



United Nations Takes Major Step Forward to Prevent Catastrophic Oil Spill in Red Sea as UN Development Programme Signs Agreement to Purchase Oil Tanker

Purchase of vessel is a critical development in operation to remove more than a million barrels of oil from decaying supertanker off Yemen's Red Sea coast. Funding still urgently needed to complete safe removal of oil

New York, 9 March 2023 – the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) signed an agreement with Euronav today to secure the purchase of a Very Large Crude Carrier – or 'VLCC' – as part of the UN-coordinated operation to remove more than a million barrels of oil from a decaying tanker off Yemen's Red Sea coast that threatens a humanitarian and environmental catastrophe.

The replacement vessel is now in drydock for modifications and regular maintenance before sailing to the FSO *Safer*, moored about nine kilometers off Yemen's Ras Isa peninsula. It is expected to arrive in early May for the operation.

The FSO *Safer* has not been maintained since 2015 because of the conflict in Yemen. It 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.

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 would also result in the closure of 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. Desalination plants would close, cutting 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 Development Programme (UNDP), which is implementing the high-risk operation as part of the UN-coordinated initiative, is contracting marine salvage company SMIT to safely remove the oil and prepare the *Safer* for towing to a green scrapping yard.

UNDP Administrator Achim Steiner said, "The purchase of this suitable vessel by UNDP marks the beginning of the operational phase of the UN-coordinated plan to safely remove the oil from the *Safer* and avoid the risk of an environmental and humanitarian disaster on a massive scale. We must accept that this is a very challenging and complex operation. UNDP is working around the clock with experts from UN sister agencies including IMO, WFP and UNEP among others as well as international consultancies on maritime law, insurance and environmental impact to ensure that we are deploying the best possible expertise to successfully complete this operation."

While the project to remove the oil has received significant international support, spiraling costs mostly related to the war in Ukraine that triggered a significant price increase in the market for suitable vessels to undertake the operation mean more money is still needed to complete the emergency phase of the plan. As of 7 March, the UN has raised \$95 million, of which \$75 million has been received. The total budget for the emergency phase of the project is \$129 million.

From Sana'a, David Gressly, the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen, who has led on UN system-wide efforts on the *Safer* since September 2021, said, "UNDP's purchase of the vessel is indeed a major step, made possible by the generosity of donors, the private sector and global citizens. The parties to the conflict continue to endorse the plan. Now we are into the operational phase and hopeful the oil will be removed from the *Safer* within the next three to four months. But we still urgently need funding to implement the plan and prevent disaster."

To fill the budget gap, the UN is re-launching a crowdfunding appeal which saw thousands of individuals around the world contribute to the FSO *Safer* project in 2021. To learn more, visit www.un.org/StopRedSeaSpill.

For more information

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