# Ozone Treaty Anniversary Gifts Big Birthday Present to Human Health and Combating of Climate Change

## Timor-Leste Makes Montreal Protocol First Global Environmental Agreement to Achieve Universal Ratification

**Nairobi, 16 September 2009**--A treaty to protect the ozone layer, which shields all life on Earth from deadly levels of ultra violet rays, has scored a first in the history of international environmental agreements.

Today Mr. Xanana Gusmão, the Prime Minister of the young Pacific nation of Timor-Leste, announced that it had ratified the Montreal Protocol making this the first environmental agreement to achieve universal participation by 196 parties.

"Timor-Leste is very pleased to be joining the rest of the world in the fight against the depletion of the ozone layer and the effort towards its recovery. We are proud to be part of this important process to protect the ozone layer and undertake to implement and comply with the Montreal Protocol like all other States that preceded us in this important journey," Mr. Gusmão said.

The historic announcement, made on the UN's International Day for the Preservation of the Ozone Layer, is the latest in a rapidly evolving list of achievements for the ozone treaties.

The Montreal Protocol, established to phase-out the pollutants that were damaging the planet's protective shield, will in just three months' time have completely retired close to 100 chemicals linked with ozone damage.

Today, as the sun rises in Australasia swiftly onto Timor-Leste before setting on Hawaii, United States—one of the first nations to ratify—countries will be marking not only the recovery of the ozone layer. They will also be celebrating the unique contribution that the Montreal Protocol has, and is continuing to contribute, to combating other key challenges including climate change.

Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), said:" The ratification by Timor-Leste makes this special day even more special and a signal that when the world fully and wholly unites around an environmental challenge there can be multiple and transformative effects".

"Without the Montreal Protocol and its Vienna Convention, atmospheric levels of ozone-depleting substances would have increased tenfold by 2050 which in turn could have led to up to 20 million more cases of skin cancer and 130 million more cases of eye cataracts, not to speak of damage to human immune systems, wildlife and agriculture," he added.

"Today we in addition know that some of the same gases contribute to climate change. By some estimates, the phase-out of ozone-depleting substances has since 1990 contributed a delay in global warming of some seven to 12 years underlining that a dollar spent on ozone has paid handsomely across other environmental challenges," said Mr Steiner.

Marco González, Executive Secretary of the Ozone Secretariat which is hosted by UNEP, said the focus was now switching from the original gases such as chloroflurocarbons (CFCs) to their replacement gases known as HCFCs and HFCs for uses in refrigerators, foams and flame retardants.

In 2007 governments agreed to accelerate the freeze and phase-out hydrochloflurocarbons or HCFCs—explicitly for their climate change impacts.

The maximum benefits here are only likely to occur if this goes hand in hand with the introduction of more energy efficient equipment that can work with substances that have low or zero global warming potential.

The focus is now also rapidly shifting to hydroflurocarbons (HFCs). This year scientists, reporting in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, suggested that if these became the replacement substances of choice, the climate impacts could be serious.

The scientists argue that HFC use could climb sharply in the coming years in products such as insulation foams air conditioning units and refrigeration as replacements.

Conversely, rapid action to freeze and to cut emissions annually alongside fostering readily available alternatives could see HFC emissions fall to under one Gigatonne by 2050.

“Importantly, governments last year requested the Executive Secretaries of the Montreal Protocol and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change to cooperate more closely on these issues and this was taken forward in 2009 in the spirit of One UN,” said Mr González.

In November in Port Ghalib, Egypt, governments will meet under the Montreal Protocol to chart the future directions for the treaty including its role in combating climate change.

Mr González emphasized that “this historic meeting, hosted by the Government of Egypt, will be the first to bring together the highest number ever of participating States for decision-making under an international treaty.”

These discussions will come just days before the key climate meeting in Copenhagen where nations are being urged to Seal the Deal on significant emissions reductions backed by support for adaptation for vulnerable countries and communities.

The story of the ozone layer also underlines that sustainably managing the environment is less costly and time-consuming than repairing damage once it has been done. Even with the swift and decisive action taken by governments under the Montreal Protocol, the Earth’s protective shield is likely to take another 40 years to 50 years to fully recover.

**Note to Editors:**

**About the Montreal Protocol**

The Montreal Protocol focuses on the protection of the earth's ozone layer. This treaty has enabled both developed and developing countries to achieve a near total phase-out in the production and use of most ozone depleting substances.

Because the majority of ozone depleting substances are also potent global warming gasses, the actions taken under the Montreal Protocol have contributed significantly to the global effort to address climate change.

**Interesting facts about the Montreal Protocol**

- The Montreal Protocol has achieved universal participation by all states in the world, the number of participating States is 196, an achievement unprecedented by any treaty;
- It is estimated that without the Protocol, by the year 2050 ozone depletion would have risen to at least 50% in the northern hemisphere's mid latitudes and 70% in the southern mid latitudes, about 10 times worse than current levels;
- The Montreal Protocol is estimated to have prevented:
  - ✓ 19 million more cases of non-melanoma cancer
  - ✓ 1.5 million more cases of melanoma cancer
  - ✓ 130 million more cases of eye cataracts
- Ninety seven per cent of all ozone depleting substances controlled by the global treaty known as the Montreal Protocol have been phased out – but what remains is still a challenge to eliminate;
- Global observations have verified that atmospheric levels of key ozone depleting substances are going down and it is believed that with implementation of the Protocol's provisions the ozone layer should return to pre-1980 levels by 2050 to 2075;
- In 2003, political recognition of the Protocol came in the statement of then United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan, who termed the Montreal Protocol "perhaps the single most successful international environmental agreement to date".

**The Ozone Layer**

The Ozone layer protects the earth's inhabitants from harmful UV radiation and is essential for life on Earth, as it screens out lethal UV-B radiation. Increased UV-B from ozone depletion can lead to:

- More melanoma and non-melanoma skin-cancers
- More eye cataracts
- Weakened immune systems – this may contribute to viral reactivation and a reduction of effectiveness of vaccines
- Reduced plant yields, changes in plant growth and form
- Damage to ocean eco-systems and reduced fishing yields
- Damage to wood and plastics

For additional information please visit the Ozone Secretariat website (ozone.unep.org) or contact:
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For the UN Secretary General message on the International Day for the Preservation of the Ozone Layer, please visit: http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2009/sgsm12449.doc.htm