



Security Council

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Letter dated 17 July 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council

I have the honour to enclose herewith a copy of the briefings provided by the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, Inger Andersen, and the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock, in connection with the video-teleconference on the “The situation in the Middle East (Yemen)”, convened on Wednesday, 15 July 2020. Statements were also delivered by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Yemen, Mohammed Abdullah Al-Hadhrami, and the representatives of Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

In accordance with the procedure set out in the letter dated 7 May 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council (S/2020/372), which was agreed in the light of the extraordinary circumstances caused by the coronavirus disease pandemic, the briefings and statements will be issued as an official document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Christoph Heusgen
President of the Security Council



Annex I

Statement by the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, Inger Andersen

The Red Sea environment and its people are currently seriously exposed to the risk of a massive oil leakage from the *FSO SAFER*, a floating storage and offloading unit that is anchored 4.8 nautical miles off Ras Isa, Yemen. The *FSO SAFER* contains an estimated 1,148,000 barrels of Marib Light crude oil. Should the situation get out of control, it will directly affect millions of people in a country that is already enduring the world's largest humanitarian emergency. It will destroy entire ecosystems for decades and extend beyond borders.

However, in this bleak picture, there is one bright spot. This disaster is entirely preventable — if we act fast. The United Nations possesses the capacity to intervene and resolve the problem.

Allow me to provide some background. The *FSO SAFER* has not been maintained since 2015. Its condition is deteriorating daily, increasing the potential for an oil spill. If that happens, it will cause an environmental catastrophe, with an impact on ecosystems and the lives of, potentially, 28 million people who rely on those ecosystems for their livelihoods. As a consequence, it is not unlikely that it would also contribute to a deterioration of security in the region, as the resources upon which the population relies would become polluted, scarce and contested.

The following two scenarios are considered increasingly likely. First, corrosion and lack of maintenance of the *FSO SAFER* for an extended period of time leads to some of the oil leaking into the sea. Secondly, an explosion and fire on board, caused by accidental ignition of gas accumulated in the cargo tanks, results in a catastrophic scenario, with massive leakage of most or all of the oil into the sea.

An oil spill or explosion in the Red Sea could have a serious, long-lasting environmental impact. The Red Sea is one of the most important repositories of biodiversity on the planet. Its waters support internationally important species, including marine mammals, sea turtles, and seabirds. The coastal marine environments of the region consist of arid coastal zones, coastal wetlands, mangroves, seagrass and coral reefs, which constitute the basis of much of the region's unique biodiversity, its fisheries production and its conservation and recreational value. It is estimated that a total of 28 million people rely on the natural resources of the Red Sea and the coastal zone for their livelihoods. Beyond the impact on nature, therefore, an oil spill or an explosion would have a massive impact on the livelihoods and the health of the people relying on the area's natural resources, including fisheries.

Independent experts were recently commissioned to model worst-case scenarios involving an oil spill and explosion from the *FSO SAFER*. Among the possible scenarios, the study found that an oil spill at any time of the year would pose an immense threat to livelihoods. But the worst situation would occur if the oil spill happened during the period of July to September, given prevailing currents and winds. The key findings of the modelling project impacts along the following lines.

With regard to fisheries along the Red Sea coast of Yemen, 100 per cent would be affected in the early days, and the cost could rise to \$1.5 billion over the course of 25 years.

The closure of Al-Hudaydah port for five to six months could result in a 200 per cent increase in fuel prices in Yemen for several months.

Food prices would likely double and traders currently based in Al-Hudaydah port would need to partially shift their operations to Aden port, which would struggle to accommodate the additional volume.

Further atmospheric dispersion modelling completed in 2020, whereby the entire cargo is consumed by fire between July and September, projects that more than 8.4 million people would be exposed to harmful levels of air pollutants. That model further projects that 500 square kilometres of agricultural land along the shore in Yemen would be affected, resulting in a \$70 million loss in production, 3.25 million farmers hit by crop loss and over 8,000 water wells placed at risk of contamination.

The health impacts of hydrocarbons on humans have been well studied and range from skin irritation to cancer. In the case of an oil spill situation, some compounds of the hydrocarbons could bioaccumulate in living organisms, such as shellfish, and could become more concentrated along the food chain. Humans may become exposed to concentrations of those contaminants in food that could be orders of magnitude higher than in the contaminated environment. That is particularly problematic because people who live far away from the oil spill location could be impacted by consuming food coming from the spill-affected area.

The Government of Yemen has published an assessment on the environmental risks posed by the *FSO SAFER*. Modelling of a potential oil spill has also been undertaken with the Mutual Aid Centre of the Regional Organization for the Conservation of the Environment of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden (PERSGA).

