

Palestinians and Israelis at peace with the sea



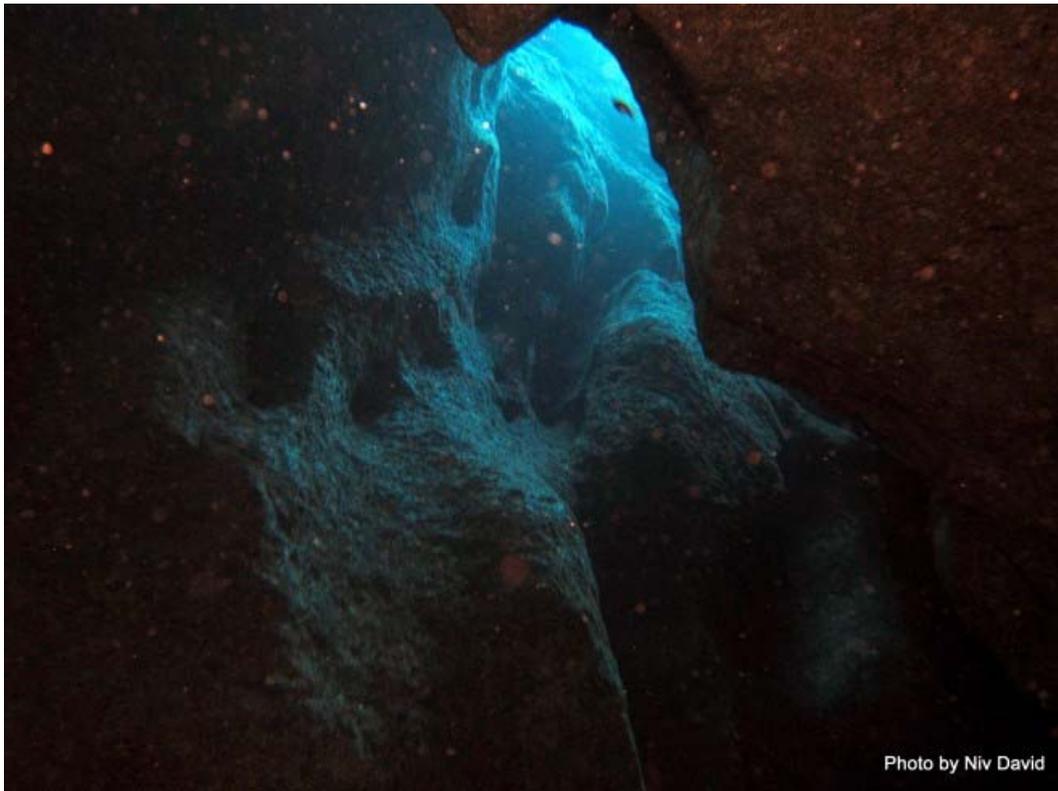
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Lifestyle / lifestyle-culture

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Another terror attack today in Jerusalem. Vengeful and permanent acts of aggression that leave no room for negotiation. I want to remind you that despite the horrible killings by axe and guns there are builders of peace from this Holy Land.



