

Volunteers conduct massive beach clean-ups

• By CELIA JEAN

Tens of thousands of volunteers gathered on Friday as the world's largest beach cleaning project kicked off along Israel's shoreline in an attempt to break the Guinness world record by cleaning the country's coastline with volunteers, activists and even sea divers.

Projects were held along Israel's continually stretching Mediterranean sea shores from the top of the country at Rosh Hanikra on the border of Lebanon in the North to the beaches of Ashkelon in the South. Shoreline cleaning projects were also held in the Sea of Galilee and in Eilat.

In addition to the important job of keeping the shores and beaches of Israel clean, the goal of the event was to influence decision-makers in the establishment of marine reserves, as well as the implementation and enforcement of a ban on single-use plastics and utensils.

"We all hope that the extensive mobilization will influence the decision makers to work for the future of the sea. Marine life and flora provide us with breathable air, food sources and agricultural infrastructure, and it is on us to protect them," said Michael Raphael, the national coordinator of the ANU (We) organization's Mediterranean Sea coalition.

The State of Israel had pledged to declare 10% of Israel's areas as marine reserves, "but as of today it has only done so for 3% of Israel's marine area, leaving many marine species in danger," Refael said. "Marine nature reserves are the only solution recognized that can provide significant protection and ensure the future of the sea."

Globally, some eight million tons of plastic are dumped into the seas and oceans each year, according to estimates. In Israel 70% of ocean debris consists of bags and plastic packaging, according to a national monitoring report published in 2019 by the Environmental Protection Ministry.

This year, disposable masks and gloves only compounded the matter and were added to list of major contributors to beach debris.

The event kicked off at Herzliya's Acadia Beach and was attended by European Union Ambassador Emmanuel Joffre, Environmental Protection Minister Gila Gamliel, Chairman of the Interior and Environmental Protection Committee Miki Haimovich, and Herzliya Mayor Moshe Fadlon.

"Our future lies in our environment. This event expresses our approach of leading waste reduction efforts and conservation of our maritime and coastal environments and natural resources," Fadlon said.