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Guana Residents Take Battle to the Capitol

On March 16, several charter planes departed Guana Cay filled with passengers on a mission. Aboard were leaders and supporters of the Save Guana Cay Reef (SGCR) organization. Their destination was Parliament Square in Nassau and their mission was to peacefully protest the proposed Guana Cay development.

About 30 Guana Cay residents, equipped with posters, began their protest at 10 a.m. in front of Parliament Square. The group was granted permission for the demonstration, which took place at the same time the Prime Minister and other cabinet members arrived for their weekly meeting. Led by Attorney Fredrick Smith, and co-chairs of SGCR Troy Albury and Erin Lowe, the supporters marched up and down Bay Street shouting "No golf on Guana," 'No means no,' 'Crown Land is our Heritage' and 'Respect our heritage' They distributed flyers that outlined their cause and stated their reasons for protesting. Demonstrators where dressed in t-shirts that read "Respect the Locals" and the demonstration lasted for more than three hours.

The SGCR organization has made many attempts to contact members of local and national government. However, there has been no response to the numerous letters and phone calls. SGCR supporters also made unsuccessful attempts to discuss their concerns with the lawyers representing the San Francisco-based development company. "We'll come to you, if you won't come to us," said one supporter.

"It's not that we do not want development in Guana Cay. We want the best development and this project is not the best," said a Guana Cay native while protesting.

The proposed plan is to build a 575-acre development on the northern end of Guana Cay. The Bahamas government has granted the developers land that equals approximately one third of the 7-mile-long island. The proposed development will also include an 18-hole golf course, 240-slip marina, a 75-room villa and more than 350 home sites.

The leaders and supporters of the SGCR organization have many reasons to support their opposition to this project. Residents say that the fertilizers used on the lawn of the golf course will run-off thus killing the reef that is just 50 feet offshore. The dredging for the marina will destroy 70-plus acres of mangrove and fish estuary. In addition, the residents fear that the turtle nesting grounds, which are protected under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, will be destroyed.

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Attorney Fred Smith is representing the large group of Guana Cay residents opposed to the project. According to Smith, the development is inappropriate for Guana Cay

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and should take place on a larger island such as Grand Bahama where the infrastructure is in place and where there is massive unemployment. There is a 100 percent employment rate on Guana Cay.

Prime Minister Christie never addressed the protestors directly but gave a statement to the press as he left Parliament Square.

The SGCR organization has launched an all-out campaign that includes a website www.saveguanacayreef.com. The group will continue to protest the proposed development and are actively working with their attorney to prohibit any groundbreaking on Guana Cay.

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