



FRIENDS OF NATURE

OVERVIEW OF FOUR DECADES OF ACTIVITY

THE LAUNCHING – 1972

A group of students from the American University of Beirut, led by Ricardus Haber a science student at the time and a member of the Sierra Nevada Club, created a show one day at the main gate. The show expressed their message toward the importance of nature and natural assets, as well as, their ideas and views at addressing the nature of Lebanon. They presented sketches, speeches and short performances delivering their vision. A music band played all day; convinced and committed audience was called to sign to become a member of the Friends of Nature.

This is how the first NGO dedicated to defend nature and protect natural assets of Lebanon established its first nucleus.

THE FIRST TWO DECADES (1970'S AND 1980'S)

FATHERING THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT IN LEBANON INVESTING DECADES IN AWARENESS BUILDING & PUBLIC MOBILIZATION AS THE SOLE AWAKENING VOICE

The first two decades centered on building awareness in a country that had no appreciation to the value and role of natural resources. The resources were still largely protected by lack of interest at exploiting them; but the threats were starting to lurk and augment in scale and profusion.

The Friends of Nature diversified their activities to reach all segments of the society in various modes of sensitization.

- **Nature Walks**
 - FON conducted nature walks on weekends for free; they were advertised in newspapers for the general public with specific itineraries and meeting points. The walks attracted youth and young adults from all over Lebanon and became a medium of acquaintance and interaction.

- **Cleaning Campaigns**
 - Forests: Littering, as today as before, reached all sites where people settled, camped, had picnic, etc. It was spread on the sides of roads and extended to the heart of forests.
 - Beaches: the first time FON went on a beach for cleaning, it was a parade with banners and slogans made for the occasion. The public was puzzled by the initiative of unknown people extracting garbage from under their feet.

- **Lecturing all over the country**
 - FON collected all the beauty of Lebanon's nature and the existing threats in photos that transformed to visual presentation and slide shows at a time when there were only slide projectors.
 - 1000's of lectures were given at schools, centers, community gatherings, villages, etc. and covered all of Lebanon.

- **Exhibitions**
 - FON created a revolutionary approach at the time to expose the natural assets of Lebanon in glamor and beauty. Annual exhibitions were held with the most amazing photography to sensitize the public to the protection of nature through the measures of awesome beauty.
 - Environmental awareness exhibitions were also prepared, reflecting on the damage and modes of destruction and disturbance that are inflicted on Lebanon's environment and natural assets, in a mean to spread awareness and deter further destruction.
 - Exhibitions were also prepared for schools and created like tours to communicate with and to the youth the importance of the natural heritage of Lebanon and to give them a role at its protection.

- **Engagement of the Media**
 - Writing
 - Reporting
 - TV and Radio programs

- **Environmental Activism**

Actively engaging in protection of landmarks and heritage through

 - Protests
 - Sit-ins
 - holding press conferences, exposing problems through the media
 - Alerting and pressuring central authority for action
 - Creating strong lobbies for causes

- Engendering local communities to voice against local authorities to act and stop damage and destruction

Many of the salvaged sites and assets still exist and attest to the contribution of FON to maintain our natural heritage. For example,

- stopping the quarrying of the Dog River tunnel,
- Stopping a highway project in Dlebta that would have destroyed the old traditional Lebanese houses
- protesting against quarrying of Antelias Cave where FON was exposed to gun shelling
- Stopping the dumping of chemical waste in the water catchment of Ayoun Seeman, and many more

THE THIRD DECADE (1990'S)

A DECADE OF NATIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS INSTITUTING NATURE CONSERVATION

FON contributed largely and profoundly to the creation of an environmental movement where for a long time FON was the only mobilizer and defender of environmental causes. The impact of this arduous mission inspired in the late 80's the rising of other NGOs to care for environmental values, mostly emulating and repeating similar activities in cleaning beaches, lecturing, etc. Confident that others will carry out some of these activities, FON decided to move forward, not resigning all its earlier engagements but devoting more effort and strategic discipline to the new phase.

The mission of the new decade was paving its path through the previous one till the right moment arrived. The decision was taken to seed accomplishments that would defy the passing of time, that would remain forever as national, and possibly international icons, and would become prototypes to expand and replicate.

NATURE RESERVES

The establishment of nature reserves by concept and practice legally, communally and effectively

- **Ehden Forest Nature Reserve – Local conservation**
 - 6 years of fieldwork researching the biodiversity at the nature forest of Ehden proved the significance of the natural system at maintaining its assets under the immense threats.
 - FON launched an awareness campaign targeting various components of the social structure: teachers, students, elders, youth, university students, farmers, herdsman, politicians, etc.
 - In parallel, activities safeguarding the forest and reducing anthropogenic pressures were executed with local volunteers.

