**Stopping the Next Pollution Disaster**

**Action Plan to Stop Oil Pollution in Eila**t

**Background**

The writing has been on the wall for a long time, regarding the ghastly oil-pollution event off of Israel’s coast. Back in 2008, the Israeli government took a resolution on the need for a plan to cope with marine pollution. The resolution, however, was never implemented and the budgets and resources needed for it were not allocated. Sadly, it was only the ecological disaster that prompted the government to wake up, resolve to allocate NIS 45 million to clean up the beaches, and instruct the Minister of Environmental Protection to distribute to the other ministries, within thirty days, draft legislation that would prepare the country to handle a marine-pollution event.

The main challenge is to thwart the next pollution incident, which, unfortunately, also seems to be anticipated. The peace agreements with the Gulf countries include an accord between these countries and the Eilat-Ashkelon Pipeline Company, Ltd. (EAPC), to deliver oil from these states to the Gulf of Eilat in huge container vessels and send it on from Eilat to Ashkelon in an antiquated pipeline that dates back to the 1960s.

The transport of such large quantities of petroleum through an area as sensitive as the Gulf of Eilat is a sure recipe for disaster. Even the smallest leak from one of these gigantic vessels as it arrives, or as it connects with the pipeline, may destroy the northern coral reef of the Gulf of Eilat, a feature of exceptional importance at the highest global level. Damage to the reef and pollution of the sea, of course, would also deal a death blow to the tourism that supports the city of Eilat.

It will be a monumental challenge to stop the project due to the enormous revenues that it is expected to generate, meaning that the pressure to go ahead with it be enormous as well. Of course, the project also has geopolitical significance for Israel’s relations with the United Arab Emirates. In addition, there is no regulatory way of keeping the quantity of oil passing through the Gulf from growing from five ships per year, as it is today, to 150 annually on the basis of the existing infrastructure, since EAPC has a unique status in Israeli law that allows it to operate secretively and almost uninhibitedly.

The main way to halt the project at the present time is by having the Israelis government adopt a resolution that will stop EAPC from moving forward with the planned activity.

**Goal**

Halt EAPC’s agreement with the Gulf states and thwart progress on the project that would deliver oil to Ashkelon via the Gulf of Eilat.

**Objective**

A Government resolution that would limit EAPC’s activity in the Gulf of Eilat.

**Modus Operandi**

The objective, as stated, is a government resolution after the new government is formed; the action plan is derived from this in reverse order:

* Adoption of a government resolution limiting EAPC’s activity—by the end of 2021;
* Including the topic in the new government’s program for its first hundred days—by July 2021;
* Inserting the topic into the coalition accords—by May 2021;
* Getting candidates and parties to consider the matter and make commitments in regard to it—by March 23, 2021.

To bring this about, the following public activities shall be undertaken:

* Establishment of a coalition of mayors from Eilat, Negev localities, and Ashkelon, and deploying them against the plan;
* Informational meetings in municipal jurisdictions in conjunction with the authorities—if possible—to promote the cause vis-à-vis their mayors and the government;
* Extensive activity on social networks, targeting relevant government ministers—the Prime Minister and the ministers of Finance, Energy, and Environmental Protection;
* Meetings with the relevant ministers to present the topic;
* Publishing an official position of the Ministry of Environmental Protection against the project;
* Legal action—petitioning the courts;
* Promoting professional work on a series of topics (the dangers of leaks, ecological effects, the health effects of air pollution, political effects on Israel’s relations with Egypt, defense implications, etc.);
* Protest vigils in front of the Finance Minister’s home / the Ministry of Finance;
* Activity vis-à-vis the National Security Council.

**Work Plan**

The activity shall be undertaken by a broad coalition of environmental and social organizations that was established about a month ago. The coalition’s operations, placed under the central control of a project coordinator, shall progress toward the aforementioned objective by wielding a range of tools: legal, lobbying, public relations, and public action, all based on a series of professional works that support our arguments.

Some of the activity shall be based on the resources of the organizations that participate in the coalition, with emphasis on their legal, lobbying, and public-relations abilities. Even in these respects, however, we will need support from outside elements. Consequently, most resources will be pledged to support for our professional stance by means of professional opinions, meaningful public action, and a project coordinator who will integrate these activities.

**Budget**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Area of activity** | **Budget (NIS)** |
| Project coordinator, 9 months | 120,000 |
| Professional inputs | 200,000 |
| Legal action | 50,000 |
| Lobbying action | 60,000 |
| Public relations | 40,000 |
| Public activity | 100,000 |
| **Total** | **570,000** |