

Statement

**Remarks at the pledging event for the FSO Safer operation
co-hosted by the Netherlands and the United Kingdom**

Sana'a, 04 May 2023 – The UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen, David Gressly, delivered the following remarks today at the online pledging event for the FSO Safer operation co-hosted by the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

First, I want echo Achim's thank you to the United Kingdom and the Netherlands for having organized this event.

And for contributing generously.

A third element that they both deserve credit for is recognizing early on the promise of a private-sector initiative to address the Safer which the Fahem Group and SMIT Salvage proposed in mid-2021 – a time when the previous UN plan to inspect the Safer was not moving.

The initiative called for a leading maritime salvage company to transfer the oil off the Safer and replace the decaying supertanker's capacity.

That was the basis upon which the United Nations principals asked me to lead and coordinate UN system-wide efforts on the Safer, in September 2021

In December 2021, United Nations senior management endorsed the UN-coordinated plan and asked UNDP to implement it, contingent upon donor funding.

In February 2021, I met with the Government of Yemen in Aden, which confirmed its support for the plan.

They have remained supportive ever since – as evidenced by a \$5 million pledge that they made last year.

The Sana'a authorities had been favorable to the original initiative, but insisted that it be done under UN auspices.

In March 2022, they signed a memorandum of understanding with the UN that committed them to facilitating the operation.

A commitment that they continue to honor.

The agreement was also signed by myself with the Fahem Group, which has supported engagement in Sana'a on the initiative since 2021 on a voluntary basis.

By April 2022, the UN presented a draft operational plan to begin fundraising. The original budget for phase 1 and 2 was \$144 million.

As Achim said, the Netherlands pledging event in The Hague last May brought in \$33 million, which was a catalyst to move us to where we are today.

But finding funds to prevent a catastrophe proved far more difficult than finding money for a disaster.

In June, we launched a public crowdfunding campaign for the operation.

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That has now brought in more than \$250,000. More importantly, it captured media attention that galvanized further support for the plan.

In August, we received the first pledge from a private entity. \$1.2 million from the HSA Group. The International Association of Oil and Gas Producers followed with a \$10 million pledge and Trafigura Foundation with \$1 million.

The private sector, we learned, was concerned about its liability linked to a contribution. UNDP, in particular, led the effort to resolve those issues of concern which gives us a basis for further private sector contributions.

By September last year, the UN met the target of \$75 million to start the operation.

Unfortunately, even as UNDP was gearing up to begin, the cost of suitable replacement vessels surged, chiefly due to developments related to the war in Ukraine.

More money was also needed to start the initial phase because of the necessity to purchase a replacement vessel – also linked to the war in Ukraine as suitable vessels for lease were no longer available. The budget for the emergency phase – during which the oil will be transferred – is now \$129 million. Most of the funding is now required up front in phase one. Now, the second phase only requires \$19 million to complete the project.

So, the budget of \$148 million is just \$4 million more than was presented to donors a year ago.

Prior to today's announcements, we had raised \$99.6 million from member states, the private sector and the general public.

The general public has provided donations from \$1 to \$5,000.

The broad coalition working to prevent the catastrophe also includes environmental groups like Greenpeace and, in Yemen, Holm Akhdar.

Every part of the United Nations is involved, including the International Maritime Organization, the UN Environmental Programme, and the World Food Programme. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is among those that have worked on the Safer file for years and has now ensured \$20 million of bridging finance. That would need to be replenished by donor funding.

I also want to recognize the United States for playing a tireless role in mobilizing resources. It is among the top five donors, together with the Netherlands, Germany, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom.

On 9 March, UNDP's Administrator took the bold decision to purchase the replacement vessel Nautica – before all of the operation was in place.

That is because UNDP recognized the extraordinary problem and understood that the cost of inaction is too great, as Achim outlined.

UNDP also contracted the Boskalis subsidiary SMIT Salvage, which played an enormously helpful role in developing the UN plan long before it had a contract.

With both the Nautica and the SMIT vessel Endeavor en route to Djibouti, we expect the operation to start before the end of the month.

Therefore, I thank all donors for the generous support, and we look forward to further generous support.

But the risk of disaster remains.

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**OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS
RESIDENT & HUMANITARIAN FOR YEMEN**

I am forever thankful to the heroic skeleton crew aboard the Safer that continues to do all it can to keep that vessel together until we can organize this salvage operation.

None of us will heave a sigh of relief until the oil is transferred.

And we will all heave a final sigh of relief when the critical second phase is completed. This requires that the project is fully funded as described.

As everyone has said we are just one step away so lets take the final step.

Thank you.

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