

# Friends of Soqotra September 2021 AGM Executive Committee Meeting Minutes

**Name of Association:** Friends of Soqotra (UK Charity Number 1097546)

**Type of Meeting:** Executive Committee Meeting (AGM)

**Date and Time of Meeting:** 26<sup>th</sup> of September 2021, 8:00-12:00 UK time (UTC+0)

**Venue:** Ghent University (Belgium) and virtually via Zoom.

## 1. Attendees and Apologies

The AGM was opened by the Chair.

Attendees included FoS committee members, of which the majority joined through the online meeting platform (Zoom, indicated by \*), others were present in person at the venue.

FoS members present (Executive Committee Members indicated with \*) included Raquel Vasconcelos\* (RV), Kay Van Damme (KVD), Haifaa Abdulhalim\* (HA), Dana Pietsch\* (DP), Petr Maděra (PM), Hana Habrová (HH), Martin Rejzek\* (MR), Eike Neubert\* (EN), Miranda Morris\* (MM), Francesca Pella\* (FP), Mark Thomlinson\* (MT), Fabio Attorre\* (FA), Petr Vahalík (PV), Rowan Salim\* (RS), Christina Deborah Herzel-Matsumura\* (CM), Dirk Van Dorpe (DvD). Apologies were received by Vladimir Melnik (VM), who was in contact via email during the meeting, Tullia Riccardi and by Peter De Geest (PDG). The agenda is attached as Appendix 1.

The meeting agenda was presented following a PowerPoint presentation where each reported on activities for which they are responsible.

## 2. Executive committee meeting and supporting Miro Presentation

### Communications and Outreach

#### Tayf

The last Issue of Tayf is the number 18 (2021). The section for children includes a colouring picture. "Soqotra newsletter" on the front was renamed into "Friends of Soqotra newsletter". The English editing was done by Lyndon DeVantier and Catherine Cheung, HA is offering her time and availability for the Arabic translation. Mendel University (Brno) covered the printing costs. KVD is planning to send a copy to different WhatsApp groups in Socotra, so they can spread it, combined with the distribution of some hard copies once on the island.

## **Website**

DP updated the participants about the website maintenance and progress, reminding that she will continue contacting the committee every month to invite everyone to contribute to update the system with new references or other news. The Bibliography page has still to be modified and/or updated in cooperation with the “archive subcommittee”. DP is asking the contribution of all the participants to suggest and / or recommend some concrete, consistent and reliable modifications to upgrading the FoS website’s layout. The participants explored the possibility to increase the number of members in the website subcommittee, with responsibilities and roles. PayPal links are now fully functioning. It was expressed that there is a need to reevaluate the option to automatically renew the membership. It was suggested to write a brief copyright agreement to send to the authors of the photos published on the website to formalise an agreement for the use of their pictures by FoS.

## **Social Media**

KVD reported that the number of FB people that visit the FoS page keeps rising, sometimes reaching over 10,000 people. Most of the visitors are from Yemen mainland. All comments and interactions in FB are positive (no negative interactions or comments). The FB page is also used as support to publish updates or scientific work related to Socotra, such as the last book of MM (*The Oral Art of Soqatra – A Collection of Island Voices, 2021. Brill Ed.*, also posted on the website).

## **Archive**

MR reported that he is adding 12 scientific papers to the archive. MR compiled a list in 2021 of all new papers that appeared in relation to Socotra and shared it with the website subcommittee. MM asked if FoS is interested to add a link connected to the Bibliography of the Modern South Arabian languages [Compiled by Janet C.E. Watson & Miranda J. Morris], regularly updated by a growing number of colleagues.

The other suggested activity (in continuation of previous year’s idea) is to create an archive of photos. This could involve the following main steps: a) The FoS executive committee will observe the pictures, cataloguing them based on the date and identifying photos that are appropriate (= not potentially controversial, etc), the recent vs the historical photos, images of landscapes vs those with people, and so on; b) All the pictures would be stored in Google Photos; c) The photos selected must be shown to the people (or family members) present in the pictures, in order to ask the permission to use the images; d) The selected and approved pictures will be accessible in the FoS website, if permission is granted (taking into consideration copyright and permission of individuals).

## **Core**

## **Finances**

MT reminded that in the past, FoS, after having submitted income and expenditure to the Charity Commission, used to be audited. He reminded that this passage is not an obligation, because the charity has an annual income of less than 10,000£. The current balance is 6,675.00£. Other ways to contribute to FoS are being explored, such as the fundraising of Facebook for birthdays. Moreover, this year the Charity received a grant from PayPal (182.00£). MT listed the current expenses as well, such as the insurance fee and the running costs of MailChimp. The RBS transfer, reported as still progressing in the April AGM minutes, has now been completed and signatory transfer has been done.

## **Governance**

KVD suggested privacy policy of FoS to be in line with the GDPR and new laws in relation to sharing digital information. He said that this activity and the updating of the constitution is not finished yet, a first draft of privacy statements has been outlined but not further defined. Updating the Charity privacy policy and the Constitution are still ongoing.

## **Membership**

### *Update*

The current number of the members is 42, confirming the trend, already recorded in April, of an increased interest in FoS. The recipient of MailChimp collates the current and the former members, reaching a total of 110 recipients. About the effort that FoS should do in engaging more people and involving the young generations in the Charity, DP reminded the other participants that we can pursue in campaigns looking for new members. FP proposed promotion stands in fairs, such as school fairs, using leaflets, past issues of the magazine Tayf or other material.

