

Secretary-General António Guterres
United Nations
UN Headquarters, S-3800
New York
NY 10017

11th August 2020

Averting an oil spill from the *FSO SAFER* tanker in Yemen

Dear Mr. Secretary-General,

I am writing to you today to ask for your urgent help to prevent an environmental catastrophe that could further deepen the current humanitarian disaster in Yemen.

As you are aware, the oil tanker *FSO SAFER* - a storage vessel - is currently moored off the coast of Yemen. The tanker carries a significant quantity of crude oil and has been left unattended for such a prolonged period that there are grave concerns that it could rupture or even explode.

If the 1 million barrels of oil thought to be contained aboard the *FSO SAFER* were to spill into the Red Sea it would cause an ecological disaster of global significance and further exacerbate the humanitarian challenges in the region.

As the UN Security Council recently heard, a spill would have “appalling consequences [and] has the potential to inflict terrible additional suffering on millions of Yemenis.”¹

Undertaking the urgent repairs needed to stabilise the *FSO SAFER* and subsequently offloading the oil it carries will pose complex technical and logistical challenges.

Given the context of brutal conflict in Yemen compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, and with the risks of an oil spill threatening citizens in the wider region, UN action is critical to prevent an environmental and humanitarian disaster. Some governments have already called for UN intervention² and, whilst the Security Council recently met to discuss this issue, progress remains slow. As the Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme said, “time is running out for us to act in a coordinated manner.”³

¹ Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, *Briefing to the Security Council on the SAFER tanker in Yemen*, New York, 15th July 2020

https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/20200715%20USG_Statement%20to%20Security%20Council%20on%20SAFER%20tanker.pdf

² *UK warns of “catastrophic environmental threat” from hazardous Yemeni tanker*, UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 15th July 2020
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-warns-of-catastrophic-environmental-threat-from-hazardous-yemeni-oil-tanker>

³ *Yemen oil tanker wreck: Time running out to avert ‘looming environmental, economic and humanitarian catastrophe’*, UN News, 15th July 2020
<https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/07/1068461>

We urge you (and the Security Council member states that we are also writing to) to:

- *Make averting an oil spill from the FSO SAFER a priority for urgent UN action.*
- *Mobilise the UN's full diplomatic and technical capacity to carry out an urgent on-board technical assessment to determine what repairs are needed to make the vessel at least temporarily safe.*
- *Once stabilised, the oil on board should be safely removed onto another seaworthy vessel.*

We are grateful for your personal leadership on issues that we both work on. Greenpeace has supported your call for a COVID-19 ceasefire, are grateful for your support for a global Ocean Treaty and your demand for urgent action on the climate crisis. We believe the challenge posed by the *FSO SAFER* speaks to all three of these UN priorities and hope that you will ensure prompt action is now taken.

Thank you for taking this forward. I am happy to speak to you personally on this matter and to connect you and your team with our Middle East and Northern Africa office.

Yours sincerely,

Jennifer Morgan
Executive Director
Greenpeace International

c.c. Inger Andersen, Executive Director UN Environment Programme