Scientists warn of growing threat to global warming from unchecked gases – UN

22 June 2009 – An international team of scientific researchers has warned that hydrofluorocarbon (HFC) gases – used increasingly in insulation foam, air-conditioning and refrigeration – present a significant threat to global efforts to stabilize climate change, in a move welcomed today by the head of the United Nations Environment Programme (**UNEP**).

A scientific paper published in the*Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*(PNAS) highlights the need for urgent action over the HFC group of greenhouse gases, arguing that their use could climb sharply as replacements for gases being phased out to protect the ozone layer, such as chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs).

"By some estimates, action to freeze and then reduce this group of gases [HFCs] could buy the world the equivalent of a decades-worth of C02 emissions," said Achim Steiner, UNEP Executive Director.

Mr. Steiner stressed that cutting carbon dioxide emissions is the key to accelerating a transition to a low carbon, resource efficient 'green economy.'

"It is also central to delivering a stabilization of the atmosphere as outlined by the assessments of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (**IPCC**)," he added.

According to a news release issued by UNEP, if HFC growth continues unchecked, by 2050 the amount of gas produced could total nine Giga tons, or the equivalent of 45 per cent of total CO2 emissions. Conversely, rapid action to freeze and to cut emissions annually alongside fostering readily available alternatives could see HFC emissions fall to under one Giga ton in the same period.

The projected growth in production and consumption of HFCs is in part linked with the success of the UNEP-administered Montreal Protocol, which has successfully phased out 97 per cent of chemicals that deplete the ozone layer.

In 2007, countries meeting in Canada, under the Montreal Protocol, agreed to speeding up the freeze and phase-out of hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs) – chemicals designed to replace the old, more ozone-damaging CFCs.

The new research findings in the PNAS indicate that unless urgent measures are taken to restrict HFCs, countries and companies are likely to pick this group of gases to replace HCFCs in products such as air conditioning units, refrigeration and insulating foams.

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