- **Palm Island Nature Reserve – Local conservation**
 - In collaboration with the Environment Protection Committee NGO in Tripoli, FON worked on uncovering the biodiversity riches of the Palm Islands archipelago comprising 3 Islands: Sannani, Nakhel & Ramkeen.
 - Field research revealed the importance of the islands as the last resort to many of the coastal floral species and the struggle of these species for survival under intense pressures.
 - FON conducted an awareness campaign directed to local community of Mina-Tripoli, similar to Ehden
 - A series of activities were implemented to reduce the pressures off the islands

- **First Law of Conservation of Nature Sites in the Republic of Lebanon**
 - FON drafted a conservation law and prepared a portfolio for each of Ehden and Palm Islands including biodiversity assessment, state of threats, significance of ecosystems, and landmarks as national assets.
 - The portfolio was presented to the Ministry of Justice for processing.
 - FON lobbied for the passing of the law for a year and a half, first with through the government, followed by the parliament
 - The law was passed without major change and ratified by the Lebanese parliament to be the first law of conservation of a nature site in the Republic of Lebanon. Law 121, March 1992 achieved the precedence for nature conservation.

- **International Platform - Rio Biodiversity Convention**
 - Lebanon was one of rare developing countries that achieved nature conservation before to the Biodiversity Convention.
 - Owing to the efforts of FON, Lebanon went to Rio having accomplished a prototype of local and legal conservation.
 - Owing to the efforts of FON, Lebanon and the Ministry of Environment acquired huge funds for the conservation of biodiversity.

UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITE

- **Qannoubine Valley – Cultural Natural Landscape the 9th in the World**
 - Secretary General of FON, Dr. Ricardus Haber was called by UNESCO-Paris to defend the valley for nomination.
 - Dr. Haber prepared a portfolio including all aspects of the valley: cultural, historical, religious, natural, and other.
 - He presented the project in front of the committee in Paris
 - After long discussion, Dr. Haber succeeded at winning the valley the status of Natural Cultural Landscape the 9th in the world
 - The committee delegated two dignitaries to verify the status on site
 - Dr. Haber prepared a visit for the delegates and toured with them two days showing them the various aspects of the valley.
 - Their report confirmed the arguments for the declaration of the valley a World Heritage Site of the category Natural Cultural Landscape.

CREATION OF THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT

- **1993 – Birth of the Ministry of Environment**

- Secretary General of FON, Dr. Ricardus Haber had long lobbied for a body to care for the environment, proposing basically a high council for the Environment, which would be pan-ministerial.
- He again lobbied for that proposal prior to the creation of the government of President Elias Sarkis. He had met with Mr Pierre Gemayel as well as others for that purpose.
- Balancing the powers in the ministerial cabinet necessitated a seat for the ‘Kata’eb’ party. Its president Mr. Gemayel took the portfolio of Dr. Haber and requested the creation of the position of Governmental Minister for the Affairs of the Environment which was granted. The position was then occupied by a member of the ‘Kata’eb’ – Minister Cesar Nasr.

BIRD MORATORIUM BOUND TO INTERNATIONAL FUNDING

- **Effective Halt of Bird Slaughter/hunting for 5 years - 1995**

- In the post war era, funding was become more and more available for reconstruction, so was funding for environmental issues.
- FON lobbied with international organizations and EU parliament for subjecting funding to Lebanon to the imperative stopping of hunting of migratory birds, which are mostly Europe’s birds.
- The response was major. In 1995, Lebanon was obliged to stop hunting if to benefit from international funding.
- The Lebanese army was handed the mission of controlling hunting all over the Lebanese territory, which was strongly effective. All weapons were confiscated on sight.
- Birds lived for 5 years in peace. During this period, we observed many types of birds that used to be shy to appear or too afraid to land in Lebanon.
- Unfortunately, the effect of the moratorium was not perpetuated into a national strategy and hunting returned more aggressively than ever recruiting more of the youth and university students.

THE FOURTH DECADE & ON (2000’S)

A DECADE OF INTERNATIONAL EXPOSURE

After accomplishing long lasting projects on the ground, the momentum was geared to continue to serve the same objectives and mission for more radiant achievements and to raise the level of interaction to a new dimension. It was time to engage the Lebanese diaspora at helping in the protection of their heritage, as well as to bridge

with international bodies in order to bring environmental activity to global recognition.

LEBANESE DIASPORA

- **International Festival For Lebanese Immigrants**

FON tried to reach as many of the Lebanese immigrants from home believing that those who visit Lebanon still maintain a strong link with the motherland.

