

Friends of Soqotra

Annual General Meeting

10:30 Saturday 30 November 2002

West Lodge Park, Cockfosters Road, Hadley Wood, Hertfordshire

MINUTES

Present: Miranda Morris (Chairman), Wolfgang Wranik (Vice-Chairman), Sue Christie (Secretary), Neil Oakman (Treasurer), John Dickson, Roderic Dutton, Phil Haines, Tony Miller and Francine Stone.

As the quorum is 1/10 of existing membership = 5, the meeting was declared quorate.

Prior to opening the meeting officially, the Chairman wished there to be a full discussion of the matter of whether or not FOS should continue. She presented three options; 1) disband, 2) proceed, but with a slightly different agenda/profile than was originally envisioned or 3) proceed as originally envisioned. Each Member present was invited to give their views.

There was agreement that there is still a role for an organisation such as FOS, as proposed in the original GEF report, supported at the inaugural meeting and as has been repeatedly voiced both in Yemen and elsewhere. However, much discussion ensued as to the best way to deliver this. There was a strongly expressed viewpoint that FOS should disband and immediately reconstitute itself in an effort to overcome the misunderstandings and difficulties of the past year. By disbanding the 'air would be cleared' and any allegations of people acting in their own personal interest would be defused. Others felt that this would not solve the problems as the same people would inevitably be involved both with the newly constituted 'FOS' and with SCF (and thus little would be gained), and additional confusion and work would be generated. There was agreement that the major source of difficulties arose due to unfortunate timing; FOS was becoming active at the same time as SCF was working hard at forming itself. SCF, it was noted, has expressed the view that as both organisations are very new it would not be appropriate at this time for them to be formally linked by FOS becoming an Associate Member of SCF. It was felt that FOS, given that its own members have had to endure some months of confusing uncertainty this year, should concentrate on membership servicing and awareness raising activities in the UK, Europe and the USA as a first priority in the coming year; work that will also support SCF by increasing general awareness of the challenges that the island faces. It was agreed that the initial idea from the Edinburgh meeting for FOS to directly support development work on Soqotra should be shelved, and that any support should be carried out solely in collaboration with local NGOs in programmes approved by SCF/SCDP.

All agreed that the past year has been very difficult for all those actively involved with FOS. Continuing under such conditions is highly undesirable. However, it was felt that FOS should build on the positive relationships which have been established with many organisations in Yemen and elsewhere and to attempt to avoid any further sources of conflict through careful selection of non-controversial activities. The best approach is to prove the organisation's and individuals' good intentions through action that appeals to the members and is in accord with SCF's and SCDP's objectives and those of other organisations in Yemen that are concerned with Soqotra and the well-being of its people. It became apparent during the FOS delegation's visit to Sana'a in September that there are many organisations with which relationships are required, and that such relationships are becoming stronger. Whereas a good working relationship with SCF is essential, there are other groups with which FOS should also endeavour to maintain positive working interactions.

The distinctive rationale for FOS is that it brings together scientific research and broader general interest aspects and develops the synergies between these. The main roles for FOS were seen as:

- Servicing FOS Membership,
- Supporting scientific, applied and action research,
- Facilitating information exchange among members,
- Promoting Soqotra to the public in 'western' countries,
- Working with and supporting groups working on Soqotra through providing information and expertise.

Membership of FOS and SCF is in no way mutually exclusive or contradictory, indeed all agreed that FOS members should be encouraged to join and support SCF. Dual membership is likely to be particularly attractive to many of the scientists involved with Soqotra. There is a large contingent of people who have a more general interest in Soqotra for which FOS can offer useful information and activities, and this is a group which we should currently target for FOS membership; working strongly on the accepted concept of a 'Friends' organisation.

After much discussion it was agreed that FOS should continue, within the existing constitution, but with a restricted emphasis concentrating on activities outside of Yemen for the time being. We hope to build a strengthening relationship with SCF, and we should proceed with establishing relationships with other groups in Yemen.

1. **Apologies** were received from Diccon Alexander, Grazia Borrini-Feyerbad, Peter DeGeest, Dylan Hannon, Andrew Kembal, Rebecca Klaus, Jacopo Monzini, Morag Smith, Sandy Smith and F. E. B. Witts.
2. **Minutes of the First GM, 25 August 2001**, were approved as a correct record.
3. **Matters Arising from Previous Meetings**
 - 3.1. **Procedures for Executive Committee.** The circulated draft was modified and agreed (see Annex 1).
 - 3.2. **Application for Charitable Status.** It was agreed to proceed with this. Forms were signed by the new Executive Committee Members (see below) and drafts of the revised actions as agreed below will be circulated for agreement by the Executive Committee.
 - 3.3. **Newsletter.** This is a priority. Members should be asked for contributions on their activities and the retiring and new Chairmen will prepare short articles on the past and planned future activities of FOS. It was agreed that the Newsletter and Web Site are closely linked to each other in terms of content. It is vital that the Newsletter be at least partially bilingual, and a Yemeni organisation or FOS Yemeni Members should be approached to do this for us as providing the most acceptable translation. We will start with translations of abstracts only, as importable files. The letterhead and Web Site must also be bilingual, also as importable files. We will send final drafts to SCF and others for their comments. There should be at least one edition per year; this may increase if there is the need for greater communication or if a good deal of information accumulates, but the Web Site will be promoted for Members' use, and short email communications with Members can be used for updates, or to alert Members to major Web Site information additions.
 - 3.4. **Web Site.** Phil volunteered to co-ordinate this and to involve a friend of his in doing the technical aspects. All Members will be asked to contribute articles. There should be a simple, quickly accessed, basic set of pages with photos and further information on 'buttons' to ensure that those with basic computer systems can easily access the core information. Design is crucial, and we should start relatively small and build as required. The Site should be updated quarterly at least. It should cross-link to other relevant sites, not duplicate their information. Pages to include: Aims, Activities, Membership form and Contact details for FOS, Links to other Soqotra information sites, Calendar, Bibliography,

Recent publications, News, Articles, 'Plants and Animals of the Month' and a Guide to Tourist Behaviour. Abstracts of current publications are available on the Site for free, full documents can be supplied at a cost (discounted for Members). Drafts of the content and layout will be circulated to Executive for comments.

