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REGIONAL MARINE POLLUTION EMERGENCY
RESPONSE CENTRE FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA (REMPEC)

CENTRE REGIONAL MEDITERRANEEN POUR L'INTERVENTION
D'URGENCE CONTRE LA POLLUTION MARINE ACCIDENTELLE (REMPEC)

MEDITERRANEAN ACTION PLAN
PLAN D'ACTION POUR LA MEDITERRANEE



8th Meeting of Focal Points of the
Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response
Centre for the Mediterranean Sea (REMPEC)

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**REMPEC'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE MARINE POLLUTION INCIDENT
IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN
DURING THE SUMMER 2006**

Note by the Secretariat

Introduction to the Marine Pollution Incident in the Eastern Mediterranean

1. During the conflict in the Middle East, between July and August 2006, a major oil spill occurred at the tank farm of the Jieh Power Plant, located some 30 km south of Beirut in Lebanon. The Lebanese Ministry of Environment estimated that the amount of oil that entered the Mediterranean Sea as a result of the damage to the tank farm was up to 15,000 tonnes. A number of storage tanks containing fuel oil, defined as fuel similar to IFO 150, were damaged and caught fire in the air raids on the 13 and 15 July 2006. The fuel oil that was not consumed by fire on land entered the sea causing an oil spill which continued moving towards the north, following the general pattern of currents in the eastern basin of the Mediterranean Sea.

2. The ongoing hostilities during almost two months after the incident prevented the Lebanese national authorities from attempting any containment of oil near the site of the spillage or recovery operations in the open sea. The above-mentioned movement towards the north of the fragmented original oil slick consequently caused the contamination of various sites along 150km of the Lebanese coast between the Jieh Power Plant, including an area just south of it, and the border between Lebanon and Syria in the north. By 2 August 2006 some oil originating from the spill in Jieh also reached beaches in the southern part of Syria, affecting approximately 7km of the shoreline.

Call for assistance

3. Following a request for assistance from the Lebanese Minister of Environment concerning a "massive amount of oil spills along the coastlines", received by REMPEC on the 21 July 2006, specific information on the spill was immediately requested by the Centre. Subsequently, initial technical advice on shoreline cleaning was provided by REMPEC to the Lebanese Authorities.

4. In compliance with Article 12 of the Prevention and Emergency Protocol (Protocol Concerning Cooperation in Preventing Pollution from Ships and, in Cases of Emergency, Combating Pollution of the Mediterranean Sea, 2002), once the necessary information was collected on the oil spill, a circular letter calling for assistance was issued on the 25 July 2006 by the Centre and addressed to the REMPEC's OPRC Focal Points of all the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention (i.e. the 21 Mediterranean coastal States and the European Community). In addition, Lebanon also requested direct bilateral assistance from various Governments and from the European Commission (EC), which immediately activated the Monitoring and Information Centre (MIC) operating within its Directorate-General for Environment.

5. On the 3 August 2006, REMPEC was informed by the Syrian Ministry of Environment that on the 2 August 2006, Syria was affected by oil slicks that affected approximately 7 km of its shoreline. REMPEC asked the Syrian authorities to analyse the oil, in order to compare it with the characteristics of the oil spilled in Lebanon.

6. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic sent a call for assistance to REMPEC on the 6 August 2006, after the Syrian shoreline was again affected by oil slicks. REMPEC immediately informed the Contracting Parties about the Syrian request (*vide* paragraphs 23 and 24 below) and officially activated the Mediterranean Assistance Unit (MAU).

National/Regional/International Assistance Coordination Structure

7. Since the early days of the incident, in accordance with the provisions of the Prevention and Emergency Protocol, in liaison with Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP) and in close co-operation with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), International Maritime Organization (IMO), European Commission (EC) and other partners, REMPEC co-ordinated, at the regional level, the response operations to the oil spill, in collaboration with the respective competent national authorities in the region.

8. Due to the number of Governments, international organisations, institutions, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), etc... which offered assistance, a national, regional and global coordination structure as well as a clear definition of the response strategy was essential for efficient response. During a High Level Co-ordination Meeting on the Response to the Marine Pollution Incident in the Eastern Mediterranean held in Piraeus, Greece, on the 17 August 2006 convened by Mr. Efthimios Mitropoulos, Secretary-General of International Maritime Organization (IMO), and Mr. Achim Steiner, Executive Director of United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and attended by Ministers and high-level representatives from the affected countries (Lebanon, Syria), the three potentially affected countries (Cyprus, Greece, Turkey), as well as by the Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit, EC, UNEP MAP and REMPEC, the following response coordination structure was reconfirmed:

- Global co-ordination : IMO/UNEP/OCHA/EC;
- Regional co-ordination : REMPEC; and
- National co-ordination: Ministry of Environment of Lebanon.