- This is a capital to be invigorated toward preserving the assets of Lebanon the way they knew it, saw it and kept it in their memory.
- They are important assets to instill change stemming from the more enhanced background they bring from their countries of their new nationalities.

Annually, FON took part in the International Festival for Lebanese Immigrants projecting to the diaspora another image of Lebanon, and delivering the message of their imperative engagement in the conservation of assets, particularly in their villages and surrounding where they would have a strong impact.

- **Visiting Diaspora**

A plan of action was designed to visit the Lebanese diaspora at their current home countries in order to bring their attention back to the homeland, particularly that many still have immense inherited property in Lebanon which is most of the time abused due to their absence. The message was:

- Care for your properties of the old Lebanese houses of red tiles and the terraced gardens of the grand grandparents so they would not dilapidate.
- Maintain the natural aspect of your properties to save Lebanon's nature and keep safe havens for biodiversity on your land.
- link with the municipalities or mayors of your villages to refuse the logging of your lands or the transformation of its green assets into charcoal, and more.

Several countries were visited including: Australia, England, US, Germany,... Lectures were delivered with visual documentation to show evidence of the importance of Lebanon's natural assets and the mode of destruction in order to instigate the diaspora to act in favor of preservation of assets.

INTERNATIONAL BODIES

Several international bodies were contacted to establish measures of collaboration and bring to Lebanon new experiences. Here are some examples.

- **National Trust – UK**

The National Trust is a centennial organization structured to accept property from the citizens in donation. The trust is thereafter entrusted to maintain the property in its natural state with restoration and renovation of the included constructions in old palaces, churches, country houses, etc.

FON visited the National Trust on a pre-planned program of tours designed to check the sites under the care of the trust in various areas of the UK, and to equally learn of the satellite management units that are responsible for the sites. Following the tour program was a series of meetings with central administration.

This collaboration resulted in the preparation of a project to create a similar trust body in Lebanon based on the structure and organization of the National Trust-UK and one that operates in close exchange of expertise. The aim of the project was to create a structure to help protect and preserve private property in Lebanon for posterity under the permission of the owners.

The structure of the Lebanon trust, its legal obligations toward the property owners, the integrity of its mission and the long-term management of the terrain were drafted into a proposal and a prototype law to allow the management of private property as nature reserves. The portfolio was presented to the government for channeling and to be later sent to the parliament. Unfortunately, the process was stopped at the level of government.

- **Royal Botanical Gardens – Kew and Seed Banking**

With the help of the Embassy of the United Kingdom, FON established links with the Royal Botanical Gardens – Kew for collaboration on biodiversity research to better acknowledge the value of the Lebanese flora, particularly the endemics.

The visit to Kew Gardens included meetings with the heads of departments and administration to discuss means of collaboration. FON contributed by delivering a series of lectures to sensitize the scientists at Kew. FON Secretary General Dr. Ricardus Haber exposed the richness of the native flora, the diversity of the ecological systems, and the already invested efforts in nature conservation with the role-played by FON.

FON efforts resulted in:

- the strengthening of collaboration ties and efforts through exchange of scientific modules and experience. Several scientific teams visited Lebanon thereafter to work on particular floristic symbols.
 - Bulbous plants scientists visited Lebanon and surveyed a good part of the landscape. FON guided the scientists and partly accommodated them on their visit.
 - *Fritillaria* specialists came to Lebanon in search of the different species and the verification of their taxonomy. FON guided and assisted in the research.
- the dedication of a section at KEW's Seed Bank to preserve seeds from the flora of Lebanon, providing higher attention to endemic, threatened and endangered species.

The project paved the way for more collaboration with Lebanon and its academic establishments.

- KEW assisted in the revival of the Post Herbarium at AUB

- Several projects were funded to collect seeds from Lebanon and protect samples in the Seed Bank of KEW
- It finally inspired the creation of a seed bank in Lebanon affiliated with the LARI and the Ministry of Agriculture, planned and executed with international guidance and support.

From the end of 2005 through 2006 and for several years thereafter , Lebanon and the Friends of Nature experienced years of great calamity.

The state of political instability and dilapidating general security severed many of the connections and links established with the international bodies and deterred them from coming to Lebanon.

It forcibly obstructed the execution and furthering of many activities and projects on the ground and through the government.

Friends of Nature also lost its founding father and Secretary General who had carried the flame and imbibed the zeal through several decades.

The Friends of Nature Awakened from the Tragedy

It took time for the Friends of Nature to stand back on its feet. We have resumed our role with the same strength, zeal, perseverance and insight to continue the mission of the founders at guiding the society to a better future.

