

**OFFICE OF THE RESIDENT COORDINATOR
AND HUMANITARIAN COORDINATOR FOR YEMEN**

Near verbatim transcription

Statement

UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, David Gressly, opening remarks at the Sana'a Center online briefing on the UN-coordinated plan to address the threat of the FSO Safer

13 June 2022

Well, Spencer, thank you very much. It's really great to be here. I would like to thank you and the Sana'a Center for the opportunity to reach out to all of the media that's online. And I look forward to answering questions as we go forward this afternoon. I would like to start off with just a brief outline of the overall plan that we have in place and then talk about the resource requirements, which is the critical piece that we're facing right now.

We do have an operational plan that has the confirmed commitment from the authorities here in Sana'a and, equally important, the government of Yemen. In fact, we just had consultations on that today, in both Sana'a and Aden to reconfirm that. So this plan is well endorsed in terms of the overall approach.

So that was an important step to get this operation going. We are very far advanced on procurement of the salvage operation and vessel procurement for transferring the oil.

So we're basically pretty ready to go. We have about \$144 million we need to carry the whole operation through in two stages – an initial emergency operation just to get the oil out of the current Safer tanker into a secure vessel and then a longer term, second stage to replace the existing capacity that the current FSO vessel represents.

Frankly speaking, the primary constraint we face is no longer really political, security, procurement or operational. It's resources. And that's really why I want to highlight that aspect today. And so we've made an appeal in the Netherlands back in May where we raised about \$33 million.

We need \$80 million to start this operation – to do the emergency phase. We need the additional \$64 million, approximately, to complete the second stage. So we have the \$33 million plus roughly \$5 million-\$6 million that we already had in hand. We were roughly in the \$40 million range and I want to thank the donors that made those initial pledges because that was extremely important to get this resource mobilization initiative underway.

Specifically, I would like to highlight the role that the Netherlands has played in not only making a significant contribution, but in the continued outreach to other member states to support. Germany, which has made a very significant contribution. The United Kingdom, European Union, Qatar, Sweden, Norway, Finland, France, Switzerland, and Luxemburg have all made [pledges or]

contributions that have carried us to this point. And, most recently, both the United States as well as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have pledged an additional \$10 million each, which gets us to about the \$60 million threshold of the initial \$80 million that we need to raise to start the operation. Our discussions with other donors for the second stage are well underway. So we're optimistic that we'll raise the funding for both stages in an appropriate time. But let's focus on where we are today and how we can close the current gap. And that's really what I want to highlight because we're launching a social media fundraising campaign that will open tomorrow [14 June]. It's important that we get the word out to the public that we really need to get this funding going.

So, we do have for the [emergency operation] about a \$20 million gap and we really need to raise that as soon as possible. We're still in a good period for the operation, but by the time we get to October, November, the environment to carry out the operation becomes more difficult. More importantly, it's because of the nature of the winds and currents that increase the chances that this vessel, which is old and decaying, will break up. That would be the highest time of risk in fact. So, we really want to get this going quickly.

We're trying to get to this \$80 million figure by the end of this month, it's doable, but it's going to take a push and that's why we're calling on the public to help us to cross the finish line to get that first \$80 million in place.

\$20 million is really not much when you look at the overall cost that this catastrophe would have. If indeed there were a spill, the estimates that we've received on the cleanup alone would be \$20 billion. A \$20 million additional investment today to save \$20 billion seems like a very easy business case to make. A return of \$1,000 on every dollar invested. But that \$20 billion is just the cleanup cost. It doesn't count the other costs that will affect the region.

The disruption to international shipping would have a major cost – costing huge amounts on a daily basis. We saw that with the recent incident of the Ever Given when it ran aground – how that impacted. That potential is there. If there's sufficient pollution in the shipping lanes that could have a significant impact. It will certainly have a significant impact on the ecosystems. The Red Sea is known for its pristine environments, which would no longer be pristine after such a spill. The reefs and the mangroves across the Red Sea could be affected. It might take as much as 25 years to restock the fisheries.

Any country along the Red Sea could be affected. It would depend on the currents and winds at the time of the spill. That would determine which countries, but that means all countries are currently at risk. Tourism on the Red Sea would be affected. Desalination plants would be affected. It would affect not only the Arabian peninsula coastline of the Red Sea, but also the African coastline.

But of course, Yemen, currently in conflict, would be the most affected.

Fishing communities would be devastated with maybe as many as 200,000 jobs wiped out overnight. This industry supports over 2 million people, directly or indirectly. Whole families would be exposed to pollutants. Millions of people would be forced to breathe more polluted air. The ports of Hudeidah and Saleef would be closed. These are the ports that supply the majority of Yemenis with food, whether commercial or humanitarian assistance, but also fuel and other life-saving

commodities. 17 million Yemenis are already uncertain where their next meal will come from, even in the current circumstances with the ports open.

There's too much at stake to allow this to happen. And we're so close. We just need to bridge that gap and we can start this operation. As I said earlier, we need about \$144 million to carry the whole operation through. We need \$80 million to start it, to get the emergency operation done, and then we'll work on the long-term replacement capacity.

As I mentioned at the beginning, the political will is there. We reconfirm that periodically. They're anxious in fact that we start. We don't see any real obstacle to move ahead from that front. We just need the funding, as I keep saying. We're close, but we're not there. Every day that goes by is another day that we take a risk, a chance that this vessel will break up and the catastrophe that I described will unfold.

We need to take action. As I mentioned earlier, as we get into October, November, December, the odds of that happening will be significantly higher. So we're running out of time.

That's why today I'm announcing a social media fundraising campaign to help us close the gap. We're asking the global public and not just member states – the global public to crowdfund a quarter of the remaining gap. That would be \$5 million for this emergency operation. \$5 million is an ambitious goal for this kind of campaign, but, given the stakes, I think it is one that we should strive for.

Importantly, every dollar that the public puts forward in this operation sends a message to all other member states and private companies, foundations that have not yet contributed or could contribute that they also need to act now before it's too late.

The campaign will be located on the UN website at un.org/StopRedSeaSpill.

That's fairly obvious. It will be hosted by the global United Nations website. Or it will also be accessible through the UN Foundation where there is a donation page hosted. So you can either access the donations through the global UN website or go directly to the UN Foundation and make your contribution directly there.

I'm basically appealing to the public as well as member states to help us close this gap, start this operation, and save a catastrophe that is not just a probability or possibility, but a certainty if we do not act. It's not only a question of when. It's not a question of if. Let's get it done now, if we can.

Thank you very much for your time, your attention and your support. Thank you.

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