

One Year Post Aggression.... And Oil Spill

What happened to the Cleanup and Prosecution of Israel

Press release

Beirut, 27 July 2007

One year has passed after the Israeli Aggression on Lebanon and its devastating impacts on the civil life, infrastructure and environment of Lebanon including the major oil spill off the Lebanese coast resulting from the intentional bombardment of the Jiyeh tank farm.

On July 13 and 15, the Israeli airforce repeatedly attacked the fuel tanks of the Jiyeh power plant south of Beirut leading to an enormous fire burning about 50000 tonnes of heavy fuel oil and the leak of about 15000 tonnes into the sea causing the worst oil spill ever to hit the Eastern Mediterranean basin. This spill polluted about 120 km of Lebanese shores including very important and sensitive marine ecosystems, and a world heritage site in Byblos. This was followed by a sea and air blockade that prevented any response to restrict the damage and commence an early cleanup operation as usual in such disasters.

Today, one year after the spill, still no comprehensive scientific assessment of the Environmental Social and Economic damages has been done. On the contrary, two United Nations Agencies presented diametrically contradictory reports. While UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme presented the impacts as modest and that Lebanon evaded serious damage, UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) presented the spill impacts as severe, disastrous and long term.

From its side, Israel rejected any responsibility claims and considered the issue as part of the collateral damage of war.

On its part, the Lebanese government did not, to date, present any compensation claims to the UN or any of its relevant agencies to help it control the impacts and conduct the recovery; as if the disaster happened on another planet and not that the real responsibility lies in the hands of the US government which prevented then all calls for cease fire and then to end the blockade worsening the impacts of the spill.

Professor Richard Steiner from the University of Alaska and member of the IUCN Commission of Environmental Economic and Social Policy reaffirmed his conclusion that Israel intended to cause an environmental disaster as it knew

exactly that the oil can only be used for the power plant and not any other activities related to war, making this attack a clear war crime.

This confirmation came in a press conference held today by the two Lebanese NGOs Green Line and Byblos Ecologia at Le Meridien Commodore Hotel.

The two NGOs seriously criticized the international community and specifically the US government for failing to take any measures to hold Israel liable and force it to compensate for the intentional damage caused to humans and environment. The international efforts and donations to date are a failing blind wash attempt.

Professor Steiner conducted on behalf of Green Line and CEESP as assessment of the current situation coming up with the following conclusions:

1. Large areas of the Lebanese coast are still severely polluted as if there were no cleanup activities there,
2. Although about a thousand tones of oil and waste were removed, the waste is still on site endangering the ecosystem while awaiting treatment,
3. There is still no National Contingency Plan to confront similar oil spills,
4. Cleanup should be resumed to the rocky areas using high pressure hot water or steam despite other contradictory recommendations;
5. A comprehensive rehabilitation plan for the marine ecosystems should be started immediately.
6. Recovery and rehabilitation should be paid for by Israel or the international community
7. Despite the scarcity of the funds that were allocated for cleanup, a major question regarding the USAID grant to SEACOR amounting 5 million dollars which did a very lousy cleanup operation; and the full scale cleanup and recovery grant from Bahr Lubnan NGO that was accepted by a special governmental decree but not materialized into action.

Green Line and Byblos Ecologia request the Lebanese Government to assume its responsibilities to remove all impacts of this disaster facing its people and their environment, as this is the ground of existence of any government.