

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

UN-EC MISSION: PROSPECT FOR REHABILITATION GOOD
JOINT TEAM CONCLUDES RESPONSE TO OIL SPILL IN REPUBLIC OF KOREA

(Geneva/New York, 27 December 2007): A joint United Nations-European Commission Assessment Team, which has now returned from the Republic of Korea after responding to the oil spill from the *Hebei Spirit* in the Yellow Sea, has concluded that the prospect for the rehabilitation of the affected area is good. They attribute this conclusion to the quick actions and the speed of the clean-up operations on the part of the authorities in the Republic of Korea, who acted in an effective and efficient manner, using methods consistent with international oil pollution response practices.

Although emergency assistance to aid with clean-up operations is not required, the team concluded that environmental monitoring and analysis should be undertaken to determine the impact on the environment, and that shoreline assessment training should be carried out to assist with longer term clean-up options and to build national response capacity.

Follow up activities began almost immediately after the mission ended. As a result of the mission's findings, the Government of Canada is deploying a team of oil spill specialists to provide Shoreline Clean-up Assessment Training to Korean personnel. In addition, the United Nations Environment Programme and the European Commission will collaborate on a "Post Disaster Needs Assessment" to help national authorities establish an environmental monitoring methodology.

The UN-EC Assessment Mission began on December 15 and ended on December 22. It undertook a number of site visits by land, sea and air and established a partnership with national, provincial and local authorities involved with clean-up operations. The majority of beaches visited were cleaned, a result of strong coordination and the considerable effort of personnel dedicated to the clean-up and volunteers from the general public. A mission report, which will be shared with the Government, is being finalised and will contain a number of practical recommendations.

The team was fielded by the Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit and EC Monitoring and Information Centre. It was made up of experts from Canada, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, the EC Environmental Directorate-General, the European Maritime Safety Agency, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the UN Environment Programme.

The *Hebei Spirit* released approximately 10,500 tons of light crude oil after being struck by a barge on December 7, 2007. It is the worst oil spill in Korean history and a significant environmental emergency. The affected coastline, approximately 300 kilometres, hosts a number of fish farms and an active wild fishery industry, and is home to habitats for a variety of migratory birds. The region is also a popular tourist destination.