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Sustainable development

Oil slick on Lebanese shores

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 9 of General Assembly resolution 74/208, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit to it, at its seventy-fifth session, a report on the implementation of the resolution under the item entitled "Sustainable development".

It provides an update on progress made in the implementation of General Assembly resolutions 61/194, 62/188, 63/211, 64/195, 65/147, 66/192, 67/201, 68/206, 69/212, 70/194, 71/218, 72/209, 73/224 and 74/208 concerning the environmental disaster caused by the destruction of the oil storage tanks in the direct vicinity of the Jiyah electric power plant in Lebanon by the Israeli Air Force on 15 July 2006, which caused an oil slick that covered two thirds of the Lebanese coastline and extended beyond. It complements the information presented in previous reports of the Secretary-General on the subject (A/62/343, A/63/225, A/64/259, A/65/436, A/66/297, A/67/341, A/68/544, A/69/313, A/70/291, A/71/217, A/72/353, A/73/302 and A/74/225).

The report was prepared by the United Nations Development Programme, building on the work undertaken by the inter-agency team established for the preparation of previous reports.

* A/75/150.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 9 of General Assembly resolution 74/208, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit to it, at its seventy-fifth session, a report on the implementation of the resolution under the item entitled “Sustainable development”.

2. It provides an update on progress made in the implementation of General Assembly resolutions 61/194, 62/188, 63/211, 64/195, 65/147, 66/192, 67/201, 68/206, 69/212, 70/194, 71/218, 72/209, 73/224 and 74/208 concerning the environmental disaster caused by the destruction of the oil storage tanks in the direct vicinity of the Jiyah electric power plant in Lebanon by the Israeli Air Force on 15 July 2006, which caused an oil slick that covered two thirds of the Lebanese coastline and extended beyond. It complements the information presented in previous reports of the Secretary-General on the subject (A/62/343, A/63/225, A/64/259, A/65/436, A/66/297, A/67/341, A/68/544, A/69/313, A/70/291, A/71/217, A/72/353, A/73/302 and A/74/225).

3. The report was prepared by the United Nations Development Programme building on the work undertaken by the inter-agency team[1] established for the preparation of previous reports.

II. Brief overview of recent developments

4. The marine oil spill caused by the destruction of the oil storage tanks at the Jiyah electric power plant by the Israeli Air Force resulted in the release of about 15,000 tons of fuel oil into the Mediterranean Sea, leading to the contamination of about 150 km of coastline in Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, causing adverse impacts to the environment and to the achievement of sustainable development as referred to by the General Assembly in its resolutions 61/194, 62/188, 63/211, 64/195, 65/147, 66/192, 67/201, 68/206, 69/212, 70/194, 71/218, 72/209, 73/224 and 74/208.

5. Several United Nations agencies and other international, regional and national entities, including the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the World Bank and the National Council for Scientific Research of Lebanon, were involved in assessing the implications of the oil spill for human health, biodiversity, fisheries and tourism in Lebanon at the time of and in the immediate aftermath of the spill. A summary of their combined findings was presented to the General Assembly in the above-mentioned previous reports of the Secretary-General.

6. In paragraph 4 of its resolution 74/208, the General Assembly acknowledged the conclusions of the 2019 report of the Secretary-General (A/74/225), in which it was reiterated that studies placed the value of the damage to Lebanon at $856.4 million in 2014, and requested the Secretary-General to urge United Nations bodies and agencies and other relevant organizations involved in the initial assessment of the relevant environmental damage to undertake, within existing resources, a further study, building on, inter alia, the initial work of the World Bank presented in the report of the Secretary-General submitted to the Assembly at its sixty-second session (A/62/343), with a view to measuring and quantifying the environmental damage sustained by neighbouring countries.

[1] The inter-agency team established in 2006 comprised the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Development Programme, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Health Organization and the World Bank. The International Union for Conservation of Nature was also a key partner in this work.

