

Washington unveils warrant for seizure of Iran-operated Grace 1



Washington, August 17 (RHC)-- The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) has unveiled a warrant for the seizure of the Iran-operated Grace 1 supertanker a day after Gibraltar's Supreme Court confirmed the release of the vessel.

On Thursday, Gibraltar's government announced it was releasing the supertanker seized by British marines in the Strait of Gibraltar despite pressure from the US for the vessel's continued detainment.

The warrant unveiled on Friday read: "A seizure warrant and forfeiture complaint were unsealed today in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia alleging that Oil Tanker "Grace 1," all petroleum aboard it and \$995,000.00 are subject to forfeiture based on violations of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), bank fraud statute, and money laundering statute, as well as separately the terrorism forfeiture statute."

The DOJ also alleged that there had been "a scheme to unlawfully access the US financial system to support illicit shipments to Syria from Iran."

Britain's naval forces unlawfully seized Grace 1 and its cargo of 2.1 million barrels of oil in the Strait of Gibraltar on July 4 under the pretext that the supertanker had been suspected of carrying crude to Syria in violation of the European Union's unilateral sanctions against the Arab country.

Tehran, however, rejected London's claim that the tanker was heading to Syria, slamming the seizure as "maritime piracy." Following the incident, Spain's Foreign Ministry reported that the UK had seized the vessel at the request of the US, which has been trying to trouble Iran's international oil vessels as part of its campaign of economic pressure against the Islamic Republic.

The Gibraltar government had also said the US applied to seize the oil tanker after a report by British media that the vessel's release was imminent.

Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization said Tuesday that Britain was expected to soon free Grace 1, after the two sides exchanged certain documents to pave the way for the supertanker's release.

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