

## **Lebanon's Oil Spill has become a Regional Problem**

### **Final Ceasefire is needed for Accurate Assessment and to Start Cleanup Operations**

By Wael Hmaidan

GreenLine activist, and coordinator of oil spill assessment team for NGOs

The escalating Israeli attack on Lebanon did not only kill its civilians and destroy its infrastructure, but it is also annihilating its environment. Last week between 15,000 and 30,000 ton oil spill resulted from the Israeli air raid on the Jiyeh power plant South of Lebanon. In an effort to help assess the extent of the damage, local environmental NGOs have prepared a preliminary map highlighting areas along the coast that have been impacted by the spill. It appeared to them that the oil slick has reached Syria and there is a possibility that it would reach other neighboring countries further north. It also was clear to them that no proper assessment can be carried and no cleanup operations can stop without achieving a final ceasefire.

The assessment has been made very difficult under the current siege of Lebanon especially that the use of boats, which are needed to monitor the oil slicks that are far away from shore, are not permitted. Also, the coastline needs to be surveyed meter by meter from sea in order to carry accurate assessment, which at this time is not possible.

At the same time cleanup operations should start as soon as possible; otherwise it will be harder and harder to cleanup. Each day we delay the cleanup, we allow the oil to settle into the sand, rocks and seabed more and more. The Israeli air force has hit ambulances, aid trucks and other civilian equipment during the past two weeks. There is no guarantee that they will not target the cleanup operations," he added.

The map that the NGOs have distributed shows roughly the areas where oil has been spotted along the shore. "The extent of the damage was much more than we had expected. Important fish nursery areas along the coast have been completely covered by oil. The thickness of the slick in some spots exceeds 40cm. Our eyes have never witnessed anything as horrifying as what is now happening to the Lebanese environment," said Hmaidan. (3)

The Lebanese environmental NGOs put the primary responsibility of this environmental crime on Israel. There was no need or excuse for Israel to target the fuel tanks in the Jiyeh electrical power plant. The NGOs also call on the International community and the United States to put an end to this war, for the rescue of Lebanon, its people and its environment.

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Notes to editor:

- (1) The Lebanese environmental NGOs include: Bahr Lubnan Association, Union of Professional Divers, and Green Line Association; which are prominent local Non-Governmental Organizations known for their work in protecting the Mediterranean Sea in Lebanon.
- (2) For the sake of comparison, the famous Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska in 1989 amounted to 37,000 tons. The cement factory oil spill in Lebanon in 2003 amounted to 50 tons.
- (3) The Lebanese coast is a very important site for fish spawning and sea turtle nesting, including the green turtle, which is an endangered species in the Mediterranean. During the month of July, turtle eggs start to hatch along the Eastern coast of the Mediterranean. Also, Blue Fin Tuna, which is a very important commercial species and which has been under severe stress from over-fishing, are present in the Eastern Mediterranean coastal water in this period of the year. The oil spill, of which part of it has settled on the sea floor, will threaten the blue fin tuna and other fish species spawning areas. Another important impact of the spill is the effect on tourism in the future. The Lebanese coast is an important tourist destination, and after the war ends, Lebanon will need every source of income to rebuild the country.