

10/3/2023

Presentation to the German Reception

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen - Good Afternoon.

I am extremely proud to be standing here today. With your permission, I'd like to begin with a personal story.

My father was 5 years old in the spring of 1939 when he, together with 668 other children, were saved by a courageous man. This man, Sir Nicolas Winton, –helped children escape from Nazi occupied Czechoslovakia to England and Scotland. Sir Winton did what was needed and later said (at the age of 100): “It is no use thinking you’ve had a good life if you haven’t done any harm. You have led a good life if you’ve done some good”.

This is the legacy I take with me. “Active goodness” as Sir Winton called it, is especially needed today as threats to our world are amassing. To me, it is through science that I try to make a change, to take down barriers and build bridges of communication and trust, finding solutions to our world’s greatest challenges including the global dangers of climate change that are affecting each and every one of us.

So:

It is a fact, that over 70% of the world is coloured blue with the oceans and seas surrounding us. Our blue planet is a crucial buffer to these changes. The marine system is a lifeline to all human populations and especially to **the millions of people living around its coastlines. YET – THIS LIFELINE IS THREATENED in many places including the Mediterranean Sea and the Arabian Gulf.**

Ocean warming, desertification, dust deposition, expansion of sea-water desalination, exploitation of deep-sea energy resources, intensive shipping and commerce, invasive species, mariculture, construction of new land on coastal sea areas, expanding tourism, and unfortunately geopolitical turmoil - all these threaten our oceans – our lifeline. We are increasingly aware that these ecosystems need to be protected and managed in a sustainable way that will protect the resources and ensure economic viability and growth for the local populations and for the next generations.

In 2008, the University of Haifa took upon itself to champion this cause and established the first graduate School of Marine Sciences in Israel. Fifteen years later the Leon Charney School of Marine Sciences is Israel’s largest academic center for marine sciences holistically connecting the physical, chemical, geological, biological and ecological aspects of the marine science to the human social, historical, and strategic relationship with the sea.

We are thrilled to have partnered with the Helmholtz Foundation and GEOMAR Helmholtz Centre for Ocean Research Kiel to establish **The Eastern Mediterranean Sea Centre- An Early-Warning Model-System for our Future Oceans: EMS Future Ocean REsearch (EMS FORE)**. This joint project coordinated by Prof. Eric Achterberg (GEOMAR) and myself together with a team of 17 investigators + ~8 students from both institutions, investigates the eastern Mediterranean Sea as a model for Future Ocean Research to examine and predict ecosystem resilience and sensitivity of the future oceans under climate change.

Recently, we have expanded our partnership and reached out across the Arabian Peninsula forming a trilateral Collaboration between the University of Haifa, GEOMAR Helmholtz Centre for Ocean Research Kiel, Khalifa and UAE Universities in the UAE . The Trilateral Collaboration was signed on November 14, 2022 at COP27 in Sharm El Sheikh. We are now working to secure funding and begin our joint research.

This is a historical moment to which we invite you all to take part in.

And it is here that I would like to share another personal exciting moment that embodies how small and interconnected our world is, and illustrates the role of science in breaking down walls. In the first Zoom meeting with our fellow scientists from the UAE, Prof. Waleed Hamza, mentioned his positive experience as a young Egyptian student in the early 1980's working with one particular Israeli scientist in the Mediterranean Sea and the Sea of Galilee – Prof. Tom Berman, he said. Well, I said, that was my father.

And here I am, today – closing the circle that began many years ago with a new collaboration.

These scientific partnerships as we are solidifying at present are crucial for the future - especially in geographical regions of cultural, political, and religious conflicts. If we succeed in our mission, we will ensure a healthier future. Let me conclude with a quote, by our first PM Ben-Gurion back in 1950. He said - "**the sea unifies and brings people closer...and embodies the unity of the human race...opening to mankind horizons and expanses unknown on land.**"

Thank you.