



Security Council

Seventy-sixth year

8786th meeting
Thursday, 3 June 2021, 3 p.m.
New York

Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Auväärt	(Estonia)
<i>Members:</i>	China	Mr. Geng Shuang
	France	Mrs. Broadhurst Estival
	India	Mr. Raguttahalli
	Ireland	Ms. Byrne Nason
	Kenya	Mr. Kiboino
	Mexico	Mrs. Buenrostro Massieu
	Niger	Mr. Abarry
	Norway	Ms. Heimerback
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	Ms. Gonsalves
	Tunisia	Mr. Ladeb
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Dame Barbara Woodward
	United States of America	Mr. Mills
	Viet Nam	Mrs. Nguyen

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Yemen to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Inger Andersen, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme; and Ms. Reena Ghelani, Director for Operations and Advocacy, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Ms. Andersen.

Ms. Andersen: The risk of a massive oil leakage from the *FSO SAFER*, a floating single-hull storage and offloading unit, is growing every day. Unfortunately, no significant changes have been reported since my briefing last year (see S/2020/721). Risks to the environment and the livelihoods of people remain.

An agreement reached with Ansar Allah in November 2020 on the scope of the work for the assessment of the vessel sent positive signals at that time. However, political and logistical obstacles have impeded the implementation of the agreement, and the planned mission has been unable to deploy. As a result, we still do not know the exact condition of the vessel or what the best solution would be to deal with 1.1 million barrels of oil in an ageing tanker located in an environmentally sensitive area of the Red Sea.

As I reported last year, the two possible scenarios of a potential spill or explosion would directly affect millions of people, in a country that is already enduring the world's largest humanitarian emergency. The coronavirus disease pandemic has complicated efforts to address the emergency. In the event of a spill, entire ecosystems could be damaged and it would take decades to clean up spilled oil. Economic, social and health impacts would also be dire.

It is estimated that up to 670,000 people's livelihoods could be impacted by a spill and resulting

damage to fisheries, marine resources and coastal industries, factory and port closures. The forced closure of the Al-Hudaydah and Saleef ports could limit fuel and food imports for two to three weeks. Fifty per cent of fisheries could be blocked, with an estimated economic cost of around \$350 million over five years. The livelihoods of more than 31,500 fishermen would be at risk, and 235,000 workers in the fishing industry could lose their jobs.

The Red Sea area is one of the planet's most important repositories of biodiversity. It hosts internationally important marine mammals, sea turtles, sea birds and many other species. Coastal marine environments, and particularly mangroves, represent 86 per cent of the mangrove cover in the Republic of Yemen, with large extensions of seagrass meadows and coral reefs.

In the event of a fire or explosion, around 4.8 million people in Yemen and 350,000 people in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia could be exposed to harmful levels of pollution within 24 to 36 hours. About 1 million internally displaced people live in areas in Yemen that could be covered by the smoke plume. Vulnerable populations — especially those with heart and lung conditions — could experience severe health impacts. Although the west coast of Yemen would be the most severely affected, an oil spill could also negatively impact neighbouring Red Sea countries and shipping along one of the busiest commercial routes in the world.

The United Nations system is working to support readiness, contingency and response planning in case of an oil spill. We have some progress, and that is on track, especially in setting up coordination mechanisms, which I would like to outline for the Council.

The Regional Organization for the Conservation of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden (PERSGA), with support from the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the International Maritime Organization (IMO), has developed the regional contingency plan, with the participation of PERSGA's member States. Together we have established a coordination committee to coordinate regional and international assistance in the event of a significant oil spill from *FSO SAFER*. The committee aims to support affected countries in mitigating damage caused by a spill. The committee has prepared standard operating procedures in case of a spill, clarified the mandates of the committee members and described critical functions in the event of a request for assistance.

The Government of Yemen has also established a national emergency committee on the *FSO SAFER*. There is an ongoing review of the national contingency plan, with support from PERSGA, UNEP and the IMO.

The IMO has recently contracted a company to update scenarios in the event of an oil spill from *FSO SAFER*.

Those efforts have been accompanied by a series of capacity-building workshops on response at the regional and national levels, convened by PERSGA, the IMO and UNEP. The areas covered have been the development of regional procedures to implement the regional contingency plan and facilitate response efforts; national training of the Environment Protection Authority in Yemen on the use of oil-spill response equipment and dispersants; and regional virtual simulation and desktop exercises to test the regional spill contingency plan.

