

Transnational
Red Sea
Center

Bridging Science
& Diplomacy for
the Future of Corals

PRESS RELEASE

Le Transnational Red Sea Center forced to postpone its first expedition season to 2022

The Swiss initiative combining science and diplomacy for the preservation of Red Sea corals will conduct its first series of studies in the summer of 2022 along the Sudanese coast. This postponement is due to the prolonged immobilisation of the sailing vessel Fleur de Passion following an incident in the Gulf of Aqaba.

In the meantime, and in the long term, the Transnational Red Sea Center will continue its other activities, including the installation of continuous monitoring stations for the health of corals, in collaboration with its regional partners.

Lausanne, 4 August 2021 - The Transnational Red Sea Center (TRSC) has been forced to postpone its first season of expeditions to the Red Sea to 2022 due to the prolonged immobilisation of the sailing vessel Fleur de Passion following the navigation incident that occurred on 21 July in the southern Gulf of Aqaba.

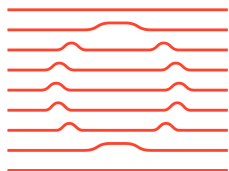
This first expedition season will take place along the Sudanese coast in partnership with the Red Sea University in Port Sudan, as initially planned.

In the meantime, the Swiss initiative housed at the Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL), which combines science and diplomacy in favour of the study and preservation of Red Sea corals, will implement another axis of its activities. In the coming months, it will set up its first two continuous coral health monitoring stations: in Eilat and Aqaba, in collaboration with two other regional partners, the Inter-University Institute for Marine Sciences and the Marine Science Station at the University of Jordan and Yarmuk University.

"The Transnational Red Sea Center has been forced to postpone its first expedition season, originally scheduled to take place from late July to late August along the Sudanese coast in partnership with the Red Sea University in Port Sudan, to the summer of 2022," explains Prof. Anders Meibom of EPFL, director of the TRSC.

"This postponement is certainly regrettable, but it does not call into question the project as a whole. Our action is indeed part of a long-term perspective and we intend to carry it out regardless of the hazards encountered," continues Prof. Meibom.

"The TRSC's ambition, which is to promote a regional approach to the issues of research and preservation of what is de facto the world's last coral 'refuge', remains unchanged," insists the TRSC director.



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Over the past 30 years, 50% of the world's corals have disappeared due to global warming, pollution and other destructive human activities, and only 10% are expected to survive beyond 2050.

Recently, however, there is a unique hope for the survival of at least one major reef ecosystem in the world. Recent studies involving EPFL researchers have revealed that Red Sea corals are resistant to global warming because of their particular genetics. Their survival is therefore possible, provided that the environmental pressure exerted by human activity in the countries bordering the Red Sea is mitigated.

Created in 2019 at the EPFL with the support of the Swiss Confederation, the Transnational Red Sea Centre plans to carry out four expeditions around the Red Sea, along its 4000 km coastline, each summer over the next four years.

At around 4:30 am on Wednesday 21 July 2021, the expedition yacht *Fleur de Passion* of the Fondation Pacifique in Geneva, the expedition's logistical partner, ran aground in the Strait of Tiran, north-east of the Egyptian city of Sharm el-Sheikh, while sailing towards Sudan, forcing the Egyptian Navy to rescue the ten crew members, including six scientists, who were fortunately unharmed.

Recovery operations are currently underway and the sailboat is expected to be tied up for several weeks for damage surveys and repairs.

Fleur de Passion set off from Seville at the end of April towards the Red Sea, following a symbolic ceremony organised at the Three Cultures Foundation.

The official launch of the Transnational Red Sea Center's first expedition season took place on 24 June in Aqaba in the presence of the Swiss Ambassador to Jordan, representatives of the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority and regional partners.

The boat then made a stopover in Eilat, from where she was to sail to Port Sudan after five days of navigation.

Media contact:

Transnational Red Sea Center
Samuel Gardaz, coordinator
samuel.gardaz@epfl.ch
Swiss mobile: +41 76 563 65 43