

Friends of Soqotra 2022 AGM Executive Committee Meeting Minutes

Name of The Charity: Friends of Soqotra (UK Charity Number 1097546)

Type of Meeting: Executive Committee Meeting (Annual General Meeting), open to public

Date and Time of Meeting: 18th of September 2022, 09:40 – 13:00 Rome time (UTC+1)

Venue: Orto Botanico di Roma (virtual attendance via Zoom and attendance in person)

Attendants and Apologies

The AGM was opened by the Chair.

Attendants included FoS committee members, of which the majority joined through the online meeting platform (Zoom), others were present in person at the venue. The meeting included Yemeni attendants (both Soqotri and non-Soqotri).

FoS members present (Executive Committee Members indicated with *) included Raquel Vasconcelos* (RV), Kay Van Damme* (KVD), Haifaa Abdulhalim* (HA), Petr Maděra* (PM), Hana Habrová* (HH), Miranda Morris* (MM), Francesca Pella* (FP), Mark Thomlinson* (MT), Fabio Attorre* (FA), Rowan Salim* (RS), Vladimir Melnik* (VM), Eike Neubert* (EN), Tullia Riccardi* (TR), Dana Pietsch* (DP), Christina Deborah Herzel Matsumura, Petr Vahalík, Salem Hamdiah, Abduljameel Mohamed Jana Tulková, Marketa Jakovenko, Abdulrahman Fahdl Al-Eryani and others, including non-members.

Apologies were received by Martin Rejžek.

Executive committee meeting

The agenda of the meeting is attached (Appendix 1). The meeting was accompanied by a PowerPoint presentation with a general structure for the reporting. The minutes of last AGM were approved and adopted.

Communications and Outreach

Tayf

As outlined in the previous AGM meeting, Tayf Issue 18 (2021) was printed in full colour, and these costs were kindly covered by Mendel University, thanks to HH and PM. The English version was brought to Soqotra by PM, KVD and FP March 2022, together with issue 17 in English and Arabic (available from Oct 2021 and March 2022 respectively). Older issues were brought to Socotra (March 2022) and handed over to public libraries in schools, where it was well received. The English version of issue 18 of Tayf is available online, and few copies were distributed in Socotra. Tayf Issue 19 (2022) was in production and October 2022 was the planned deadline to be finalised. It was proposed that FoS could inform members explicitly on the website where people can find publicly available copies of Tayf in Socotra for reading, such as libraries, education office, schools. In addition, issues of Tayf could be used by travel agents (and kept in cars of tourism operators for tourists to read, as some already do). Mr Al-Eryani gave his availability in helping HA with translating issue 18 and other papers in Arabic voluntarily for FoS. The availability was

very welcomed, and the Executive Committee approved the proposal to involve Mr Al-Eryani in the Arabic translations.

Website

DP and KVD proposed to update the FoS website and make it more accessible for use on smartphones, relying on the work of a professional web-designer. It would cost approximately 500€, plus 7€ a month to cover the hosting costs. DP is available to continuing to contribute to the maintenance of the website, with the help of Luca Malatesta in updating the bibliography. The proposal to pay a professional for the FoS website renewal was voted, the majority of the Executive Committee Members agreed, and the proposal was approved. DP added that she would need a plan, suggesting that small team should be responsible to organise the timetable and the list of the tasks. KVD proposed to be in this team and would contact the web designer, pending on the availability of the transfer of the funds.

Social Media

Since October 2021, FoS published 20 posts in our main social media platform Facebook (ca. 3/month). 1,447 people liked the FB page in this period and 1,501 people follow it. More than 55% of the followers are from the Arab Region. In addition, the FB page of FoS is stimulating donations. In 2022 the views for each post ranges from 100 to 1200, reaching on average 400 views per post. Since the start of the Facebook page in 2013 (an initiative by former committee member Lisa Banfield), we have had zero negative feedback. The FB page will continue. An Instagram account was discussed briefly (previously suggested by TR), depending on availability and time. However, as Instagram requires more direct and rapid engagement than facebook, and more regular posting, this social media output would be considered if a volunteer steps up who has sufficient time. The FB page is working well, so for now it is a good option.

Archive

No updates or activities concerning the Archive were reported – MR sent the overview of publications for 2021 to DP for the website.

Administration and Governance

Finances

MT reported an increase of 20% in donations in comparison to the previous year. He highlighted that the GPB is weak, but he remarked that the account is positive, as well as the donations' trend.

Governance

KVD reported that MSP resigned, and the privacy policy draft has been finished. No other updates or activities were reported. (Note: unfortunately, Dr Mark Stanley-Price passed away in December 2022).

Membership

In FoS there are 31 active members (membership expires in 2023). The memberships that expired in 2021 are 30, 22 the previous year. There were 37 people that didn't renew their membership before 2020. FA suggested to give credits to university students in exchange of the participation of the AGM and FoS

Annual Conference, to attract more young students and, at the consequence, using the momentum for acquiring potential new members.

