



Media Briefing, May 2022

US\$80million to make the FSO Safer *safe* and avert a major disaster for people and the planet

On 11 May, countries will meet at a UN emergency pledge conference where they must commit funds for the transfer of over 1.1 million barrels (140,000 tonnes) of crude oil from the oil tanker FSO Safer, which is rusting at anchor off the coast of Yemen, to prevent a major humanitarian and environmental catastrophe in the Red Sea. Experts, officials, the UN and anyone involved agree that, without action, the tanker could cause a major oil leak or an explosion. The operation will cost US\$80million, and while this sounds like a lot of money, it is far less than the subsidies that governments give to oil corporations. In May 2022, several oil companies are holding their AGMs and announcing their profits: the average oil industry profits for 3 months (US\$7.3 billion) are over 90 times the amount needed to salvage the Safer and save people and the environment in the Red Sea region.

Ghiwa Nakat, Executive Director at Greenpeace MENA, said: We are witnessing an oil disaster in slow motion. Everybody agrees about what needs to be done about the Safer and the urgency to act, but only a handful of countries so far have committed money to the salvage operation. The US\$80million needed to make the Safer safe is nothing compared to the US\$20 billion estimated cost to respond to a spill, plus the incalculable impacts for the livelihoods of coastal communities and the fragile environment of the Red Sea. It is much less than the US\$405billion a year given by G20 governments to fossil fuel corporations as subsidies. The funds needed are also much less than the profits made by the major oil companies. It is time political leaders put money where their mouth is and prioritise action to prevent a major humanitarian and environmental disaster.

Background

The FSO Safer, built in 1976 in Japan, is one of the world's largest oil tankers. It has operated as a floating storage and offload (FSO) tank anchored in the Red Sea off the coast of Yemen since 1988. It is not insured and has been left without maintenance for the last seven years with a cargo of over 1.1 million barrels (140,000 tonnes) of crude oil.

On board the rusting tanker is a small crew (of 9 or 10) working desperately to keep the tanker afloat and secure and they managed, so far, to prevent a major catastrophe. Despite their efforts however, leaks have happened, the most serious was in May 2020 when seawater gushed into the engine room.[1] It took five days to weld a patch to stop the leak.

A humanitarian and environmental disaster in the making

There is consensus among experts, officials, the UN and anyone involved that, without action, the tanker could cause a major oil leak or an explosion as the inert gas systems, pumps and fire-fighting equipment are not functioning.[2]

An oil spill or explosion would have [potentially catastrophic impacts](#). If all the oil on board is spilled, it would be four times bigger than the Exxon Valdez causing widespread severe environmental damage to the fragile environment of the Red Sea, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis unfolding in Yemen and affecting neighbouring countries. Such a spill would force the closure of the local port of Hodeidah through which 68% of the aid and supplies flow. It could impact food supplies for 8.4 million people, drinking water for 10 million people and the livelihoods and health of 1.7 million fishermen and coastal communities.

Preventing a major oil spill

The only way to prevent a spill is to transfer the oil from the Safer to another tanker, and although this is a challenge, the technology and expertise exist to undertake this operation.

After many months of negotiations a deal has been reached between the UN and the De Facto Authorities (the Houthis) in Yemen to undertake this task under the coordination of the UN.[3] [An outline plan and budget has been formulated and circulated. Funding of \\$80million is needed and a UN pledging conference hosted by the Netherlands is scheduled for May 11](#) – but without adequate funding agreed, the plan could fail.[4] The oil transfer must be completed before September/October when wind and currents will be too dangerous to undertake the salvage operation.

The UN has invited a number of governments from powerful economies such as Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Japan, Kuwait, Norway, Portugal, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Sweden, Switzerland, UK, US and the EU institutions to attend the conference and pledge financial support. These governments, who have all expressed concern about the threat posed by the Safer, spend billions of dollars annually supporting fossil fuel corporations and need to put their money where their mouth is to prevent an environmental disaster that would seriously exacerbate the humanitarian crisis in Yemen.

