



INTERNATIONAL FORUM ON SOLIDARITY TOURISM AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

FITS TUNISIA 2017

FINAL COMMUNIQUÉ

Sustainable, fair and responsible tourism driving sustainable development and peace among peoples

The 7th International Forum on Solidarity Tourism and Sustainable Development (FITS) was recently held in Tataouine, Tunisia.

A major event for 2017, designated by the United Nations General Assembly as the “*International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development*”, the forum brought together delegations from 23 Mediterranean and African countries. They assembled in the Tataouine area for one week to discuss and debate the “*Role of alternative and fair tourism in the sustainable development of fragile areas in the Mediterranean region and Africa*”.

Organised under the aegis of the International Social Tourism Organisation (ISTO), the FITS was supported by the Corporate Social Responsibility programme of Tataouine companies (ETAP, ENI, OMV, Medco Energie). It was sponsored by the French Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur region, the Institut Français de Tunisie, the Swisscontact foundation, the Sahara Events company, and the Associative Network for the Sustainable Development of Oases (RADD0).

In Tunisia, FITS celebrated its 15th year of existence. The initiative was launched during the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg in 2002. It became a tangible reality with the organisation of the first FITS in Marseille the following year. The story continued in Mexico in 2006, then once again in Marseille in 2007, in Mali in 2008, Morocco in 2012, Nicaragua in 2014, and in Tunisia in 2017.



This 7th FITS in Tunisia was of particular significance for two reasons: the event, originally planned in 2015, was postponed due to the tragic events that affected the country in 2015 and 2016, and this forum is tangible proof of a belief shared by all participants that alternative and fair tourism, driving sustainable local development, is possible.

This tourism creates jobs and revenue where it is most needed, it respects and values cultures, and protects the environment. But most importantly, it promotes mutual understanding and respect. In this regard, it helps to foster peace among peoples.

Forum participants insisted that a *sensible tourism* model safeguarding nature, peoples and cultures has become critical. Whether it is called *solidarity*, *alternative*,

responsible or fair, it is gaining ground all over the world. It is the only tourism model that puts humans, culture and nature at its core. It is the future of tourism. By contributing to the reduction of unacceptable inequities that fuel tensions and conflicts around the world, this model contributes to restoring social harmony. In an unstable world in the midst of critical social and climate disruptions, this model could be the only *sustainable tourism* in the long run.



At the closing session, forum participants adopted the *Tataouine Declaration*. They unanimously approved all the « *Recommendations for the development of alternative and fair tourism in Tunisia and in African and Mediterranean countries* ».

These recommendations to the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), Tunisian Government and other relevant Government agencies, international organisations and media, highlight the critical need to apply, in every country, a dynamic and purposeful policy in order to support this alternative and fair tourism model.

In addition, the forum resulted in the adoption of an *Action Plan for the Development of Tourism in Southern Tunisia*, targeting more specifically the southern governorates — Tataouine, Medenine and Gabès— and gathering the main proposals for cooperation and support in this regard.

A working group will translate this action plan into a wide-ranging international cooperation programme in order to strengthen capabilities in creating tourism products, promoting southern destinations, and marketing their tourism products.

There were 120 participants coming from 23 countries, including experts and field practitioners, government agents and policymakers, tourism operators, journalists, craftspersons and tourism service providers, who all made the personal commitment to ensure the prompt implementation of this Action Plan.

The participants left the forum with the promise of meeting again in the foreseeable future in order to discuss the role of fair tourism in the conservation of species in great danger due to ill-development and the aggravating factor of the climate crisis.



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