Projects, Grants and Science

Mangroves

The mangroves of Shuab and Neet were strongly affected by the cyclones Chapala and Megh (2015), and in general the surface covered by *Avicennia marina* is significantly decreased in Socotra, for different reasons. In addition, mangrove stands (besides an individual tree here and there) disappeared from the northern coast of Socotra several decades ago. The mangrove project in Ghubbah is helping in mitigating this negative trend. It is carrying out in cooperation with EPA/ARC-WH and implemented by the local NGO, the Al Tamek Association. The project continues since 2017-2018 and meetings with ARC, EPA and Al Tamek continued, including two visits by FoS on site since the 2021 AGM (Oct 2021, April 2022). In addition, the visits were accompanied with contributing a total extra of 500 USD for the protection of more trees. Agreements with EPA, ARC and Al Tamek were renewed. The trees are producing seeds, so it should be no necessary going to other sites to collect them. The local community is driving the project and it is keen to disseminate the outcomes of it; FoS could help provide material for a joined (FoS + local community) capacity building plan, contributing in this way to awareness activities. The capacity building and other initiatives – included birdwatching – are aiming to promote the mangroves' conservation. During the last visit, FP involved the local Al Tamek member, met on the site, in birdwatching in the mangrove site. Schools and the local people are priority targets, and HH has provided them with useful materials. In order to carry out the awareness campaigns, the material and the methods should be organised and prepared; few ideas were suggested. RV recommended to ask the teachers what the best way could be to involve the children. Examples included: leaflets (already prepared or to be created), games or competitions (mentioned by Tarim Contin-Kennedy), trips by tourists to the mangroves' site. Other suitable activities could be planting seeds or cleaning the site from rubbish. RV didn't recommend the distribution of the leaflets without control, because they can be wasted or thrown into the environment and was recommending digital documents; KVD pointed out that digital documents cannot be sent to Socotra due to bad internet and it is not possible, and that a few good folders would not be wasted on Socotra, people keep this kind of info for long; the best compromise would be having few printed copies in strategical places, together with the digital versions for a wider use for those with a smartphone and WhatsApp (and enough phone credit).

Indigenous Culture and Language

MM shared her point of view about the priority topics that should be included in awareness campaigns of FoS, also following up on presentations and requests for awareness in these fields from last year (KVD on freshwater and waste, HH on mangroves): waste, invasive species, fresh water, soil, and mangroves. She outlined all the activities and publications in which she is involved and ongoing cultural projects in Socotra. A request of reporting all this relevant news about the heritage and culture of Socotra in an article for Tayf was made by KVD. She would like to donate a copy of her book "The Oral Art of Socotra: A Collection of Island Voices", leaving it in Socotra, but she was wondering where the best place on the island could be, and KVD offered to bring a copy to the island if needed; the library was mentioned as one of the options.

Other FoS projects

RV reported a previous interesting initiative, applied in another area, that can be repropose in Soqatra, such as producing bags – to be sold to the tourists and used on the island – from recycled fishing material. The alternative item could be fabric bags with the FoS logo printed on them. This proposal was positively received, but no funds allocated.

Education and awareness

As shown already in the previous AGM in April, KVD and FP said that during the Socotra mission in March – April 2022, several Tayf issues were distributed:

- a) Bilingual: 2004; 2005; 2006; 2007; 2008
- b) Arabic: 2003; 2009; 2012; 2013; 2020
- c) English: 2021

The copies were handed in several places: English College in Hadiboh, Qarah, Woman Association, Keybani tourism camp, EPA, others handed out in Socotra for further distribution with local communities, including in SAMHA island for the first time.

The following seminars including awareness meetings and fieldtrips were organised *in situ* in Socotra: English College in Hadiboh, Hadibo (30th March); Women Association (FP, Shaikha Mubarak), Hadibo (5th April); Field visits and birdwatching (FP, Shaikha Mubarak), e.g., in Firmihin, meetings with local NGO (PM, KVD, FP), Hadibo (4th and 9th April); meeting with Al Tamek Association chairman, Ghubbah mangrove project site (KVD, PM, FP, 9th April).

Next meeting

Few potential places for the next Annual Conference (2023) were listed: Vienna, Egypt, Qatar (UNESCO Doha), UK, Slovenia. Chairman KVD also received a proposal from HQ of UNEP in Kenya. Slovenia was suggested as the potential primary option, all options will be checked and communicated towards the mid-year committee meeting.

Any Other Business

FP described her experience of a day spent introducing the FoS Charity (2nd July 2022) in a local rural fair in the UK, showing a few photos.

MT communicated the decision to resign as FoS Treasurer. The committee showed their gratitude for his great effort and work during the past years as FoS Committee Member.

The Honorary Officers (KVD, HA, FP), the executive committee and the subcommittees as defined at the 2021 AGM were re-elected by majority of votes (incl. online, hands raised on Zoom).

RV suggested specific efforts towards communication between the Soqotri people and the FoS, which could then act as advisers and information providers. This dynamic can be promoted not only waiting for the questions of the local communities, but actively and constantly asking and interacting with them. KVD informed the committee that this is actually already an active part of FoS functioning and is being done and invites members who wish to also engage in such communications to volunteer.

Appendix 1

21st International Soqotra Conference and Annual General Meeting of the Friends of Soqotra (FoS)

16th – 18th September 2022, Botanical Garden in Rome, Italy

AGM 18th September 2022, 9:00 – 13:00, Botanical Garden in Rome, Italy

1. **Opening**
2. **Apologies/Present**
3. **Committee Election**
4. **2021 AGM minutes**
5. **FoS 2022 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 Rezejek)
- 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 2022-2023**
 - 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 2023 Dates
 - b. Venue 2023
8. **Any Other Matter**