Although it is the west coast of Yemen that would be the worst affected by far, the impact of any oil spill would also quickly extend to neighbouring Red Sea countries, including Djibouti, Eritrea and Saudi Arabia. An oil spill in the Red Sea would also affect demand for fish from the entire Red Sea. It would also impact the movement of the more than 20,000 ships that pass through the Red Sea each year, potentially crippling one of the busiest commercial routes in the world.

An operational response to any oil spill would need to include containment and recovery of the oil at sea and a shoreline clean-up and subsequent disposal of the resulting contaminated material. Even if the response activities were to be initiated immediately after the oil spill event, it would nonetheless take years for the ecosystems and the economies to recover. The conflict in Yemen would also impede efforts to address an environmental emergency in a timely and effective manner.

Without assistance, neither the Government of Yemen nor the neighbouring countries currently has the capacity to manage and mitigate the consequences of a massive oil spill and the resulting environmental catastrophe. The international actors, including those from the private sector, that would typically respond to such incidents would be reluctant to deploy their personnel and resources to the conflict zone.

Although PERSGA has prepared a draft regional contingency plan, in our assessment that plan would need considerable additional support to be tested, and further developed in order to be implemented in the event of an incident.

In addition, the coronavirus disease crisis has relegated the oil spill issue to further down the priority list of the States of the region. Preventing the crisis from intensifying is really the only option to avoid an environmental and human catastrophe. Despite the difficult operational context, no effort should be spared to first conduct a technical assessment and initial light repairs. That will provide independent evidence of the appropriate next steps while gaining additional time.

Given the age and condition to the tanker, it is likely that the safest option will be to remove the vessel. If this is confirmed by the assessment, it means we will need to work with the parties to, first, offload the oil from the *FSO SAFER*; secondly, tow away the *FSO SAFER* to a safe location for inspection; and, thirdly, assess and possibly dismantle the *FSO SAFER* in an environmentally sound manner. These

elements are being discussed at different levels with the various shareholders. The immediate priority remains the same: assessment and light repairs.

At the same time, we must nonetheless — in tandem with such prevention efforts — continue to plan for an effective response should an oil spill occur.

The United Nations Environment Programme has been working with the International Maritime Organization, the United Nations Office for Project Services, the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and PERSGA to develop a response plan.

If the *FSO SAFER* leaks, potentially spilling four times more oil into the Red Sea than the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill, which took place in Alaska in 1989, with 275,000 barrels of oil spilled, ecosystems and fisheries would be damaged for an extended period into the future. People who have already been impoverished by conflict would suffer further health and economic impacts. An environmental crisis could also exacerbate regional divisions.

Time is running out for us to act in a coordinated manner to prevent a looming environmental, economic and humanitarian catastrophe. It is therefore imperative that access be granted to the *FSO SAFER* to assess and inspect the current state of the vessel, so that evacuation of the oil can be safely done to prevent such an environmental and human catastrophe.

Annex II

Statement by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock

I have briefed the Council 15 times on the *FSO SAFER* tanker in the last 15 months. Most of those 15 briefings have repeated the same information. With little concrete progress, there was little new to say until quite recently.

But in May, a leak on the *FSO SAFER* brought us closer than ever to an environmental catastrophe. Last week, Ansar Allah authorities confirmed in writing that they would accept a long-planned United Nations mission to the tanker, which we hope will take place within the next few weeks.

We understand that Member States are working to finalize funding to pay for the United Nations mission, which in the first phase will include a technical assessment and any initial repairs that prove possible. Member States have also been helpful in using their good offices to advocate in favour of this work.

So this is a good moment to recap where we are with the *FSO SAFER* and where, we hope, we are going. There are four issues I should like to update the Council on today: first, the recent leak onboard; secondly, what a major spill would mean for local communities; thirdly, what we have been doing about it; and, fourthly, what will happen next.

Let us start with the incident beginning on 27 May, when seawater began leaking into the *FSO SAFER* engine room. It is difficult to know precisely what caused that leak, as no maintenance has been carried out on the *FSO SAFER* and there have been no international visits to it since the conflict in Yemen escalated nearly six years ago.

Water coming uncontrollably into the engine room could destabilize the *FSO SAFER* and potentially sink the entire structure. That would almost certainly lead to a severe oil spill. As the Council heard from Inger, the *FSO SAFER* is carrying 1.1 million barrels of oil. That is about four times as much oil as was discharged in the Exxon Valdez disaster — a spill that the world still talks about 30 years later.

