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Divers, youths clean up Aqaba's beaches and waters



JREDS Executive Director Fadi Sharaiha and ASEZA Chief Commissioner Hosni Abu Gheida survey the mountain of garbage divers brought to the surface as under the Clean Up the World campaign in Aqaba (Photo by Susan Lawrence Helke)

By Susan Lawrence Helke

AQABA - Sixty-five divers gathered to save the coral reefs of Aqaba under the 2009 Clean Up the World dive campaign.

In what is deemed to be one of the most beautiful coral sites in Aqaba, public volunteers and navy divers removed one tonne of garbage, 60 per cent of it plastic, from the seabed at the northern side of the Marine Science Station on Saturday.

Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority Chief Commissioner Hosni Abu Gheida was present at the launch and surveyed the mountain of garbage divers brought to the surface.

Trash recovered from the site consisted of plastic bags, bottles, cups and plates, aluminium cans, PVC pipe and empty paint cans. Large black plastic trash bags were found entwined in the reefs, depriving coral of light and nutrients it needs to survive.

Participants 16-year-old Leen Hamarneh and 15-year-old Tayseer Al Fayoumi from the International School of Aqaba said they were participating because they both wanted to help in the campaign, held under the patronage of HRH Princess Basma Bint Ali.

During a ceremony on Saturday, Royal Marine Conservation Society (JREDS) Executive Director Fadi Sharaiha outlined the threats posed by the container and ferry terminal expansion and relocation projects, slated to begin in January.

“The trash we cleaned up today was generated from the ferry terminal. When the container terminal is enlarged and the ferry terminal relocated towards the Marine Science Station, the amount of trash is going to increase significantly,” the JREDS director said.

“There will be no buffer zone between the container and ferry terminals - which are areas of high traffic density - and the Marine Science Station, and that will be a big problem,” he said, pointing out that coral saplings collected and transported prior to the container terminal expansion would have to be relocated.

According to Sharaiha, 50,000 square metres of coral will be destroyed or damaged by the three projects. The developments, coupled with a new port project planned near the Saudi border, poses what he called an “environmental disaster,” and will result in the destruction of one-fourth of all Jordanian coral reefs.

Meanwhile, on Sunday, 700 students and 300 volunteers gathered at Al Ghandour public beach for a clean-up organised by JREDS.

Prior to the beach clean-up, Princess Basma and Sharaiha spoke to the youths on the importance of protecting the reefs from trash by not littering and keeping public facilities clean.

“From the trash we have sorted, we will now gear our awareness campaigns in these directions, educating the public on the problems created primarily by plastic on the reefs,” Sharaiha said. According to JREDS, 80 per cent of all trash accumulated on the reefs comes from the beach.

“We will continue our campaigns in schools, because we are reaching the next generation of Jordanians, whom we will entrust the reefs to,” he said.

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