We recognize that despite all the efforts being undertaken by United Nations agencies and partners, the risk remains, and the situation will deteriorate as delays mount. Even if the response activities were to be initiated immediately after an oil spill, it would take years for the ecosystems and economies to recover.

With respect to contingency planning and despite the steps already taken and that I have described, much more needs to be done in terms of preparedness and such planning. We are concerned, for example, about limited equipment availability, potential insurance issues and other challenges that will need solutions.

In closing, almost a year has passed since we came together to discuss the growing risk of the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker. I again urge international partners to intensify efforts to address that situation. Making an assessment of the *FSO SAFER* is critical to giving us an understanding of the risks and to ensure that we can identify the appropriate next steps to reduce such risks.

In tandem with such prevention efforts, we must continue to exert all efforts and work together to plan for an effective response should an oil spill occur.

The President: I thank Ms. Andersen for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Ghelani.

Ms. Ghelani: Over the past two years, Under-Secretary-General Lowcock has briefed the Security Council 23 times on the *FSO SAFER* tanker, including

at a dedicated meeting like this one last July (see S/2020/721). With 23 briefings behind us, progress, needless to say, has been much slower than anyone would have wanted. In the past, we have explained in detail what we think the likely impact of the spill or explosion might be, that is, a dire environmental and humanitarian situation. That assessment has not changed, so I will not repeat it here today. We have also updated the Council every month on United Nations efforts to gain access to the *FSO SAFER* vessel. There is not much more new to say here either. The bottom line is that so far, no mission has been allowed to deploy. That is mostly because the Ansar Allah authorities, while always agreeing to a mission in principle, have been reluctant to provide the concrete assurances needed to proceed.

The United Nations wrote to Ansar Allah two months ago to clarify exactly what is needed for the mission to deploy. Project donors sent a similar letter, and several Member States have been raising the issue directly as well. Over the past 10 days, there have also been extensive discussions to try to bridge the remaining gaps. But so far, those efforts have not succeeded. The main sticking point seems to be what exactly the United Nations mission will do and, more specifically, why the United Nations cannot agree more in terms of repairs.

As we have said before, the *FSO SAFER* is a dangerous site; it has had essentially no maintenance for more than six years. From what we can gather, the physical structure is degrading, the underlying systems do not work, and there is a good chance that flammable gases are building up in some places. But because the United Nations has never been allowed to visit the site, we do not know exactly what the conditions are like on board. That means that it is impossible to say in advance exactly what activities can safely be performed.

That is why also the main purpose of the United Nations mission has always been to assess the vessel's condition. Experts need to verify what we are dealing with and assess what can be done safely. The assessment will provide impartial evidence on the options to resolve the problem once and for all. During the mission, the experts will also do some light maintenance to minimize the immediate risk of a spill, which we hope will buy more time. A formal scope-of-work document, available on the United Nations website, outlines exactly what the United Nations team wants to do in terms of maintenance, provided the conditions on board and in

the surrounding environment make it safe enough to do so.

As we have told the Council, Ansar Allah at the time accepted the scope of work back in November. However, it now seems unhappy with this. The United Nations focus on assessment may seem frustrating given that everyone wants to see the problem solved right away. And, of course, the world would certainly welcome whatever path can be taken to move as quickly as possible towards a safe and sustainable solution. For a United Nations-led mission, that path starts with a comprehensive, impartial assessment. As we have said before, the United Nations has no preference on how the problem is ultimately solved so long as it is done safely.

So where do we go from here? The United Nations expert team remains ready to deploy, as it has been for the past two years. The United Nations will keep that team on standby for as long as we have donor funding to do so. Some of those funds, however, will start running out soon, so we hope that things will start moving much, much faster. If all the assurances come through, it will still take several weeks for the United Nations to rent the mission vessels, ship all the specialized equipment, deploy the experts and sail to the *FSO SAFER* from Djibouti. The sooner all the discussions wrap up, the sooner all this can start.

In parallel, as the Council has heard from the Executive Director, there is also work under way to support the contingency planning. I thank UNEP, the IMO and others for supporting those important efforts.

The United Nations remains eager to help as best it can, in line with everything that I have just described.

The President: I thank Ms. Ghelani for her briefing.

It is my understanding that Council members wish to make statements in closed consultations.

I now give the floor to the representative of Yemen.

Mr. Al-Saadi (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your presidency of the Security Council for this month. I wish you and Estonia, a friendly country, every success. I also thank the Permanent Representative of China for his presidency of the Council last month.