Fortunately, the engine room leak was relatively small, and divers from the *SAFER* Exploration and Production Operations Company were able to contain it. That dangerous work took five days, with divers spending a cumulative 28 hours underwater. The world owes them a debt of gratitude, and I want to commend them on their work. But the fix they applied is only temporary, and it is impossible to say how long it might hold. The world might have a bit more time to solve the larger problem, but not much.

This brings me to my second point — the impact of a spill. The Council has just heard from Inger about the appalling environmental consequences for Yemen and its neighbours. A spill would also be bad news for the Yemeni people, millions of whom already depend on humanitarian aid after nearly six years of war and now an unprecedented pandemic.

Independent experts have modelled what a major spill might look like depending on seasonal conditions and other factors. In every scenario, coastal communities would be severely affected in Taiz, Al-Hudaydah and Hajjah, mostly in areas controlled by Ansar Allah authorities.

If a spill were to occur in the next two months, experts project that 1.6 million Yemenis would be directly affected. Essentially every fishing community along Yemen's west coast would see their livelihoods collapse and would suffer substantial

economic losses. About 90 per cent of the people in those communities already need humanitarian assistance.

Sea currents and seasonal conditions also mean that much of the oil would likely remain near Yemen's coast rather than dispersing widely. As a result, the port in Al-Hudaydah could be forced to close for a period of weeks or even months.

Yemen imports nearly everything, and most imports come through Al-Hudaydah or the port at nearby Saleef. Losing either of those ports for an extended period would destabilize critical commercial and aid imports of food and other essential commodities. That would inflict terrible additional suffering on millions of Yemenis, including people who are already going hungry in Sana'a, Saada, Ibb and other places located away from coastal areas.

It would also deliver another severe blow to Yemen's already embattled economy. The resulting disruption would substantially accelerate recent trends that are already — once again — pushing the country towards famine. International maritime routes and neighbouring States would also be affected.

So I want to be clear that the risk from the *FSO SAFER* is by no means strictly environmental, dreadful though the environmental impact would be, as Inger has described. It is also a direct and severe threat to the well-being — and potentially the survival — of millions of Yemenis. We are deeply concerned about those people, and we want to do everything we can to avoid this new blow falling upon them.

That brings me to my next point: the role of the United Nations. The Government of Yemen and the Ansar Allah authorities formally requested United Nations assistance with the *FSO SAFER* in March 2018, more than two years ago. The first step was to be a technical assessment, in order to provide impartial evidence to guide the next steps, which might potentially include the safe extraction of the oil and removal of the *FSO SAFER* structure, were the parties to agree to that.

For much of 2018, a coalition-backed military offensive in Al-Hudaydah made it too dangerous to visit the site. But with the Stockholm Agreement in December of that year and the subsequent ceasefire in Al-Hudaydah, safe access again became possible. Since then, the United Nations has been working closely with the parties to secure the necessary clearances so that the United Nations technical team can deploy.

The Government of Yemen has agreed to the assessment and has actively sought to facilitate access to the *SAFER*. The Ansar Allah authorities have also consistently agreed — in principle. In fact, authorities in Sana'a have sent several letters to the United Nations and to the Security Council confirming their agreement. They have also made public statements to that effect.

But in the past, the Ansar Allah authorities have been unwilling to accept a mission in practice. Instead, they imposed preconditions and linked the *SAFER* with other issues.

I have provided the Council, in my previous 15 briefings, with a running commentary on this protracted bureaucratic minuet of permissions to visit being sought, apparently being granted and then turning out in fact not to have been granted.

The most frequent demand from the Ansar Allah authorities has been to deploy the United Nations Verification and Inspection Mechanism (UNVIM) to Al-Hudaydah prior to any assessment of the *FSO SAFER*. That is a completely unrelated issue to that of the tanker.

I must emphasize here that from a humanitarian perspective, we do not take a position on where UNVIM is deployed. That is a political issue and is subject to agreement by the parties. My only objective — with the *FSO SAFER*,

UNVIM and indeed all of our work — is to alleviate suffering and prevent a humanitarian catastrophe.

The Ansar Allah authorities have also sought assurances that repair works will occur simultaneously with the assessment. We would like to do that and so have adjusted the mission plan to include both a technical assessment and whatever initial repairs might be feasible. Obviously, though, you have to find out what the problem is before you can fix it, and you cannot do either without visiting.

Initial repairs, insofar as they might be possible, may buy us a little more time to find a sustainable solution, but they will not be enough to eliminate the risk of a disaster. The assessment results will provide an impartial analysis of what needs to happen next and of what kind of equipment and other resources will be required.

