

A seal named "Hope"

An admirable creation was assembled by The International School of Paphos (ISOP), led by Marina Sophia Flevotomas - Eco-School Coordinator and Geography teacher - with the help of her students for the "Keep our Sand and Sea Plastic Free" project by the TUI Care Foundation and the Cyprus Sustainable Tourism Initiative (CSTI). The plastic mural, which depicts a Monachus Monachus Mediterranean monk seal, was made with 300 plastic bottles retrieved during the Eco Club Beach Clean-ups.

ISOP is dedicated to ensuring the reduction of single-use plastic, raising awareness of environmental protection and inspiring students to be part of a sustainable future. The seal mural highlights the plight that plastic pollution is a major source of degradation of the oceans and sea life. Cyprus, with its accessible coastline, shelters the critically endangered Monachus Monachus. The urgency to protect life underwater and on land, but also to combat climate change through our actions and the need to adopt sustainable ways of consumption and production, are essential in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda.

Throughout the academic school year, Ms Flevotomas guided students in the preparation of the mural. During the weekly after-school Eco Club, she had students assemble bottles for the mural by removing labels and caps, then cutting and flattening them. The seal mural painting was finalised by Ms Flevotomas. She has worked on large scale environmental awareness projects before, though this was her first experience using plastic.

Ms Flevotomas has more than a decade of experience in human and environmental rights. Having been a part of the Cyprus Delegation team to several United Nations Climate Change conferences, she has dedicated her personal and professional life to environmental education, with a focus on children and youth. Inspiring and guiding student to experiencing the awe of our planet, her hope is that children and youth benefit from nature-led activities for their mental and physical health and wellbeing while cultivating a sense of belonging, stewardship and empowerment. Students develop their critical thinking and problem-solving skills through collaboration of pro-environmental activities.

ISOP Year 13 student, Himali Sharma, had the following to say: "Building this seal was a great experience as it really brought us close together. Building this seal, putting down plastic - piece by piece - felt like building a home for Hope with my eco family and it really shows how together, step by step, we can create something so beautiful. Together, little by little, we can also make a change. I hope everyone sees our seal as a symbol of "hope" and is inspired to keep our sands and seas plastic free."

ISOP is grateful to be a member of CSTI. We are thankful for the learning opportunity through their project "Keep our Sand and Sea Plastic Free" and hope the artwork inspires people to reduce their plastic use, to appreciate, respect, and protect our oceans and seas.