9. During the second part of August, the Oil Spill Operations and Coordination Centre (OSOCC) was formed in Lebanon to enhance, at a national level, overall coordination, information and media management, operations and logistics, administration and support as well as international assistance.

10. Following the High-Level Co-ordination Meeting on the Response to the Marine Pollution Incident in the Eastern Mediterranean held on the 17 August 2006 in Piraeus (Athens), Greece, and the Stockholm Donors Conference held on the 31 August 2006, a number of countries and international organizations responded to the calls for assistance of

Lebanon and provided the Government of Lebanon with assistance in kind (expertise, equipment, material) or with financial assistance.

Action undertaken by REMPEC

Dissemination of information

11. REMPEC communicated frequently with the Lebanese Ministry of the Environment to request specific information, to obtain regular updated information on the pollution incident and to inform the Ministry about actions undertaken by the Center. REMPEC Focal Points were continuously informed through **circular letters** aimed particularly at specifying the needs of the Lebanese Government in terms of equipment, expertise and funds, and at updating Contracting Parties on developments with respect to the oil spill.

12. In addition, relevant information was systematically forwarded by **email**, for co-ordination purposes, to the organizations involved in the abovementioned international response co-ordination structure; these organizations were also regularly updated on REMPEC's actions through **teleconferences**. Furthermore, the Centre posted, on a regular basis, **Situation Reports (SITREPs)** on its **website** with a view to completing the information provided and facilitating media relations. In that respect, due to high media interest on the incident, UNEP MAP assigned, in consultation with REMPEC, an Information Officer who dealt with all the public and media relations. This arrangement allowed REMPEC to focus on technical and co-ordination issues while UNEP MAP successfully dealt with media communications.

13. As a consequence of the media diffusion of the information concerning this major oil spill, a substantial amount of clean-up private company offers were addressed to the Ministry of the Environment as well as to the main international organizations involved in the response co-ordination. In order to release the Ministry of the Environment and the international organizations from the workload that the offers follow-up involved, it was commonly agreed that all offers would be redirected to REMPEC. The Center systematically responded to all private companies and maintained an updated list of offers which was communicated to the Ministry of Environment.

Remote technical assistance

14. Since the early stages of the incident, the Centre exchanged information with the Ministry of Environment (MoE) and OSOCC in Lebanon, and with the Ministry of Local Administration and Environment in Syria in order to obtain as much and accurate information as possible, with a view to assessing the situation and its development. REMPEC also provided technical advice accordingly and forwarded, on request of the Lebanese Ministry of Environment, several technical guidelines.

15. Due to the hostilities, United Nations security clearances for Lebanon were not granted to REMPEC and, as a consequence, neither REMPEC staff nor experts could be dispatched on scene. Under these conditions, the MAU was put on stand-by, pending activation. Although no official report of oil slicks at sea was received by REMPEC, another initial concern was related to the presence at sea of a free floating oil slick, which was considered as a potential risk for the neighbouring countries.

16. In this context, REMPEC requested the Government of Cyprus to run the MEDSLICK oil spill model, developed specifically for the Eastern Mediterranean, and which could provide an indication whether a part of the oil could reach other neighbouring Mediterranean coastal States. REMPEC also investigated the possibility of obtaining satellite images from various sources, with a view to cross validate the results of the model. The Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission (EC) provided analysed satellite images (SAR)

through the EC-MIC. Aerial and boat surveys, which could only be conducted during the second half of August 2006, subsequently confirmed that there was no oil at sea, excluding therefore any threat for the neighbouring countries to be affected by the oil spilled in Lebanon. The Contracting Parties were informed accordingly by REMPEC on the 31 August 2006.

17. Since it was not possible for REMPEC to carry out the required systematic assessment on site, the Centre decided to establish a task force referred to as "REMPEC Group of Experts" composed of various high qualified experts from the Centre of Documentation, Research and Experimentation on Accidental Water Pollution (CEDRE), Cyprus Oceanography Centre, the Central Institute for Applied Marine Research (ICRAM), and the International Tanker Owners Pollution Federation Ltd (ITOPF). The main task of the Group was to develop an Action Plan whose objectives were to:

- provide immediate advice and technical assistance to the Government of Lebanon on an oil spill response strategy and appropriate oil spill response techniques;
- assess the type of assistance and resources (equipment, manpower,...) needed to respond to the spill and elaborate a clean-up plan and follow-up international assistance programme; and
- identify and mobilise the financial and in-kind available assistance and contributions needed to implement the assistance programme.