Without prejudging the outcome of the assessment, industry experts have told us we should expect additional repairs to be necessary. But for the reason I have just given about initial repairs, they do not know exactly what those required additional repairs will be. Experts have also said that extracting the oil is probably the only way to remove the threat of a spill from the 44-year-old tanker for good.

This brings me to my last point: where do we go from here?

Last week, we received encouraging news. Ansar Allah officials confirmed to the United Nations in writing that they are ready to authorize the United Nations mission to the *FSO SAFER*. They have also communicated their intention to issue entry permits for mission personnel. I welcome that announcement.

We have, of course, been here before. In August 2019, we received similar assurances and, on that basis, deployed the United Nations team and equipment to Djibouti at significant expense. The Ansar Allah authorities cancelled that mission the night before departure.

But it is not too late, and we remain eager to assist. The United Nations team can deploy within three weeks of receiving all the necessary permits. We are in touch with the Government of Yemen for their approvals. Yesterday we also submitted an official request to the Ansar Allah authorities, which includes details on the mission plan, personnel and technical equipment. We hope that these requests and other logistical arrangements will be quickly approved, without preconditions.

The Ansar Allah authorities have an important opportunity here to take steps that will spare millions of their fellow citizens from yet another tragedy. We are eager to work with them to do this.

Annex III**Statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Yemen,
Mohammed Al-Hadhrami**

[Original: English and Arabic]

Allow me at the outset to thank you, Mr. President, on behalf of the Government and the people of Yemen, for having convened this important and timely meeting on the issue of the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker, which, if left unaddressed, would imminently result in an economic and environmental catastrophe that would affect not only Yemen and Yemenis but also the region and the entire world.

The reason for calling for this special meeting was simple. We knew that the only way to resolve this potential disaster, which has lingered on for years because of the Houthis' intransigence despite all our efforts, is to put pressure on them and draw the world's attention to this matter through the Security Council. The solution to this devastating disaster is not a difficult one and starts with allowing the United Nations technical team to access and assess the floating oil tanker. But that simple procedure, however, never came to fruition because the Houthis have not allowed it. And, as time went by, we realized that the Houthi militias saw the importance of the *FSO SAFER* tanker to us and the international community and decided to use it as a bargaining chip or leverage in the peace process negotiations, with complete disregard for the potentially drastic consequences of that unethical behaviour.

Ever since early 2018, we have been trying, with the help of the United Nations, to convince the Houthi militias to grant the United Nations team access, and we have failed. Under pressure, however, the Houthis always make empty promises, and, when the pressure is off, they renege on their commitments. We have seen it happen on this issue before and on other issues as well. That is also why we need this meeting — to send the Houthis a strong signal that this time they must comply.

When we look at the alarming consequences of this disaster — which will, among other things, result in an oil spill of more than 1 million barrel of crude oil into the Red Sea and the closure of the vital port of Al-Hudaydah for months; endanger marine life and biodiversity; and expose millions of people in Yemen to toxic gases in the event of a fire — we realize that we have to act now.

We believe that the best course of action is to support the latest stand-alone detailed proposal on the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker, which we received last month from the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, Mr. Martin Griffiths (see S/PV.8753). We agreed to it on the condition that it would not be linked to any other issues or processes under discussion.

The proposal consists of three stages: first, assessment and necessary repairs; secondly, basic maintenance to facilitate oil extraction; and thirdly, disposal of the tanker. All potential revenue from the sale of oil is to contribute to paying the salaries of civil servants in Yemen.

The Government of Yemen has agreed to this and the Houthis have not. I am afraid that settling for the Houthis merely granting access to the tanker at this stage will not solve the problem. Instead, it would enable them yet again to hijack the issue in the future when the pressure is lifted.

In conclusion, allow me once again to express our gratitude to the members of the Council for answering the call to put an end to this looming catastrophe. I truly hope that today will be the last time the Council hears about the ongoing issue regarding the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker and that it will be resolved before it is too late.

Annex IV

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Egypt to the United Nations

Allow me at the outset to commend you, Sir, on the efficient manner in which you have been steering the work of the Security Council during the month of July, and to express my delegation's appreciation to you and the other Members of the Council for giving us this opportunity to address the alarming deterioration in the condition of the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker.

I also wish to thank the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme for their valuable briefings.

The crisis in Yemen continues to be one of the most pressing threats to international peace and security and one of the world's worst humanitarian catastrophes. Egypt continues to call for a comprehensive Yemeni-led and-owned political process leading to a peaceful settlement of the conflict in a manner that restores legitimacy and stability in accordance with the relevant Council resolutions, the Gulf Cooperation Council initiative, and the outcomes of the comprehensive National Dialogue Conference.