We highly value the convening of this important meeting to consider the issue of the *FSO SAFER* oil tanker. We are meeting today nearly a year after the holding of the special Security Council meeting that

took place on 15 July 2020 (see S/2020/721) to consider the same issue. The question is: what has been achieved since that meeting? To date, the answer is, nothing at all. On the contrary, the situation with regard to the tanker has deteriorated further, and the humanitarian, environmental and economic consequences that would result from a possible disaster due to its explosion or leakage are increasing. Houthi militias continue their stubborn behaviour while rejecting all calls from the international community and the Security Council as well as rejecting all initiatives and efforts, including those of the United Nations, to resolve the problem. Not only are the Houthi militias refusing to cooperate; they have also gone so far as to say recently that the United Nations is responsible for the delay and have accused it of looting the resources allocated for assessment and maintenance.

All Council statements during the previous period called on the Houthis to allow a United Nations technical team to access the tanker in order to assess the situation and conduct urgent repairs, in addition to emptying it. They all held the Houthi militias responsible. The statements called for taking realistic measures on the ground, but unfortunately nothing has happened. The Houthi militias instead ignored the Council's appeals and those of the international community and met them with stubbornness and no response. Today, therefore, we are on the brink of a grave environmental disaster that would compound the humanitarian catastrophe affecting the Yemeni people as a result of the coup led by the Houthi militias against Yemenis. The Council must also take decisive measures today to avoid this disaster and send a strong and clear message to the Houthis in order to avert an environmental calamity.

Allow me to clarify a few points.

Since the year 2018 — and even back in 2017 — the Yemeni Government has been warning about the tanker given a lack of assessment as to its condition and the carrying out the necessary repairs and maintenance. There was a suggestion that the United Nations undertake negotiations with the Houthi militias to permit a United Nations technical team to access the tanker to evaluate the situation and carry out urgent repairs and the necessary maintenance. Yet the Houthis have continued to manipulate the situation as a bargaining chip while ignoring the grave consequences of this disaster.

In the course of several briefings to the Security Council, Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, repeatedly warned of the catastrophic effects that an explosion or the leakage of more than 1.1 million barrels of oil could cause and its effect on the humanitarian situation in Yemen.

On 15 July 2020, at the request of my Government, the Council convened a special meeting (see S/2020/721) to warn about the expensive humanitarian, environmental and economic costs that could result from a leak or an explosion and lead to ominous effects.

My Government has sent many letters to the Council to sound the alarm on the increasing potential environmental, humanitarian and economic risks and has requested that the Council assume its responsibilities to prevent such a disaster and to oblige the Houthi militias to honour their repeated promises and take effective and tangible measures without delay so as to allow the United Nations technical team to access the tanker for evaluation and maintenance purposes.

Resolutions 2511 (2021) and 2564 (2021) stress the environmental and humanitarian risks as well as the need to allow a United Nations team to access the tanker without delay in order to conduct assessment and maintenance activities. They also stress the responsibility of the Houthi militias in that regard.

Many countries, organizations and research centres have also sounded repeated warnings regarding the need for urgently addressing the tanker issue, given that this is a situation that could directly or indirectly endanger 15 million people and produce losses of more

than \$21 billion in the agriculture and fisheries sectors, as well as the impact of pollution, which could affect not only the Red Sea but also the Bab El-Mandab Strait and the Gulf of Aden as well as the neighbouring countries and maritime navigation. This would be compounded by the adverse humanitarian and economic impacts that would result from the closure of the port of Al-Hudaydah for at least six months. That could lead to an increase in prices of 200 per cent, not to mention the humanitarian suffering created by the Houthis' senseless war against the Yemeni people.

The Secretary-General's Special Envoy, Mr. Martin Griffiths, proposed a three-step solution that is still the optimal one: first, assessment and urgent repairs; secondly, maintenance and the removal of the oil and, thirdly, the disposal of the tanker and the sale of the oil to cover the salaries of civil servants under the supervision of the United Nations.

In conclusion, we look forward to the Council upholding its responsibilities in this matter and taking strict and deterrent measures by seriously exerting pressure on the Houthi militias to stop manipulating this issue and waging political blackmail in this situation. Their behaviour is unethical. We cannot stay silent anymore and appease the Houthi militias, because we are racing against time. What we could do today might no longer be possible tomorrow.

The President: There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 3.25 p.m.