

U.N. informed of degradation of mangroves in Guana Cay

By ANGELO ARMBRISTER
Freeport News Reporter

The drama surrounding the degradation of the mangroves in Guana Cay played out on the international stage on Tuesday as representatives of the Save Guana Cay Reef Association (SGCRA) made a presentation at a United Nations Commission in New York.

Grand Bahama Human Rights Association (GBHRA) President Fred Smith and other "Save Guana Cay" representatives addressed the delegates representing numerous countries from around the world on sustainable development.

Smith was accompanied by Thomas Goreau, president of the Global Coral Reef Alliance, and Troy Albury of the Save Guana Cay Reef Association, who also made presentations which were broadcast live over the Internet.

In his address, Smith explained that the mangroves are critical ecosystems for shore protection and fisheries.



FRED SMITH

"They are essential to a healthy coastal environment; yet they are being destroyed worldwide at an accelerating pace. They represent an international environmental resource that is little understood or appreciated," he said.

In The Bahamas, Smith added, vast areas of mangroves are being destroyed by foreign development speculators to create all-

inclusive tourist resorts and exclusive real estate, golf and marina developments. In Bimini and in Guana Cay the devastation has been catastrophic and continues.

Smith noted that former Prime Minister Perry Christie has declared April as coastal awareness month, but has failed to appreciate the absolute and fundamental importance of mangroves.

"The Government of The Bahamas, in particular the former Progressive Liberal Party (PLP) administration, has encouraged and promoted this at the altar of "Development" at all costs! Despite paying lip service to "Environmental Protection," there is no environmental protection act," he said.

These are issues, Smith said, which present challenging social, economic, and political considerations, not only for The Bahamas, but also for neighbouring Caribbean nations and coastal communities worldwide, especially those that are being "discovered" by developers.

Smith said that Great Guana

Cay represents a microcosm of what is happening throughout The Bahamas, and elsewhere in coastal communities.

"In The Bahamas, the PLP administration had a name for this national development policy. It was called 'Anchor Projects,'" he said.

"The aim was to create economic development zones in many of the isolated and undeveloped islands of The Bahamas."

Noting that The Bahamas is an archipelago of 700 islands and cays, Smith said that the natural beauty of many of these islands have been the lure to development exploitations, particularly on the doorstep of the State of Florida whose economy has been booming particularly in home, marina, golf course and tourism sectors.

"Developers, especially from the United States, have been mesmerized by the Bahamian sun, sand and sea...but more importantly by the opportunities for mega tax free profits and lack of government regulatory regimes," Smith explained.

Smith said that, in the case of Guana Cay, the Office of the then Prime Minister entered into a secret commercial agreement called a Heads of Agreement which provided that, until such time as the Office of the Prime Minister had completely approved all aspects of the Discovery Bay land company's 10 year \$500 million Anchor Project for Guana Cay, there was to be no consultation with the 300 or so local island residents and fishermen of Guana Cay.

This was despite the fact that even the Discovery Land developer's Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) recognized the local residents as stakeholders who needed to be consulted as part of the EIA and development process.

The approach adopted by then Prime Minister Christie and his Cabinet was similar to the approach adopted by many other Caribbean centralized governments, Smith said; that is, to ignore local rights and to provide omnibus centralized government approval of develop-

ment projects. These projects purportedly cut through the "red tape"; particularly the nuisance of having to consult local governments or indeed for the developers to obtain licences or permits at the local government level for different aspects of their proposed developments.

In his closing remarks, Smith offered suggestions as to what measures could be put in place to ensure that these developers are no longer able to violate the environment as they have.

"Developers should be required to post performance bonds and developments should only be permitted incrementally and proportionately to what the community can handle and keep pace with in local human resources," he said.

"Lastly, the environment, investment and concession laws should apply equally to Bahamians and foreigners and thereby get rid of the awful reality of rank discrimination in so many fields which infects the Bahamas."

Countdown is on for 'Just Rush' Junkanoo parade

(From Page 1)

Creative Works, said final plans are going well, standard preparations had to be adjusted and with the top groups participating, timing is going to be critical.

"We want the parade to start on time and go home at a reasonable hour to enjoy the rest of the festivities for the weekend," he said.

The results will be revealed on Saturday at Taino Beach where an all-day beach party and mega concert featuring Reggae Sensation Beres Hammond is planned.

The Creative Works president is assuring that Grand Bahama has not seen the likes of what is going to take place on June 1.

"I have been able to hold meetings with the groups in New Providence once every two weeks and this past week I've been able to peep into the shacks in New Providence and what they will be bringing on the streets of Grand Bahama is just simply incredible," he said.

"Grand Bahama groups are going to be well prepared. They have had some sponsorship struggles, but we have been able to secure for them the largest amount of seed money in Grand Bahama's history," said Adderley, noting that to compete at this level they still had some challenges with corporate Grand Bahama.

Based on what they have in their shacks, Adderley admitted, however, that Grand Bahama is likely to shock the New Providence groups.

"With both groups coming to take the title, it is not going to be a cakewalk. People will expect New Providence will automatically take it, but Grand Bahama will prove

that it will not be a cakewalk.

"It's going to be a keenly contested parade."

Bleachers are already going up in preparation for the big day, and with plans under way to provide around 4,000 to 5,000 seats, Adderley explained the importance of starting the set-up process now.

This parade promises more traditional seating without the fancy, expensive seating which people are unable to afford and have them empty, but a lot of free-standing room, traditional bleachers

for \$20, \$30 and a limited amount of \$50 seats.

"Family members who can't afford the parade will have a whole lot of free-standing areas.

"What we've been able to do, more importantly, is that vendors will pay less for this parade to secure booths, fans will pay less for seating to see the parade and the Junkanooers will in fact, be getting far more," the organizer said.

Adderley also revealed that the seed money has been more than doubled and the prize money has been

increased at the request of the Junkanoo leaders and now stands at around \$135,000 to \$140,000.

This has been made possible with the addition of several sponsors who have come on-board.

The corporate sponsors include the Grand Bahama Port Authority, the Grand Bahama Power Company, the Ministry of Tourism, KALIK and Burns House, Polymers International, Pelican Bay will serve as the official hotel and Top It Off, a popular hat and T-shirt store in the Bloneva

Building.


"We expect to close a wonderful deal with BTC in a matter of days and we're just so excited. People have really put their forces and resources behind "Just Rush" and we're excited," Adderley said.

The Creative Works president noted that the parade will have a serious impact on the economy and with elections over it will serve as a cultural upliftment and healing process for the Grand

Bahama community.

"Many of the clothing stores and restaurants are running 'Just Rush' specials and all of the hotels will be full to capacity.

"By virtue of the fact that each group will be bringing an average of 250 members, that speaks volumes for the hotel capacity. All of these people have to eat and drink somewhere and they need ground transportation. So it will be a great boost for the economy," he said.



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