

DHM and Tour Operators and Warden Meeting Sousse and Port El Kantaoui 24.03.2015

Attendees: [REDACTED] (DHM), [REDACTED] (CROM), [REDACTED] (Pro Consul), [REDACTED] (Honorary Consul), [REDACTED] (Sousse Warden) , [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] (Thomas Cook), [REDACTED], [REDACTED],and [REDACTED] (TUI), [REDACTED] (Just Sunshine Holiday Group), and [REDACTED] (VLT).

Introduction to the meeting by [REDACTED] and a thank you for everyone's cooperation and collaboration last week following the Bardo incident.

It was announced that a meeting for the Federation of Tourism and Agents de Voyages had been held on 23.03.2015 at Riadh Palms in Sousse. The meeting had been attended by representatives from Hotels and Travel Agents in the area to discuss the Bardo incident at length and the implications that it may have on the Tourism sector and consequently on the Tunisian economy. They concluded that Tunisia needs to show that they are able to take the extra precautions necessary to protect their Tourists.

Hon Con [REDACTED] also announced that a meeting had been held last Thursday by the local authorities to advise of the measures that had been taken in the wake of the Bardo in an effort to secure the resorts of Sousse and Port El Kantaoui. They were:

- Review and improve security at the Libyan borders.
- A new collaboration between the local police force and the Gendarmerie in the fight against terrorism.
- Added resources to be provided for Police and Gendarmerie units in an effort to sustain the new levels of security needed.
- Hotels will be expected to raise their own security measures in line of the increased security threat.
- Tourist sites and venues to received raised levels of protection.
- Increased use of CCT IN Touristic venues.

Airport Security.

Since the attack there has been a military presence at Enfidha airport and also the use of plain clothes policing. Nevertheless attendees all expressed concerns re the apparent lack of security at Enfidha considering that it is the main hub for the majority of Touristic Charter flights. Concerns included

- Minimal Police presence on the approach to the airport.
- Only one scanning machine means that large numbers customers often need to queue outside the main airport building.

- In peak times when customer volume is high the security procedure (scanners and body checks) are discarded completely .
- Security checks do not appear to be applied to staff entering the building.

Communication

Attendees discussed the importance of communication at the time of crisis. Tour Operators were disadvantaged following the incident by the lack of communication and updates on what was happening.

Not all Tour Operators were contacted by the local security forces. Everyone felt that the bulk of their information came from unreliable sources and was often conflicting, incorrect media coverage was not helpful.

DHM proposed arranging meeting with The Ministry of Tourism and Ministry of Interior to discuss the difficulties encountered by the Tour Operators following the security incident and their need for prompt, honest and effective reporting to enable them to report back to the UK.

UK Headquarters are hungry for reassurances from the Tunisian that they can raise local security to the required level and sustain it into the near future to protect their customers. Unfortunately those reassurances are not being communicated.

Prognosis.

The incident is a catalyst for severe repercussions

- Damage to Tourism – affecting jobs 1 in 8 working in Tourism sector.
- Damage to the Tunisian economy – In an effort to further incentivize tourists to travel to Tunisia, Thomas Cook is already looking to drastically cut their already low prices, to do that they are planning to be reducing Hotel rates, transfer rates , excursion costs and flights costs all at the expense of the Tunisian economy.
- Necessity for increased levels of security .
- General consensus was that another incident at this time would devastate Tourism and most certainly result in Tour Operators withdrawing from Tunisia .
- Need For a Crisis Cell to be created that at the times of Crisis they act as a mediator between local authorities and the Tour operators, providing regular information and updates regarding the incident.
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Travel Advice

The Travel Advice published by the Embassy Website is a critical to help sustain Tourism in Tunisia and therefore maintain Tunisia's economy.

Following the incident the knee jerk reaction was to pull British Tourists out of Tunisia. Embassy staff here in Tunisia lobbied hard to retain the tourists here in Tunisia but agreed to strengthen the text of the Travel Advice to reflect the severity of the incident.

Attendees agreed that the wording of the Travel advice was pitched at the correct level and gave a clear message of the risk here in Tunisia. DHM added that currently he is not inclined to dilute the message given by the Travel advice and asked if that proved a problem for the operators. The response was negative regarding the text.

Could the Map on the Travel Advice be aligned to the maps of the Germans and the French whose Southern boundaries descended far lower than that of the British Travel advice. British Embassy was reluctant to amend their Southern boundaries to match that of other European Embassies.

Germans have already agreed for German tourists to resume visits to the Bardo. (An internet update in the meeting).

What can the Embassy Do?

The British Embassy has historically given practical assistance and tools to Tunisia to assist the fight against terrorism.

Considers that may be further training needs to be administered regarding:

- 'How to deal with crisis'
- How to effectively communicate information to Tour operators.
- Review the incident , How can we improve?

DHM closed the meeting by thanking all for their information which he will Endeavour to take to the relevant Ministries. [REDACTED] invited any further concerns or points to be raised via Lisa or Leila.

In conclusion main points from both meetings are as follows:

- Ramp up local security but ensure that it is sustainable well into the season not a short term fix.
- Proactive measures to prevent a further terrorist attack.
- Highlight security concerns raised, in particular deficiencies at regional airports.
- Encourage local authorities to provide Tour Operators with prompt honest information surrounding any incidents to ensure effective feedback to UK operations.
- Transparent reporting from local authorities surrounding major crises.
- Facilitate communication between Tour Operators and the ministries of Tourism and the Interior.