



## United Nations Takes Next Major Step to Prevent Catastrophic Oil Spill in Red Sea

*The UN Development Programme has contracted the Boskalis subsidiary SMIT Salvage to transfer 1 million barrels of oil off a decaying tanker. The team's vessel Ndeavor sets sail to the Red Sea today. Funding is urgently required.*

**Rotterdam, The Netherlands, 20 April 2023** – In the latest critical step towards preventing a massive oil spill off Yemen's Red Sea coast, the global leading maritime services company Boskalis's support vessel *Ndeavor* will sail en route to the Red Sea in the coming hours.

On Wednesday, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) finalized the contract for the Boskalis subsidiary SMIT Salvage to transfer the million barrels of oil aboard the FSO *Safer* to a safe replacement vessel and prepare the *Safer* for towing to a green scrapping yard.

The work off Yemen's Ras Isa peninsula is expected to begin in May. UNDP earlier secured the replacement vessel, *Nautica*, which will take on the oil from the *Safer*.

"The agreement today between UNDP and Boskalis subsidiary SMIT Salvage, to deploy a team of leading experts aboard the *Ndeavour* marks another critical milestone of the 'Stop Red Sea Spill' operation to transfer oil from the decaying FSO *Safer* to a safe temporary vessel," said Achim Steiner, UNDP Administrator. "We look forward to be working with Boskalis and other leading experts to prevent a humanitarian, environmental and economic disaster. We also appeal to leaders from governments and corporations to step forward and help us raise the remaining \$29 million required to complete this complex rescue operation."

"This operation highlights the unique role the UN can play to address the world's seemingly intractable problems. UNDP and other partners inside and outside the UN should be proud of their roles in getting us this far," said David Gressly, the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen, who has led UN system-wide efforts on the *Safer* since 2021. "However, we urgently need to close the \$29 million funding gap for the emergency operation and raise the additional funds needed to ensure safe long-term storage of the oil."

The multipurpose support vessel *Ndeavor*, which will sail with its crew and experts, is loaded with generators, hydraulic pumps and other specialized equipment to carry out the operation on the *Safer*, which no longer has functioning systems.

"Following a long planning period, our salvage experts are keen to get to work and remove the oil from the *Safer*," said Peter Berdowski, CEO Boskalis, who has signed the contract through its subsidiary SMIT Salvage with the UN Development Programme. "I would like to express my gratitude to the many UN member nations in their support for this operation including the Netherlands. The Boskalis vessel *Ndeavor* is ready for departure, and I wish the crew all the success in this important mission."

On Monday, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands announced they will co-host a pledging event on 4 May with the aim of fully funding both phases of the *Safer* project.

"An enormous oil disaster is looming, which could have serious humanitarian, environmental and economic implications. But we now have a chance to prevent that disaster," said the Dutch Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation Liesje Schreinemacher. "The Netherlands has worked hard to mobilise funds for the operation and now a major new step has been taken. It's good that Dutch firm Boskalis is taking on a key role in the response. The Netherlands will continue helping the UN to bring this to a good end."

The United Nations has received firm funding commitments of \$99.6 million. The total budget for this first phase is \$129 million, leaving a gap of \$29.4 million. An estimated \$19 million is required for the second phase of the operation.

To fill the budget gap, the UN is appealing to Member States and private entities, as well as the global public through a crowdfunding appeal to which thousands of individuals have already contributed.

To learn more: [www.un.org/StopRedSeaSpill](http://www.un.org/StopRedSeaSpill).

### For more information

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## **Background**

The *Safer* has been moored about nine kilometers off Yemen's Ras Isa peninsula since 1988 and could explode or break up at any time. Due to the conflict in Yemen, the FSO *Safer* has decayed to the point where there is an imminent risk it could explode or break apart, which would have disastrous effects on the region and beyond.

A major spill would devastate fishing communities on Yemen's Red Sea coast, likely wiping out 200,000 livelihoods instantly. Whole communities would be exposed to life-threatening toxins. Highly polluted air would affect millions. It could close the ports of Hodeidah and Saleef – which are essential to bring food, fuel and life-saving supplies into Yemen, where 17 million people need food assistance. The closure of desalination plants would cut off a water source for millions of people. Oil from the *Safer* could reach the African coast and affect any country on the Red Sea. The environmental impact on coral reefs, life-supporting mangroves and other marine life would be severe. Fish stocks would take 25 years to recover.

The cost of cleanup alone is estimated at \$20 billion. Disruptions to shipping through the Bab al-Mandab strait to the Suez Canal could cost billions more in global trade losses every day, as happened after the *Ever Given* grounded in the Canal in 2021.

The UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen, David Gressly, has led UN system-wide efforts since September 2021. UNDP is implementing this complex and high-risk project.

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### **For more information**

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