4. **Annual Report.** The Annual Report was accepted. It will be available to Members on request, and abstracted in the Newsletter and Web Site.
5. **Treasurer's Report & Annual Accounts.** The accounts were agreed. It was agreed that FOS should open a dollar bank account 'offshore' to accommodate subscriptions in dollars and Euros and minimise associated bank charges. The financial arrangements arising from the FOS delegation visit to Sana'a in September were discussed and will appear in next year's accounts.
6. **Report from FOS meetings with SCF, September 2002.** Incorporated in discussion above.
7. **Publicising FOS.** Having put the FOS membership drive on hold for the last nine months, it was agreed that now we should proceed with publicising FOS and enlisting new members. The leaflet needs to be redrafted, and this will be agreed by the Executive. We will also promote membership through specialist journals and societies with an interest in Soqotra.
8. **FOS Activities and Projects.** A number of areas for possible FOS involvement were discussed. It was agreed that there must be a clear separation between official 'FOS' activities and those activities being pursued by FOS Members and Officers as individuals. Considerable discussion arose about the various projects under development and how they should be pursued (as FOS, as individuals, or as informal collectives of FOS Members). It was agreed that FOS needs a 'partner organisation' in Yemen to help with local advice, contacts, translation, members servicing and facilitation. It would also be advisable to have close links with the British Council. Both avenues will be pursued by the Executive.

The following activities were agreed as priorities for the next two years:

- Establish the Web Site, Newsletter and other Members' services.
 - Promote FOS Membership.
 - Establish mutual support networks among members.
 - Establish links with Yemeni NGOs, the British Council, etc. to facilitate the servicing of Yemeni Members.
 - Plan the 2003 AGM to be an attractive event for Members to attend.
 - Compile a resource base of Soqotran data from Members to be used to identify available information and expertise.
 - Build up close relationships and encourage co-operation with like-minded organisations in Yemen and elsewhere.
 - Support the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh in developing a Soqotra Exhibition to take place in August 2004.
 - Continue to promote Soqotra and interest in it through talks, articles and publications.
9. **Election of Executive Committee and Officers.** Miranda Morris was nominated as Chairman and Wolfgang Wranik as Vice Chairman. They agreed to remain on the Executive but felt that the roles of Chairman and Vice Chairman should be taken by others. Roderic Dutton was elected as Chairman, Tony Miller as Vice Chairman, Sue Christie as Secretary and Neil Oakman as Treasurer. Additional Executive Committee Members elected were: John Dickson, Phil Haines and Rebecca Klaus. All elections were unanimous. Dylan Hannon, USA and Peter DeGeest, Belgium, were agreed as 'Country Representatives' to be ex-officio Executive members.

- 10. Appointment and Remuneration of Auditors.** It was agreed that the Treasurer would approach Lynne O'Connor, Accounts Manager of Beales Ltd to act as Auditor. It is anticipated that this will involve very little cost.
- 11. Any Other Business.** None was raised.
- 12. Date of Next Meeting.** Summer 2003, topic and venue to be determined to attract a good attendance from the Membership.

Annex 1.

Executive Committee Procedures

Meetings - Three per year. One of these meetings should coincide with the AGM, a second should be conducted by appropriate electronic means and the third should be arranged to be accessible at reasonable cost for Executive Members

Membership - elected at AGM, term is 2 years. 50% retire annually, longest serving, or those who have attended fewest meetings.

- 5 to 11 members
- Co-option of up to 3 further members (number co-opted not exceed 1/3 of Committee)
- Country representatives are ex-officio members of the Executive, copied in on papers and eligible to attend whenever convenient, but not Members of the Executive.

Quorum - one half of committee.

Attendance at a Committee can be in person or by electronic means.

Voting - questions decided by simple majority voting.

Standing Rules - Executive has power to adopt and issue Standing Orders or Rules, which come into immediate effect.

Committees – Executive Committee can appoint special or standing committees which report to Committee.

Honorary Officers. - one year terms, eligible for re-election, maximum time in one post 3 years.

Representation - FOS shall not be represented as sponsoring any individual Member's activities. FOS members can only speak on behalf of FOS if specifically authorised to do so by the Executive Committee.

Correspondence - All corporate correspondence is with the Committee, and responses are from the Committee. All such correspondence should be agreed by the Officers, and by the entire Executive if the Officers deem this desirable. It is very important that individuals not be isolated and that the Committee presents a united front. All information is to be freely shared among the Committee. There is a policy of complete openness, transparency and confidentiality within the Committee. Strictly administrative and business correspondence can be carried out by Secretary or Treasurer as relevant (Membership, requests for information, etc.).

Confidentiality - All Committee papers and correspondence are considered to be confidential to the Committee.

Minutes - Draft Minutes will be circulated and any objections raised immediately. If there is no response within one week (or such longer period as may be required in a specific instance) then support for the position is assumed.