- **FON Restructuring**

The Friends of Nature has reconstructed its teams, with an elaborate scientific team, an extensive group of partners and collaborators, and a youthful group of volunteers.

New premises were acquired that serve the objectives and mission of FON, situated in a nature zone associated with a very important and unique cultural entity – Modern And Contemporary Art Museum MACAM, in Alita, Qartaba road, Jbeil.

- **Cyclamens of Lebanon**
Cyclamen Society – UK, 2014

FON was approached by the Cyclamen Society – UK to assist on a visit to study the Cyclamens of Lebanon.

Abiding by international agreements and protecting the right of Lebanon to its natural heritage, FON helped acquire CITES permits for this mission from the Ministry of Agriculture. The permit recorded the export of plant material, confined the extraction of this material to few samples, and limited the use of the material to scientific purposes only. In that, it protects the rights of Lebanon over this set of material forever.

In March 2014, FON provided field guidance and scientific assistance to a team of 3 senior scientists from the Cyclamen Society on their exploration of our 3 species of Cyclamen.

- **CONNECTING CHILDREN WITH BIODIVERSITY project**
SGP- GEF – EU funded - 2 years project 2015-2017

Objective : training school children to learn, explore and befriend to increase awareness and preservation of Lebanon’s natural assets.

Activity: Schools visit our premises for a school day of outdoor hands-on learning and appreciation of nature with leisure. Children learn about plants, insects/animals, natural cycles (water cycle, geology, forest formation,..) and fossils to connect the past with the present and the future. Management and reporting are constant integral activities.

The project became one of Friends of Nature continuous programs.

- **AGROFORESTRY FOR MOUNTAINS AND MEDITERRANEAN – AGROF-MM project**
Erasmus+ funded, European partnership 2016- October 2018

Objective : Diffusion of educational material in the academic sector for integration of AF in the curricula and awareness of graduating students for ecological and agricultural perception.

Activities: FON prepared course materials, trained trainers of professors from 9 universities, empowered professors with course material and references, educated agricultural engineers, conducted quick survey of existing AF farming tools, exposed AF to general public, conducted internal project evaluations on pan-European level and developed respective reports. Management and reporting are constant integral activities.

The project was presented to the European Parliament.

- **ERA1 – MARINE ECOSYSTEM RECOVERY THROUGH ARTIFICIAL REEF project**

EU funded, 2018-2020

Objective: restoration of marine ecosystems to preserve biodiversity, provide better and sustainable livelihood to fishermen and the fish industry.

Activities: creation of AR design, manufacturing and installation in marine environment (Jounieh Bay), monitoring of AR, development of awareness to all stakeholders: universities, fishermen, fish industry, economic sector, tourism sector; conservation of the underwater area with AR (first marine underwater preserve), initiation of underwater eco-tourism.

- **SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE – AGROFORESTRY FOR FARMERS project**

SGP – GEF-UNDP funded, 2018- mid 2019

Objective: A sustainable agriculture is one based on employing native biodiversity to protect crops and reduce farmers losses and expenses. Farmer training is necessary to reintegrate biodiversity in farmland through the methodologies of Agroforestry.

Activities: Developing training material for one-day workshop training of farmers, networking with farmer communities, training of trainers to present the workshops and awareness, collecting farmers feedback and commitment to engage in AF, developing a small booklet for farmer assistance to use native species (20 sps) in Agroforestry.

- **EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES FOR CONSERVATION OF KBAs THREATENED AND ENDEMIC FLORA**

CEPF funded, 2019-2020

Objective: Conservation of threatened and endemic flora in Makmel and Kneisseh regions.

Activities: community and stakeholder participatory approaches to awareness spreading and final commitment to conservation of endemic and threatened flora in their regions, field survey of the current status of the species, red listing, conservation module development with communities.



FRIENDS OF NATURE

VISION, MISSION, LOGO

VISION

Enhanced survivorship potentials for all living beings ensure a better quality of life for humankind.

MISSION

FON will endeavor

- to acknowledge and preserve the natural heritage of Lebanon,
- to reduce and reverse the rate of destruction of Lebanon's natural resources,
- to advocate better management of Lebanon's environment, and
- to increase the level of knowledge about Lebanon's natural assets and environmental challenges through awareness, education, communication and research.
- to instill the sense of citizenship fervent of the natural wealth and committed to its preservation to current and future generations.

LOGO REPRESENTATION



MAN in his diversity (evolutionary, intellectual, cultural, social, religious, etc. : unequal lines) fits in the



HABITAT with its cherished diversity & diversity of its beings (unequal lines), and is rooted in



NATURE with its unbound resources and complex phenomena