



Press office 3/8/07

Synopsis of One Year On the Oil Spill Crisis Press Conference

After one year on, on the oil spill crisis of Lebanon that was caused by Israeli bombardment of the Jiyeh power plant storage tanks,

The Ministry of Environment organized, under the direction of the president of the Council of Ministers H.E. Fuad Siniora, the national press conference to commemorate the year on the oil spill in partnership with Hanns Seidel foundation and all the partners who have contributed to and worked on the oil spill crisis over the past year under the theme of:

So that we shall not forget
“One year on – Oil Spill Crisis – July 2006-2007”

At the conference, the Ministry of Environment welcomed its esteemed guests and conference participants to the National Centre for Marine Sciences in Batroun, and bid a special welcome and paid homage to our courageous Lebanese Army and its martyrs. Mr. Peter Hartman of the Hanns Seidel foundation expressed his pride in being back in Lebanon and stressed the importance of this day so we shall not forget this intentional environmental crisis that has impacts on human health, environment and tourism and that we should learn from this crisis that force is not the solution to conflict.

The conference was attended by representative of the national audit, representatives of ministries and director generals , representative of embassies and the national defense bodies such as the Lebanese Army and Internal Security Forces. Not to mention representatives of municipalities, unions and syndicates, private companies, schools, universities and consultancies and national and international agencies and NGOs. The exhibition was excellent and the panel discussion very informative and well received. That is, approximately 200 people attended from diverse backgrounds.

After that, Dr. Gaby Khalaf, Director of the Marine Sciences Centre of the National Council for Scientific Research presented some of the impacts of the oil spill crisis on the marine environment, and explained the the crisis had two parts that were: oil spill clean up operations and monitoring of impacts of the crisis. And that as it relate to the remit of the centre, the strategy to carry out monitoring activities was as follows:

- Stage I from July 2006 until the end of year 2006 (results already published by the centre)



- Stage II during the year 2007 (where the results of this stage will be published within two months in cooperation with MoE)
- Stage III will span from the year 2007 until 2011.

During these three stages the Marine Centre explained that it will continue analyzing the chemical and fuel content of the samples that are collected from 26 sampling points along the Lebanese coast, in addition to monitoring the health and safety of the habitats and movements of marine plants (plants) and animals (fauna).

The Director General of Environment then welcomed the attendees and gave special thanks to the Ministry of Agriculture and the National Council for Scientific Research / Marine Centre for their support and partnership in the organizing of the press conference. He then went on to remind those present of previous crises that the world had faced, such as the Hiroshima bomb in Japan, the chemical crisis of Seveso in Italy, the Union Carbide incident in India, Minemata and others. He briefly outlined how these crises had impacted on the understanding of the environment and the development of this field leading to the establishment of the Ministry of Environment in Italy, the creation of environmental parties worldwide and environmental legislation in Europe to mitigate impacts and prevent further crises wherever possible etc...

He then went on to spotlight the fact that in Lebanon, the oil spill crisis occurred under abnormal circumstances. That is, during war and under a land, air and sea siege and it was imperative that the first intervention be preventative first to protect the Mediterranean sea from an additional 25,000 tonnes of heavy fuel oil. Once that was accomplished, oil spill mitigation efforts were implemented and cleanup operations started. Lebanon would not have been able to carry out any intervention activities if it had not been for the three p's; partnership, partnership and partnership between all stakeholders, national and international. This partnership was crowned by issuance of resolution number 61/194 "Oil Slick in Lebanon" by the United Nations General Assembly on 6 February 2007 that 170 countries voted for.

Then, the documentary "The Oil Spill in Lebanon" that was funded by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and produced by the World Conservation Union (IUCN) was shown. This is the first of its kind documentary to show the scope of the crisis and the preliminary interventions to mitigate its consequences.

During the press conference and after the showing of the documentary, there following took place:

- The distribution of the booklet "One Year On - Oil Spill Crisis – July 2006" that presents a synopsis of the events of the past year as they relate to the oil spill crisis and the different stages of intervention and the



preliminary plans for oil spill waste management, treatment and disposal, UN resolution 61/194 and future steps. Not to mention a thank you section for all the partners that have worked on the oil spill crisis over the year. The booklet also contains some images of the coast and the work that was done and that was taken over the year “**so that we shall not forget**”...

- Distribution of copies of the documentary “The Oil Spill in Lebanon”
- An exhibition where there was work presented by the Ministry of Environment – Service of prevention from Technological Impacts and Natural Disasters and partners who had worked during the past year on cleanup operations such exhibitions by the Lebanese Army/Lebanese Navy, UNDP/EPE, USAID, Greenline NGO and Navy Group.
- An open panel discussion where the attendees presented queries and questions to the Ministry of Environment (MoE) represented by the Director General and the Oil Spill Communications officer Ms. Ghada Mitri, and the National Council for Scientific Research represented by the Director of the Marine Centre Dr. Gaby Khalaf.

During this discussion, MoE reconfirmed that the sea was free from any liquid fuel of the oil spill and clarified that Phase II of cleanup operations will cover 26 rocky sites along the coast namely sites on Palm Islands, Anfeh, Byblos, Batroun, Tabarja and some sites in Beirut and Jiyeh. This phase is expected to be completed around October when MoE will reassess the status of the sites.

The Marine Centre that is monitoring the impacts of the oil spill crisis on the marine environment explained that the preliminary monitoring plan extends upto 2011 but that does not mean that all impacts of the oil spill will be gone by 2011 which is why future monitoring plans are being looked into.

The DG also explained that the Ministry of Environment was working very closely with the Ministries of Justice and Foreign Affairs on the UN resolution 61/194 that specifically states in its third and fourth points:

Third: [The UN General Assembly] calls upon the Government of Israel to assume responsibility for prompt and adequate compensation to the Government of Lebanon for the costs of repairing the environmental damage caused by the destruction, including the restoration of the marine environment



Fourth: Encourages member states, regional and international organizations, regional and international financial institutions, and non-governmental organizations and the private sector to provide financial and technical assistance to the Government of Lebanon in support of its efforts to cleanup the pollutes shores and sea of Lebanon with a view to preserving its ecosystem;

And As the philosopher, poet and writer Gibran Khalil Gibran said in “*The Visit of Wisdom*”:

***“Advance, and never halt, for advancing is perfection.
Advance and do not fear the thorns in the path,
For they draw only corrupt blood.”***

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