



Press release

Pledging event raises \$33 million to address threat of massive oil spill in Red Sea

More funding is still urgently needed to start emergency operation to remove oil from the FSO Safer

The Hague, 11 May 2022 – The Government of the Netherlands and the United Nations co-hosted a pledging event in The Hague today where donors pledged US\$33 million in new funding for the UN-coordinated operational plan to address the threat of a major oil spill from the FSO Safer.

There is now \$40 million available for the operation, which includes previously committed funds. The decaying oil tanker is moored off the coast of Yemen and holds four times the amount of oil spilled by the Exxon Valdez. It could break apart or explode at any time.

The conference marked the start in the effort to raise the \$144 million that the plan requires, including \$80 million for an emergency operation to transfer the oil to a safe temporary vessel. Also critical to the plan's success is the installation of a long-term replacement capacity.

“Today has been an important step forward in eliminating the threat posed by the FSO Safer. In today's pledging event, we managed to collect a sizeable amount. We will continue to support the UN in the month of May to gather the remaining funds needed. Many countries are showing great interest to join the effort. I am hopeful we will get there,” said Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of the Netherlands Liesje Schreinemacher. The Netherlands pledged almost \$8 million. The other donors signing pledging commitments were Germany, the United Kingdom, the European Union, Qatar, Sweden, Norway, Finland, France, Switzerland and Luxembourg.

The result of a major spill would be a humanitarian and environmental catastrophe and cost the region tens of billions of dollars in cleanup and economic costs. More than 200,000 Yemenis in the fishing industry could lose their livelihoods overnight, tourism would be affected as far away as Egypt and shipping could be disrupted through the Bab al-Mandab straight and the Suez canal. The environmental damage in the Red Sea and its coastlines would be severe. Minister of Foreign Trade of the Netherlands Wopke Hoekstra said: “Together, we can prevent one of the largest environmental disasters in history and save lives. Cleaning up a disaster caused by the FSO Safer would cost an estimated \$20 billion. Preventing it will cost only \$144 million. It's a very simple business case. But it does require us to act.”

“We are grateful to the donors that committed funding today at very short notice and look forward to receiving further commitments from those that have not yet pledged. When we have the funding, the work can begin,” said David Gressly, the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen. “Today marks a strong launch of our efforts to ensure the project's success, including outreach to the private sector. We need to work quickly to get the remaining funds to start the four-month operation in the weather window we have ahead of us,”

The planned operation comprises the installation of a replacement vessel or equivalent capacity and the emergency operation to transfer the oil to a safe temporary vessel. The plan would cover the salaries of a crew to maintain the leased temporary vessel until the long-term solution is implemented.

“The timing and funding are both critical. If we do not receive sufficient funding urgently, the weather window to transfer the oil will close. By October, high winds and volatile currents make the operation more dangerous and increase the risk of the ship breaking up,” said Auke Lootsma, UNDP Yemen Resident Representative.



Background for editors

In September, the United Nations' senior management instructed Mr. Gressly to provide UN system-wide leadership on the FSO Safer and coordinate all efforts to mitigate the threat. He continues to engage in discussions with a wide range of stakeholders on the operational plan to resolve the threat while supporting work to strengthen contingency plans in the event of a catastrophic oil leak.

Constructed in 1976 as an oil tanker and converted a decade later to be a floating storage facility for oil, the FSO Safer is moored about 4.8 nautical miles off the coast of Hodeidah governorate. The 376-metre-long vessel contains more than one million barrels of light crude oil – four times the amount spilled by the Exxon Valdez. With no maintenance operations undertaken on the Safer since 2015 due to the conflict, its structural integrity has significantly deteriorated, and the vessel is at imminent risk of spilling oil due to leakages or an explosion.

A significant spill would quickly surpass national capacity and resources to mount an effective spill response. The result would be catastrophic, devastating the Yemen coast, destroying livelihoods and likely forcing a closure of the ports of Al Hodeidah and As Salif - which are essential for the importation of commercial imports and life-saving humanitarian assistance. Depending on the season and prevailing wind and currents, the environmental impact would also affect Saudi Arabia, Eritrea, Djibouti and Somalia, and could disrupt vital shipping through the Bab al-Mandab Strait and the Red Sea.

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