

Tunisian NGOs unite to tackle urgent threats to Protected Areas

Following the recent political instability in Tunisia, environmental and developmental NGOs have received a number of alarming reports of aggressive attacks to staff, animals and plants at Protected Areas (PA) within the country. In the face of these threats, the NGOs met recently to unite in their action to tackle the plundering of their natural resources. Since January 14, Tunisian Protected Areas have been subject to multiple aggressive attacks including: the ransacking of equipment and infrastructures; persecution of animals, and; degradation of plants and habitats. Furthermore, Tunisian NGOs have received reports that park staff who have been working alongside local people to protect the reserves have been verbally and physically attacked. In face of this alarming situation, representatives of Environmental and Development NGOs held an urgent meeting on Saturday 5th February to discuss the urgent situation. The NGOs attending the meeting were: Association des Amis du Belvédère; Association 'Les Amis des Oiseaux' (BirdLife in Tunisia); *Association pour la Protection de l'Environnement et du Développement Durable*; Association de Sauvegarde du Patrimoine Environnemental et Naturel du Cap Bon ; Association Tunisienne pour la Protection de la Nature et de l'Environnement; Association Tunisie-Méditerranée pour le Développement Durable; *Fédération Nationale des Associations de Chasseurs et des Associations de Chasses Spécialisées*, and; WWF Tunisia. As a result of this meeting, the eight NGOs agreed the following actions:

- On-the-ground assessment of the actual situation in the PAs with field visits by NGO representatives in collaboration with local NGOs and groups.
- Report on the actual situation supported by photographs, videos, interviews, documents in view of the drafting of a press and communication kit.
- Request an urgent meeting with the Minister for agriculture and the environment in order to solicit a rapid and effective intervention by the government.
- Organization of information and public awareness campaigns for local communities in and around PAs, in order to discuss with these populations the approach and the means to implement real protection of these sites and to ensure a sustainable and harmonious development, which takes into account people and nature at the same time.