7. By 2015, the Secretary-General had already noted in his report to the General Assembly (A/70/291) that, nine years after the occurrence of the oil slick, there were no further relevant findings available in relation to the environmental impact sustained by Lebanon and neighbouring countries beyond the assessments that had been previously presented. In addition, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) had indicated at that time that the scientific viability of gathering additional insight through further studies on the environmental impact was limited. In April 2016, the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic submitted a package of documentation regarding the impact of the oil slick. After conducting a technical evaluation of those documents, with a view to reassessing the viability of the requested further study, UNEP concluded that the documentation provided did not offer new findings or scientifically significant data that differed so substantially from the data used in the original study as to warrant a change in the original assessment of the physical damage to the environment. Therefore, in the absence of new findings and new scientifically meaningful data, UNEP stated that it would not be able to conduct further environmental studies either to provide an assessment regarding the past or current operations or to determine the cost of environmental degradation. Against this background, and 14 years after the occurrence of the oil slick, no further study is viable.

8. In paragraph 5 of its resolution 74/208, the General Assembly reiterated its request that the Government of Israel assume responsibility for prompt and adequate compensation to the Government of Lebanon for the aforementioned damage and to other countries directly affected by the oil slick, such as the Syrian Arab Republic, whose shores had been partially polluted, for the costs of repairing the environmental damage caused by the destruction, including the restoration of the marine environment, in particular in the light of the conclusion contained in the 2019 report of the Secretary-General that there remained grave concern at the lack of implementation of the relevant provisions of the resolutions of the Assembly on the subject vis-à-vis reparations and compensation to the Government and people of Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic affected by the oil spill. This echoes and emphasizes previous requests of the Assembly. To date, however, the Government of Israel has not assumed responsibility for the relevant compensation.

9. In paragraph 6 of the resolution, the General Assembly reiterated its appreciation for the efforts of the Government of Lebanon and those of Member States, regional and international organizations, regional and international financial institutions, non-governmental organizations and the private sector in the initiation of clean-up and rehabilitation operations on the polluted shores and encouraged Member States and the above-mentioned entities to continue their financial and technical support to the Government of Lebanon towards achieving the completion of clean-up and rehabilitation operations. Following the successful completion in 2017 of the European Union-supported contract for the treatment and disposal of the remaining solid wastes from the 2006 oil spill, no further support for recovery or rehabilitation was provided during the past year.

10. In paragraphs 7 and 8 of the resolution, the General Assembly welcomed the agreement of the Lebanon Recovery Fund to host the Eastern Mediterranean oil spill restoration trust fund and noted that, in his report, the Secretary-General had urged Member States, international organizations, international and regional financial institutions, non-governmental organizations and the private sector to intensify their support for Lebanon in that matter, particularly for recovery and rehabilitation activities on the Lebanese coast. The Assembly also reiterated its invitation to States and the international donor community to make voluntary financial contributions to the trust fund and requested the Secretary-General to mobilize international technical and financial assistance in order to ensure that the trust fund had sufficient and

adequate resources. To date, no contributions have been made to the trust fund hosted by the Lebanon Recovery Fund.

III. Conclusions

11. I wish to commend the ongoing efforts of the Government of Lebanon to address the impacts of the oil spill. However, grave concern remains over the lack of implementation of the relevant provisions of the resolutions of the General Assembly with regard to compensation by the Government of Israel to the Government and people of Lebanon and other countries affected by the oil spill, including the Syrian Arab Republic. This is particularly important since studies show, as indicated above, that the value of the damage for Lebanon amounted to $856.4 million in 2014.

12. I regret that, to date, no contributions have been made to the Eastern Mediterranean oil spill restoration trust fund hosted by the Lebanon Recovery Fund. I encourage the international donor community to contribute to the trust fund, in view of its commitment expressed in the past to provide financial and other support to Lebanon. Given the circumstances of the Lebanese oil spill case prevailing at the time of the incident and beyond, I urge Member States, international organizations, international and regional financial institutions, non-governmental organizations and the private sector to intensify their support for Lebanon in this matter, in particular for recovery and rehabilitation activities on the Lebanese coast.