

# Argument carried to UN

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The Save Guana Cay Reef Association (SGCRA) took its two-year old battle with the Baker's Bay, a multi-million dollar resort to the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development in an ongoing effort to protect the eco-system surrounding the development and eventually the entire Bahamas.

According to SGCRA, the project that the group is protesting, which will include an exclusive resort and gated community, along with an 18-hole, 585-acre championship golf course, will cause significant damage to the coral reef and the mangroves on the tiny island in the Abacos.

The group's attorney Fred Smith presented the legal and cultural side of the story at the UN session on Monday. And in a press statement he said: "It is imperative that Prime Minister Hubert Ingraham's new Free National Movement (FNM) government not simply talk about environmental legislation. It must fulfill its pre election promise to enact environmental protection legislation for the land, air and marine environments, and create an environmental protection

agency with teeth; with environmental marshals and an environmental court."

During his communication at the UN presentation he claimed that the former government's quest for the "Holy Grail" of development has resulted in wholesome abandonment of the rule of law, due process, abuses of human rights and terrible destruction of the marine and land environments.

"It has destroyed much local culture, society and heritage."

Explaining that anchor projects were introduced with an aim to create economic relief in many of the undeveloped Family Islands, Smith told UN member nations, UN agencies, major international funding agencies, the private sector and the press, that while they want to bring development to The Bahamas, they want environmentally savvy developers.

"Most of the time locals in the Family Islands are not trying to stop development," the statement continued. "They recognize the need for jobs and economic opportunities. Frequently, however, these anchors have been dropped most inappropriately in areas that do not need them or cannot provide the necessary labor, skills or resources.

"Locals simply want a legitimate role in participating and visioning the future of their communities, as stakeholders. They want a place on the bargaining table. They want to help to mitigate the extent of damage to the environment.

"The locals feel that the dictatorial centralist powers exercised by Cabinet destroy their culture, society and heritage, and it takes away their crown land. More to the point, it makes most of the locals feel like foreigners and second class economic citizens in their own communities."

Continuing to blast the previous administration, the group claimed that a "development-at-all-costs policy" was promoted and paid little or no regard to environmental protection along the way.

"This allowed for a proposed shoreline golf course to make it through with omnibus approvals. The threat of severe situation and the ruin of one of the healthiest coral reefs in the region is very real. The people of the Bahamas have said that they were not happy with the status quo and given a mandate to a new government, the Save Guana Cay Reef Association will be watching this new administration very closely," the group warned in the statement.