



## Tanzania tightens control of substances that deplete the ozone layer

17 Sep 2008

By CHRISTOPHER MAGOLA

Tanzania is today joining the international community to mark The United Nations` (UN) International Day for the Preservation of the Ozone Layer celebrated on September 16 every year.

This event commemorates the date of the signing of the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer in 1987 and this year`s theme is `` Montreal Protocol - Global partnership for global benefits.

The theme seeks to advocate for global co-operation in implementing objectives of the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer.

The Montreal Protocol for the protection of the ozone, of which Tanzania is a signatory, is designed to protect the ozone layer by phasing out the production of a number of substances believed to be responsible for ozone depletion.

Ozone Depleting Substances (ODS) are man-made chemicals that, when released into the atmosphere, can cause the depletion of the Ozone Layer.

This leads to increased levels of ultraviolet radiation reaching the earth`s surface, which results in higher rates of skin cancer, eye cataracts and damage to people`s immune systems.

It also diminishes the productivity of food crops and reduces levels of plankton in the ocean.

Since 1987 the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer has sought to reverse past damage done to the Ozone Layer by supporting efforts to eliminate the consumption and production of ODS.

With the financial support of the Multilateral Fund for the Implementation of the Montreal Protocol, the Global Environment Facility and bi-lateral donors, UNDP assists developing countries and countries with economies in transition in complying with the Montreal Protocol`s control measures.

As earlier said Tanzania is among 193 countries in the world that have ratified the 1986 Montreal Protocol for chemicals which destroy the ozone layer which scientists believe is eroded by an average of 5 per cent per decade.

The harmful chemicals which deplete the ozone layer include Chlorofluorocarbons(CFCs) and halons which are used in some second-hand technologies such as used refrigerators which are being imported into the country.

Chlorofluorocarbons are a class of compounds of carbon, hydrogen, chlorine, and fluorine, gases used chiefly in refrigerators and aerosol propellants while halons are unreactive gaseous compounds of carbon with bromine and other halogens, used in fire extinguishers, but now also known to damage the ozone layers.

`` These chemicals that are being used in the second-hand refrigerators are not advisable and instead we should use new refrigerators with new technology that use non-toxic R 34 gases`` says Mbarak Abdulwakil, Deputy Permanent Secretary to the Vice President`s Office(Environment).

At a news conference on the day Abdulwakil said chlorofluorocarbons(CFCs) and halons chemicals are also used in production of other industrial products such as mattresses, air conditioners and also during iron melting.

There are also health products with these including air-fresheners and inhalers which are used by asthma patients.

When the ozone layer is destroyed, Ultra-violet B radiation (UVB) reaches the earth and as a result causes, among other things, skin cancers.

The radiation also affects eyes and reduces the body`s immune system to fight diseases.

However Abdulwakil said compliance by Tanzania to the Ozone protection protocol has reduced production of harmful chemicals for about 95 per cent as alternative chemicals and technologies are being developed.

On her part the Minister of State in the Vice President`s Office (Environment) Dr. Batilda Buriani called on industries and businesses importing the harmful chemicals to use alternative chemicals in production of their products.

The move, she said, will enable Tanzania to avoid the use of chemicals which deplete the ozone layer, which have been banned by the government but are imported by some businesses in defiance of the ban.

On his part the Principal Environmental Management Officer in the Vice President's Office (Environment), Issaria Mangalili said the government has set a deadline for importation and distribution of items containing ozone-depleting substances (ODS), such as reconditioned refrigerators and air-conditioners.

``We want importers, suppliers and the general public to understand that such items that contain chemicals, gases and other related ozone layer depleting substances will no longer be allowed here from 1 January 2010.

Whoever defies the ban will be taken to task`` the Principal Environmental Management Officer said at the press conference on International Ozone Day.

He said the Government had already put in place the Environmental Management (Control of Ozone Depleting Substances) Regulations of 2007 which requires among other things, ban of importation of items which emit and produce chemicals such as CFCs and HCFs that scientists say have proven to deplete the ozone layer.

Mr. Mangili said the reconditioned refrigerators and air conditioners, for example, contain gases commonly known as CFCs(R 12) which had proven to contribute to depletion of the ozone layer.

``There is no reason why people should continue to import or use such items, while we have many environmentally friendly alternative gases such as R 34`` he noted.

Another environmental expert, Mrs Kemilembe Mutasa said public awareness campaigns were being conducted throughout the country to educate various stakeholders on anticipated changes and the alternative use of gases which are not a threat to the ozone layer.

In his message to mark the day the Secretary General of the United Nations Ban Ki-Moon said market turmoil, economic downturns and talk of recession have historically spelt tough times for the environment.

At such moments, safeguarding the planet has often been seen as a luxury, and as a burden on economic recovery and development.

But the remarkable story of the ozone layer, whose preservation we celebrate today, shows such thinking for what it is: mere myth" said the UN Chief in his message.

He noted that decisive multilateral action on environmental threats and challenges can bring wide-ranging health, social and economic benefits, adding:

``The Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, which underpins our efforts to combat depletion of the earth's fragile protective shield, also contributes to combating climate change, since many of the chemicals controlled under the treaty have also emerged as ones that contribute to global warming.

By phasing out chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) -- once common in products such as refrigerators -- and now deciding to accelerate a freeze and phase-out of hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs), the treaty has provided two benefits at once`` he said.

Ban was hopeful that governments in the world will look at such results and feel empowered to act across a wide range of environmental challenges, and not only in prosperous times.

``Such action should include exploring more fully the natural synergies that can occur`` among our various multilateral environmental agreements`` he emphasized.

On next year's crucial meeting on the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change to be held in Copenhagen he said:`` Our goal must be a decisive new agreement that sets the world on track to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere, and that provides the funding needed for vulnerable countries to adapt to the impact of climate change.

Such an agreement would not only represent progress on one of the greatest challenges of our time, but is also likely to help tackle urban air pollution, deforestation, the loss of biodiversity and other dangers`` said the UN Secretary General.

He explained that after decades of chemical attack, it may take another 50 years or so for the ozone layer to recover fully.

``As the Montreal Protocol has taught us, when we degrade our environment too far, nursing it back to health tends to be a long journey, not a quick fix. But the overarching lesson of the Protocol is that by acting on one challenge, we also act on many others.

Continued progress, and the possibility of new breakthroughs from Copenhagen and other fora, would also make significant contributions to achieving the Millennium Development Goals`` Ban noted.

He concluded:`` On this International Day, let us pledge to seize more such multi-faceted opportunities, and do our utmost to create tomorrow's `green economy` today.

\* SOURCE: *GUARDIAN*