KVD shared the opinion, expressed by Socotri people in the past, which clarify the general position of the island inhabitants about their potential free membership. Several Socotri have declared that they are willing to help and contribute to FoS, but that they don't necessarily need to be officially registered as members. The main conclusions were: 1) FoS could ask Socotri contacts (emails, mobile contacts and so on) if they are interested to become members and share the answer; 2) The interviewed ones willing to become FoS members will have the option to pay the annual fee and/or contribute with some smaller amount of money.

The annual fee for institutions is 100.00\$ per year, which was checked by PM.

## **Projects, Grants and Science**

### **Mangroves**

The mangrove project came as a response of 2015 cyclones that affected the Socotra Archipelago. It started in 2017 in partnership with ARC-WH, EPA and the local Socotri AI

*Tamek* Association. Nowadays the mangrove patch is growing, 80% of the planted trees survived and there are 500 trees in the nursery.

HA listed the long-term benefits that the Mangroves project is providing to the local communities, including that it will be a natural barrier against extreme weather events, it can become a nursery for fish. To ensure to reach the targets mentioned, FoS committee decided to fund the mangrove project with another 500.00£ (note: FoS received a donation by Hillary Bradt of 500 pounds specifically for the mangrove project).

### **Indigenous culture and Language**

MM reminded to the other participants that the United Nations declared this international decade of indigenous languages (from 2022 to 2032). In this context, a Russian team headed by Leonid Kogan has worked with their Soqotri colleagues to produce a booklet with 30 stories, now available on the island for free. KVD asked MM if the subcommittee on culture would consider contributing on updates in this field to Tayf as an activity, MM agreed.

### **Other FoS projects**

The “*Al Khair* Project” was completed in 2021 on Socotra, a collaboration between FoS/EPA and a local NGO named *Al Khair*. The project was able to involve sixty families and gave the opportunity to organise a workshop by EPA who talked about nature conservation, risks of alien plant species and the importance of biodiversity (by Mr Ali Mahfirhin). Moreover, awareness workshops were carried out. The local responsible sent the final report about the performed activities (in Arabic), of which a summary, translated in English, was sent to the committee members (before the April AGM).

Another campaign was a beach cleaning activity, in Erher locality, was done by volunteers and a metal sign was made (including FoS logo) to reduce litter in the area. This activity was carried out right after the AGM of 2020 (in November).

### **Education and awareness**

MM expressed concern about the possible over-exploitation of the fresh water, referring to the presentation of KVD. The discussion reached the conclusion that, to avoid any kind of misuse of this precious resource, other initiatives of home gardens should be linked with awareness and/or education campaign of sustainable water use, with the help of leaflets – in Arabic and English - for example.

Other possible suggested leaflets would be about the turtles and their conservation.

### **Next meeting**

There were several options for the next venue, also depending on the covid-situation. One possible venue for the FoS AGM & Conference 2022 could be Vienna, together with the option of online participation only. The venue will be communicated later.

### **Any Other Business**

The Chair (KVD) read the mission of the Constitution and the objectives of the Charity. The FoS objectives are: "Raising awareness of the global significance of the Soqotran culture, environment and natural resources, and of any proposed actions which might have an impact

on these"; "Supporting successful traditional Soqotran natural resource management practices and promoting all protective statutes and designations"; Influencing tourism; "Providing a source of expertise, assistance and training for the people of Soqotra"; Promoting research; "Promoting practical and action oriented research and encouraging its application and implementation. Facilitating the integration of research with the delivery of practical projects prioritised by the Soqotran community"; "Co-operating with governmental, academic and voluntary organisations in Yemen and elsewhere which have similar aims to this Association"; providing educational materials for young people. MM suggests adding "Language and Culture" as one of the objectives of FoS, because they under threat. All the other members agreed. This is part of the governance (revision of constitution) which is a work in progress.

## **Election**

The Honorary Officers (KVD, HA, FP, MT), the executive committee and the subcommittees as defined at the 2020 AGM were re-elected by majority of votes (incl. online, hands raised on Zoom). The education subcommittee was suggested to not remain part of the subcommittees and these activities will fall under other subcommittees (e.g., as part of local projects).

Appendix 1:

# **20<sup>th</sup> International Soqotra Conference and Annual General Meeting of the Friends of Soqotra (FoS)**

24th- 26th September 2021, Ghent University, Belgium

AGM 26<sup>th</sup> September 2021, 9am-1pm, Ghent University, Belgium

- 1. Opening**
- 2. Apologies/Present**
- 3. Committee Election**
- 4. 2020 AGM minutes**
- 5. FoS 2021 Trustees Annual Report**

Chairperson's Report (KVD)

FoS Subcommittees' Report – on FoS Activities **only** (KVD & Francesca Pella)

i. Communications and Outreach

- Tayf (Hana Habrova)
- Website (Dana Pietsch & Luca Malatesta)

- Media and Social Media (KVD)
- Archive (Martin Rezbek)
  - ii. Finances, Budgeting and Fundraising/Donations (Mark Thomlinson)
  - iii. Membership (Francesca Pella)
  - iv. Governance (KVD)
  - v. Projects, Grants and Science
- Mangrove Project (Haifaa Abdulhalim)
- Indigenous Culture & Language (Miranda Morris)
- Grants (Francesca Pella)
- Meetings (KVD)
- Other FoS Projects/Links nature (KVD)
  - vi. Education and Awareness (Rowan Salim)

Other

## **6. FoS Strategies and Priorities for 2021-2022**

- a. Finances
- b. Membership
- c. Publications
- d. Priority Activities (for each subcommittee)
- e. New Projects/Suggestions/Synergies
- f. Timeline
- g. Other

## **7. Next Meeting**

- a. Virtual Committee Meeting 2022 Dates
- b. Venue 2022

## **8. Any Other Matter**