Countries such as Norway, the UK, France, Germany and those in the region such as Bahrain have ready stockpiles of oil spill response hardware, and could send equipment to the region to be on stand-by, under United Nations (UN) coordination. Given the political context and the ongoing conflict in Yemen, action by the UN and the international community is critical to prevent an environmental and humanitarian disaster.

Greenpeace MENA and Greenpeace International are currently working with organisations in Yemen and the region to support a solution to remove the oil while preparing to respond in case of a major oil spill.

Oil remains the most subsidised fossil fuel in the world*

Governments need to commit to funding the operation to transfer the oil to another tanker and secure the Safer, preventing a major humanitarian and environmental disaster in the region.

While US\$80million sounds like a lot of money, it is far less than the subsidies that governments give to oil corporations. According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), **“oil remains the most subsidised fuel” and G20 governments subsidies to fossil fuels average US\$405billion a year.[5] [6]

The funds needed to secure the Safer operation are also much less than the profits made by the major oil companies. In the same month when the pledging conference is happening, several oil companies are holding their AGMs and announcing their profits.[7]

For the first 3 months of 2022 - Q1 :

- BP - AGM May 12, profits = \$6.2billion
- ConocoPhillips - AGM May 10, profits = \$8billion**
- Chevron - AGM May 25, profits = \$6.3billion
- ExxonMobil - AGM May 24, profits = \$5.48 billion
- Shell - AGM May 24, profits = \$9.1 billion
- TotalEnergies - AGM May 28, profits = \$9billion

** the last 3 months (Q4) of 2021

These profits are significantly higher than the funds needed to resolve the Safer threat: the average oil industry profits for 3 months are US\$7.3 billion, over 90 times the amount needed to salvage the Safer and save people and the environment in the Red Sea region.

Dirty money

From these staggering figures, it is apparent that spills, fires, choking air, wars caused by oil and fossil fuels have not dented the billions of dollars, euros, rubles, of oil profits raked in by a rich and powerful few. With sanctions on Russian oil, [wealthy western governments turn to the Middle East to fill their ‘oil gap’](#).

Never ones to miss an opportunity to boost their profits and consolidate their political influence, [western oil companies like BP, Shell, Exxon and Total are now reaping the benefits of massive price rise in oil and gas and using the crisis to further their own interests by encouraging governments to prioritise oil and gas production](#).

The last thing the world needs is more oil

While the oil industry uses [greenwash and deadly propaganda](#) to try and cover their tracks, essentially their problem is the product, not how well or otherwise it is extracted, transported, refined and used. [Oil is a substance that’s toxic at every stage in its lifecycle, from extraction through to its end-use which produces emissions that are heating up the planet](#) — **that** is the problem.

The industry has known that climate change is an existential threat to their business for far longer than it has been on the political agenda. [It ignored and silenced its own scientists who warned of the potential threat](#); it [funded climate deniers and lobby-groups to sow doubt](#). All to ensure that it could continue pumping oil and gas.

[UN secretary general](#) António Guterres [described](#) the recent IPCC report [as an “atlas of human suffering and a damning indictment of failed climate leadership” caused by fossil fuels](#).

Notes

[1]<https://time.com/6048436/fso-safer-yemen-oil-tanker-disaster/>

[2]https://www.acaps.org/sites/acaps/files/products/files/20220428_acaps_yemen_fso_safer_impact_assessment.pdf

[3]<https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-un-resident-and-humanitarian-coordinator-welcomes-progress-fso-safer-proposal>

[4] <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/04/1115932>

[5] <https://www.iea.org/topics/energy-subsidies>

[6]<https://odi.org/en/publications/doubling-back-and-doubling-down-g20-scorecard-on-fossil-fuel-funding>

[7] [BP](#) ; [Chevron](#) ; [ConocoPhillips](#) ; [Exxon](#) ; [Shell](#) ; [TotaleEnergie](#)

Contact

Dania Cherry, Communications Manager at Greenpeace MENA,
дания.чери@greenpeace.org

Greenpeace International Press Desk: pressdesk.int@greenpeace.org, +31 (0) 20 718 2470
(available 24 hours)

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