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Bonn Talks Seek Further Progress on Greenhouse Gas Cuts

BONN, 19 May (UNFCCC) -- Intergovernmental climate change talks will resume here from 12 to 16 June to pave the way for a political deal in The Hague next November that will commit developed countries to making significant cuts in their rising emissions of carbon dioxide and other global-warming gases.

“The current talks in Bonn as well as the next round in September – which will take place in Lyon at the invitation of French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin – must set the stage for a comprehensive deal in November,” said Michael Zammit Cutajar, the Convention’s Executive Secretary.

“I hope that a successful agreement at The Hague will trigger the ratifications necessary to bring the Kyoto Protocol into force by 2002. This would put developed countries on the path to meeting their Kyoto emissions-reduction targets. The Hague outcome must also support developing countries in their efforts to take further action under the Climate Change Convention,” he said.

Although adopted in 1997, the Protocol has not yet entered into force. Decisions on ratifying it are awaiting agreement on just how the Protocol will operate in practice. After finalizing the Kyoto rulebook in The Hague, many governments expect to be in a position to ratify the Protocol.

The Protocol, if fully implemented, should lead to a collective reduction of 5% in greenhouse gas emissions from developed countries compared to 1990 levels by the period 2008-2012. On the other hand, if these countries took no control measures their emissions would be expected to increase by 18% between 1990 and 2010. The Convention as well as the Protocol also promise to motivate and empower developing countries to address the climate change challenge through sustainable development.

“The urgency of finalizing the arrangements surrounding the Protocol and cementing the global partnership between developed and developing countries cannot be overstated,” said Zammit Cutajar. “Not only do we continue to see record warm temperatures around the world, but emissions from developed countries continue to grow. If these countries are to show

demonstrable progress in controlling emissions by the year 2005, as the Protocol states they must, and then hit their targets in subsequent years, they cannot afford to delay action.”

The 1997 Kyoto Protocol will enter into force 90 days after it has been ratified by at least 55 Parties to the Convention, including developed countries and those with economies in transition representing at least 55% of the total 1990 carbon dioxide emissions from this group. (The US accounts for 36.1% of these emissions, the European Union 24.2%, and Russia 17.4%.) The Protocol has been signed by 83 governments (plus the EC) and, as of mid-May, 22 countries – all from the developing world – have completed the next step of ratification

The June meetings in Bonn will focus on advancing understanding and narrowing differences on a complex array of technical and political issues relevant to both the Convention and the Protocol. The meetings consist of the 12th sessions of the Convention’s Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI) and Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA). These formal sessions will be preceded by one week of informal talks and workshops (which are not open to the press).

Many of the issues on the agenda involve making the Protocol both operational and environmentally credible. A great deal of methodological work is needed to make the accounting for national emissions and emissions reductions more rigorous and comparable from country to country. A particular concern is the accounting for forestry “sinks”, in which new trees absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, thus offsetting emissions. The regime to monitor and address compliance with Protocol commitments is also a key issue.

The Protocol's three "flexibility mechanisms" need to be finalized in a way that makes credible their contribution to emissions reductions. Under the Protocol, the use of the Clean Development Mechanism, Joint Implementation and emissions trading is to be supplemental to domestic action. The rulebook for operating these mechanisms has yet to be written, and a debate over whether or not there should be a ceiling for applying credits from these mechanisms to national targets must be resolved.

Other agenda items relate to the 1992 Convention. They include ongoing consultations on the development and transfer of technology, the special concerns of developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to climate change or to the economic consequences of emissions reductions by developed countries, the review of the second national communications from developed countries (these reports contain an inventory of national emissions data and describe efforts to implement the Convention), progress in receiving and analyzing national communications from developing countries, analysis of the financial mechanism (the Global Environment Facility), and national policies and measures for addressing climate change. Some countries are also seeking to discuss future commitments.

In addition, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) will present its recent scientific and technical reports to the delegates. The Special Report on Land Use, Land-Use Change, and Forestry, which was finalized in May, has a particular significance for the highly charged sinks debate. The Special Report on Emissions Scenarios, the Special Report on Methodological and Technological Issues in Technology Transfer, and the Report on Good Practice Guidance and Uncertainty Management in National Greenhouse Gas Inventories also have strong implications for the political negotiations.

The next and final round of preparatory talks will be hosted by the Government of France in Lyon from 11 to 15 September (also to be preceded by informal workshops). The Sixth Session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention (COP 6) will be held in The Hague from 13 to 24 November. The President-designate of the COP is Dutch Environment Minister Jan Pronk. COP 6 is expected to draw from 5,000 to 10,000 participants and many dozens of ministers.

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