In that regard, Egypt urges all parties to constructively engage with the ongoing efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen on a ceasefire agreement, accompanied by the urgently needed humanitarian and economic measures. Egypt also calls on all parties to implement the previous agreements reached in Stockholm, without further delay, in a manner that preserves the unity, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Yemen.

We also continue to condemn in the strongest terms the attacks against the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and all actions that continue to fuel the conflict in Yemen and violate the relevant Council resolutions by providing the Houthis with weaponry, as has been alarmingly underscored in the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2020/531), on the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015).

The deteriorating condition of the 44-year old *FSO SAFER* oil tanker represents a clear and imminent threat that could, at any moment, cause a massive environmental and economic catastrophe that would add to the tremendous suffering of the people of Yemen, as well as cause irreversible damage to the coastal States of the Red Sea, including Egypt. It would also undermine the safety of international maritime transportation through the strategic Strait of Bab El-Mandab, which is the southern gate to the Suez Canal.

In that regard, Egypt joined five other States in bringing the expected environmental, humanitarian and economic damage to the attention of the Security Council in a detailed joint letter dated 11 March 2020 (S/2020/200).

The transactional and opportunistic approach that the Houthis have been following by politicizing humanitarian issues and risking environmental disaster for political gains is morally unacceptable and unjustifiable regardless of its motivations, especially at a time when the ramifications of the coronavirus disease pandemic are sweeping across the world and the region.

We call on all parties to take the necessary measures to cooperate with the relevant agencies of the United Nations to ensure that the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker is properly maintained and secured without further delay or conditions. In that regard, we stand ready to provide any needed technical assistance.

In that regard, we stress the urgent need for the Security Council to take immediate measures to redress this situation in parallel with the ongoing efforts aimed at a political solution.

Annex V**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Saudi Arabia to the United Nations, Abdallah Y. Al-Mouallimi**

Allow me to begin by personally congratulating you, Sir, and the Federal Republic of Germany on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month. We are confident that your leadership and expertise will guide the Council towards efficiency and success. I would like to express our appreciation for convening this session to discuss the hazardous situation of the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker and the dangers it poses to the environment and maritime navigation in the Red Sea.

The grave risks associated with this floating oil tanker threaten to cause harm to the southern part of the Red Sea and to the world at large, as it is situated in the proximity of Bab El-Mandab, through which vital international maritime navigation passes between Asia and Europe. This dangerous situation must not be left unaddressed and the Security Council bears primary responsibility for securing the safety and security of the area.

The dangers emanating from the current situation include the possibility of an oil spill of millions of litres, which is far larger than the volume of the infamous *Exxon Valdez* disaster that took place in Alaska in 1989. In addition, the port of Al-Hudaydah could be closed for several months, leading to severe shortages in the supply of fuel and other essential needs to the people of Yemen. The fishing industry in the region would also be gravely harmed and would take years to recover. Moreover, marine life, the environment and the shores of my country would be seriously and adversely affected. Finally, toxic gases and black clouds emanating from the spill would cause damage to agricultural lands and farms in the vast area of both Yemen and Saudi Arabia — irreversibly damaging fruits, grains and vegetables and causing a massive internal displacement of people throughout the affected areas.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia condemns the irresponsible actions of the Houthi militia, who have caused this situation in the first place. The Houthis continue to use this potential disaster to blackmail the world into fulfilling their political ambitions without regard to the well-being and safety of the Yemeni people and the region as a whole.

The Security Council has already asserted the need to confront the risks associated with this situation and has warned against the catastrophic consequences that would result if it remains unresolved. The Council did so in resolution 2511 (2020) and in its press statement issued on 29 June (SC/14233).

We took notice of the announcement made recently by the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General that the Houthi rebels have agreed to allow access to the tanker. We remain suspicious of their plans and intentions, and request that the Council remain vigilant and stand ready to enact strong and decisive measures to deal with this situation and mitigate its risks.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia stands ready to take all steps that the Council may deem necessary to handle the situation. We wish to draw the Council's attention to the Houthis' record of procrastination and non-compliance with United Nations resolutions. The Council must not allow such reckless and irresponsible behaviour to stand. The Council must ensure that a political solution to the conflict in Yemen is found on the basis of resolution 2216 (2015), the Gulf Cooperation Council Initiative and the outcome of the National Dialogue Conference — all recognized by the international community as the elements of international legitimacy.