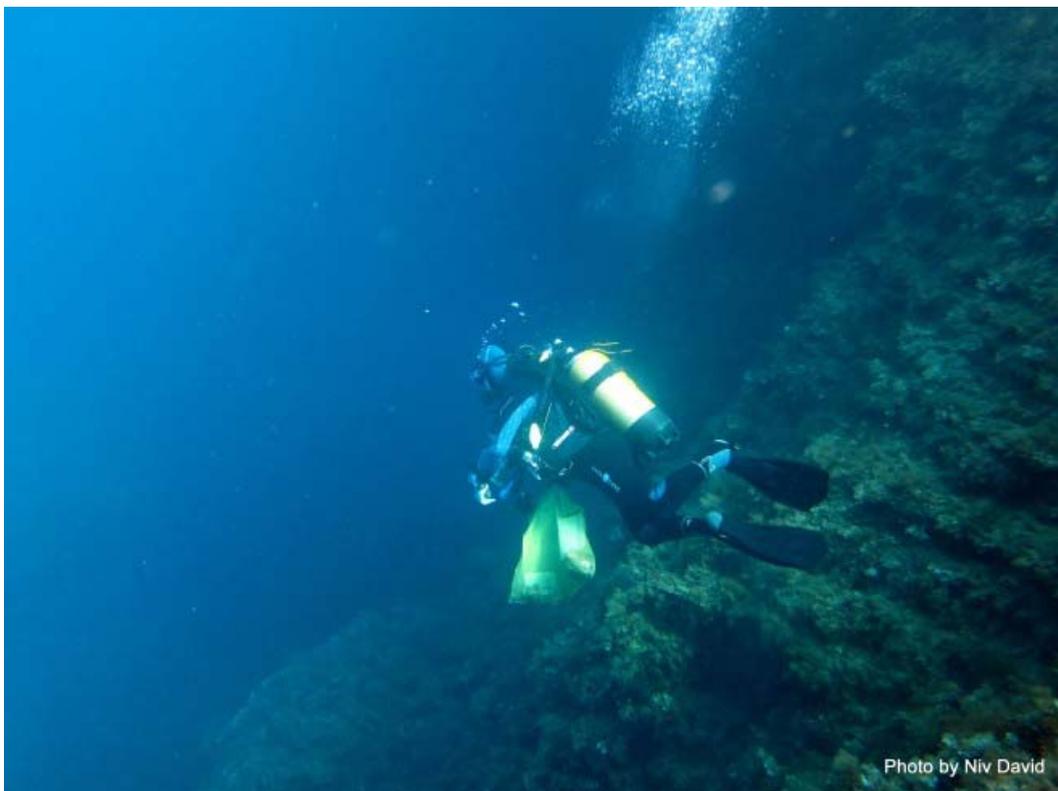
Thomas Friedman from the New York Times said it last month, and it's been something I have been saying for years since I started writing about positive environment news from the Middle East in 2007: the only way peace will come in the Middle East is through shared environmental action.



While religions can argue over access to temples, who should see the graves of the holy, or who can pray where, there is no-one who can argue about the importance of breathing clean air, drinking clean water and keeping our seas green. That's why building bridges through mutual environmental action and goals in research, industry and government is critical throughout the Middle East.



Before we give up home for Jerusalem this is a perfect time to highlight some cooperative environmental action from the region. Recently, in September, a workshop to protect marine biodiversity was held in Malta. For ten days senior researchers and their students from from Palestine, Israel, Cyprus, Ireland, Spain, Malta, Tunisia and more came together to develop a blueprint to solve marine ecological destruction in the Mediterranean. Green Prophet got to speak with two “enemies”, a Palestinian Cyriot and Israeli about working with the other.



The workshop was run by one of my favorite marine organizations EcoOcean, from Israel and Sweden, and the University of Malta, the EU’s BioDivmeX and the French National Center for Scientific Research.

Working out of Malta, the group of about 30 spent their time aboard EcoOceans's marine research vessel, the Mediterranean Explorer, as well as at labs at the Malta University.



The course of action was to start studying the biodiversity of the Maltese coast: the open sea, the nearby nature reserve Comino Island and the underwater caves of Malta. Early research on the caves revealed new species never before found in the Mediterranean region.

But just as important news is the relationships made between people, like PhD students Rana Abu Alhaija from Cyprus who is half Palestinian and Niv David from Israel.



David tells Green Prophet that the Mediterranean Sea is highly sensitive and is threatened by dense human population centers: “there is an ever growing need to document marine biodiversity in a context of global change and potential conservation support,” he says. And that “overcoming political and cultural disputes, is required to address these challenges.

David’s personal interest is a passion for maritime research while studying climate change at sea at University of Haifa in Israel: “This experience, collaboration with amazing people, was not only the key for efficient learning and knowledge exchange, but also for creating global mutualism among researches and students from different countries and cultures, sharing the same goal of better understanding marine systems for improved protection and conservation,” David tells Green Prophet

Abu Alhajja says: “Although all participants had to overcome language, cultural and personal barriers I had to deal with one more. I was a minority. I alone had to represent two countries that not only do they have a wide coast stretch but are also inconstant political turmoil.

“One might think that having Israeli colleagues in the same workshop might have impaired my ability to learn or work. In my perspective it had the exact opposite effect. There they were; the people who share with me the love for the same piece of land and care and study the same sea.

She continues: “The best part was that they were more than willing, not only to teach me the things that I do not know, but also to work beside me in achieving our common goal: to study and safeguard our sea.

“I did find many difficulties during my ten days at the BioDivMex workshop and I did disagree with other participants, one of which was a Jew who wanted to drop what he was doing to help me, but the bottom line is that through a touch of understanding we were able to successfully complete the workshop and create bonds that will generate future research projects.”

See more at: <http://www.greenprophet.com/2014/11/palestinians-and-israelis-at-peace-with-the-sea/#sthash.ex0knTOi.dpuf>