

Bhutan Raising Gross National Happiness; Deriving Climate Benefits from Ozone Layer Protection

Thimpu, 10 August 2010- Today, a small country in the lap of Himalaya has taken a giant step. Bhutan, one of the few countries in the world where sustainable development is embedded in its constitution, has made a historic decision to further advance the phase out of the Hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs) – a powerful Green House Gas and Ozone Depleting substance by 10 years.

HCFCs are widely used in air conditioning applications as well as in refrigeration and in manufacturing of insulation foams. HCFCs not only destroy the stratospheric ozone layer which is essential to life on Earth but they are also potent greenhouse gases having Global Warming Potential 2000 times more than carbon dioxide. In 2007, international community took an important step for accelerated phase-out of HCFCs. i.e. by 2030 in the developing countries in order to advance ozone layer recovery by nearly 4 years and reduce the cumulative emissions of the green house gases by nearly 25 giga tons of the equivalent of CO₂.

Bhutan's enviable reputation in environment conservation thus far is testimony of its commitment of pursuing sustainable development based on the philosophy of Gross National Happiness, which underscores that development cannot be pursued on the premise of economic growth alone but has to take place in combination with the emotional and spiritual well-being of the people. As eloquently summarized by His Majesty the King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, “Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross National Product”. This has been the guiding force of Bhutan’s sustainable development strategy.

His Majesty the King has also stated that “Throughout the centuries, the Bhutanese have treasured their natural environment and have looked upon it as the source of all life. This traditional reverence for nature has delivered us into the twentieth century with our environment still richly intact. We wish to continue living in harmony with nature and to pass on this rich heritage to our future generations”.

The United Nations Environment Programme, Division of Technology, Industry and Economics (UNEP DTIE) OzonAction Programme has been working closely with the National Environment Commission Secretariat, Bhutan in the development of HPMP while assessing various risks associated with the implementation of such a plan over a long time framework of 20 years.

In this process, relevant Ministries in the country, including the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Bhutan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI), Ministry of Health, Department of Customs as well as other national stakeholders have agreed to commit and collaborate in the implementation of the plan.

“Such a strong commitment of Bhutan to HCFC Phase out will help them reach their ambitious target. OzonAction Programme will work shoulder to shoulder with Bhutan to stop the consumption of this group of chemicals earlier than the Montreal Protocol phase out deadline, as was done when CFCs were phased out by Bhutan” said Mr. Rajendra Shende, Head of UNEP DTIE OzonAction Programme. “Scaling the Himalayan peaks require excellent supply chain management. OzonAction would do exactly that by providing capacity building and technology support” added Mr. Shende.

Bhutan has committed to phase out the consumption of HCFCs, mainly used in the air conditioning and refrigeration servicing sector in its large industrial establishments, hotels and resorts, corporate offices,

governmental sectors, as well as domestic servicing sector. The plan also involves policy and legislations, training and capacity building activities, as well as information outreach for HCFC phase-out.

“Our decision to phase out HCFCs will demonstrate to the world our determination to protect our planet by benefiting from the low hanging climate benefit fruits from the Montreal Protocol and cutting carbon footprints and promoting energy efficiency and green economy.” said Ms. Peldon Tshering, Chief National Environment Commission Secretariat, Bhutan.

This is an encouraging action that demonstrates to the global community that small countries like Bhutan can also be at the frontline in the battle against climate change and the protection of the ozone layer.

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME (UNEP)

UNEP is the United Nations system’s designated entity for addressing environmental issues at the global and regional level. Its mandate is to coordinate the development of environmental policy consensus by keeping the global environment under review and bringing emerging issues to the attention of governments and the international community for action.

Montreal Protocol on Substances That Deplete the Ozone Layer

The Montreal Protocol on Substances That Deplete the Ozone Layer is an international treaty designed to protect the ozone layer by phasing out the production and consumption of a number of substances believed to be responsible for ozone depletion. The treaty was opened for signature on September 16, 1987 and entered into force on January 1, 1989. Since then, it has undergone five revisions, in 1990 (London), 1992 (Copenhagen), 1995 (Vienna), 1997 (Montreal), and 1999 (Beijing). Due to its widespread adoption and implementation it has been hailed as an example of exceptional international cooperation "Perhaps the single most successful international agreement to date..."

OzonAction Programme: www.unep.fr/ozonaction

Multilateral Fund: www.multilateralfund.org

Ozone Secretariat: www.ozone.unep.org