

COASTAL EROSION THREATENS TUNISIAN BEACHES



The Tunisian coastline is under siege from human activity and global warming. In Hammamet, one of Tunisia's top tourist destinations, coastal erosion has been accelerating due to uncontrolled urbanization and climate change, causing the beach to vanish.

The Coastal Protection and Development Agency (APAL), a public body, undertook a massive operation to replenish the city center's beach before the summer. **15,000 m³ of sand, transported by 750 trucks from quarries in the semi-desert region of Kairouan, more than 100 km away, were dumped on the beach to restore it.**

Tourism is vital to Tunisia's economy, providing many jobs, especially for young people, in a country with high unemployment rates. The authorities aim to attract 10 million visitors by 2024. Chiheb Ben Fredj, secretary general of the Association for Environmental Education (AERE), stressed the significance of the beach to Hammamet.

Sand May Vanish in a Few Days

In the past decade, the relentless force of coastal erosion has devoured 24,000 square meters of beach in Hammamet, Tunisia. Between 2006 and 2019, 3 to 8 meters of beach vanished each year. A 2020 World Bank report sounded the alarm, describing the erosion rate as 'spectacular' and reaching a new level of 'destruction' in the last two years. The entire Tunisian coastline is in peril, with an average annual loss of 1.5 meters, resulting in the disappearance of 90 kilometers of beach and putting an additional 190 kilometers in danger out of the total 570 kilometers of sandy coastline.

While re-sanding beaches may offer a temporary respite, it is not a sustainable solution in the long term. Alternatives like constructing dikes or other structures to retain sand are being explored. According to the AERE, installing palisades over several kilometers has proven effective in rebuilding and stabilizing dunes on many beaches in Tunisia. Without such measures, the sand can be quickly eroded by the sea or during storms, as was demonstrated during a sand replenishment operation in Hammamet in the summer of 2023. Pursuing these sustainable solutions offers hope in the battle against coastal erosion.

However, these interventions come with a significant cost. It has been reported that the re-sanding of three beaches in Hammamet, Monastir, and Sfax this year amounted to 3.9 million dinars, approximately one million euros, according to APAL.

Provisional Solution

The central beach in Hammamet is considered the city's pride. Narjess Bouasker, from the Regional Hotel Federation, emphasizes preserving the beach's beauty. However, she acknowledges that the current efforts to replenish the sand are only a temporary solution. She believes that balancing preserving the landscape with effectively combating coastal erosion is crucial in the long term.

Both AERE and APAL point to human activity, particularly **uncontrolled urbanization, as the**

leading cause of erosion. Global warming exacerbates the situation, leading to more frequent and severe storms and a rapid rise in sea levels, particularly in the Mediterranean. The construction activities on the beach in Hammamet have contributed to the disappearance of protective dunes, which previously helped naturally replenish the sand.

APAL also criticizes coastal development for disrespecting ecosystems. This includes covering the beds of rivers that carry 85% of the sediments to the coast, which is vital in reducing erosion. An anonymous APAL official highlights that construction projects need to consider coastal dynamics. AERE notes that urban beaches, like those in Hammamet, Monastir, and Sousse, are the most affected by erosion.

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