18. Following the compilation of information from different sources, the "*Lebanon Marine and Coastal Oil Pollution International Assistance Action Plan*" was finalised by the REMPEC Group of Experts and approved by the High Level Co-ordination Meeting held in Piraeus (Athens), Greece on the 17 August 2006

Assistance on-site

19. In the early stages of the crisis, the Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit dispatched to Lebanon a co-ordination expert with a view to assisting and supporting the Lebanese Ministry of Environment in the overall co-ordination of the response to the oil spill. During the High Level Co-ordination Meeting in Greece, the Lebanese Minister of the Environment expressed directly to the Director of REMPEC the urgent need to dispatch an expert to the Ministry of Environment to undertake the overall co-ordination of the assistance and advice which was being provided to Lebanon. By the beginning of September 2006, with the initiation of more complex clean-up operations and the arrival of additional assistance, this function became increasingly critical. Experts from CEDRE, who were acting on behalf of REMPEC and who were made available by the French Government, provided assistance and advice to the OSOCC / Lebanese Ministry of Environment during the period 22 August - 19 October 2006. The objective of the missions carried out by the experts of CEDRE was also to assess the extent of the spill along the Lebanese shoreline and assist the Lebanese Ministry of Environment in defining priorities in the response strategy. Additional co-ordination support was also provided by experts deployed through the European Commission mechanisms.

20. At the end of the mission of the expert from the Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit, the IMO/REMPEC expert financed by the IMO Marine Pollution Response Fund ensured, between the 13 September and 1 November 2006, continuous and high-level support to the Ministry of Environment, for overall co-ordination and management of the spill response. Subsequently, the IMO/REMPEC expert was replaced by an expert made available by Environment Canada and co-financed by IMO for a short mission between the 10 and 18 November 2006.

21. It should be highlighted that, in addition to the support to the Lebanese Ministry of the Environment and OSOCC, the above mentioned experts also provided technical assistance to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Lebanon which is in charge of managing international financial contributions. Their role was essentially to assist in the definition of projects to be submitted to the donor countries and to support UNDP in the preparation of corresponding terms of references.

22. The support to the Lebanese Ministry of Environment, OSOCC and UNDP was extended in collaboration with REMPEC through a contract signed between UNDP and CEDRE for three missions aimed at *inter alia* revising projects proposals for donor countries and monitoring cleanup activities carried out by private companies contracted by UNDP. At the time of writing this document, two missions were already completed and carried out between the 8 and 18 January 2007 and between the 7 and 11 February 2007.

Mediterranean Assistance Unit (MAU)

23. On the 6 August 2006, the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic requested the assistance of REMPEC when the southern Syrian shoreline (approx. 7km) was impacted by oil.

24. REMPEC immediately activated the MAU and deployed Mr. Amato, an expert from ICRAM, within the framework of a Joint UNEP-OCHA / REMPEC team of experts. The objective of Mr. Amato's mission to Syria, which was carried out between the 8 and 11 August 2006, was primarily to assess the situation and to advise accordingly the relevant authorities.

Results of the clean-up operations

25. On the 24 February 2007, the first phase of the clean-up operation in Lebanon, which included the removal of all free floating oil and the bulk of oil from the polluted sites, was completed. This phase was the first priority of the Lebanese Ministry of Environment to ensure that remobilization of fuel oil would not pollute new sites. A total amount of 7,280 m³ of contaminated waste was collected including 1026 m³ of liquid oil, 238 m³ of semi-solid oil and 6,016 m³ of polluted sand, pebbles, debris, etc....

Support to REMPEC

26. Taking into consideration the increase in the workload of REMPEC due to the co-ordination of the response operations to the Lebanese oil spill as well as the ongoing and scheduled programme of activities of the Centre, external human resources were urgently needed to reinforce REMPEC's involvement in the management of the oil spill. Following REMPEC's request, three experts were successively seconded to the Center by Environment Canada (28 August - 18 September 2006), the United Kingdom Maritime and Coast Guard Agency (MCA) (26 September - 10 October 2006), and the European Commission (EC) through the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) (10 October - 30 October 2006). The French Navy also seconded an Ensign to assist the Centre (15 November – 15 December). Both secondments from Environment Canada and from MCA were co-financed by IMO through the IMO Marine Pollution Response Fund.

The Meeting of Focal Points is invited to take note of the information provided in this document.