



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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British Virgin Islanders campaign against Beef Island development project, 2007-2009

January

2007

to: September

2009

Country: British Virgin Islands

Location City/State/Province: *Tortola and Beef Island*

Location Description: *Islands in the Caribbean Sea*

Goals:

To prevent the construction of hotels, a marina, a golf course and other tourist accommodations on Beef Island (and as a result, also on Smuggler's Cove), both for the sake of residents and environmental protection.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 011. Records, radio, and television

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 011. Records, radio, and television

Methods in 4th segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 010. Newspapers and journals

Methods in 5th segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 010. Newspapers and journals

Methods in 6th segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 010. Newspapers and journals

Classifications

Classification:

Defense

Cluster:

Economic Justice

Environment

Group characterization:

- Conservationists and residents of BVI

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Virgin Islands Environmental Council (VIEC)

Partners:

British Virgin Islands Heritage Conservation Group (BVIHCG), B.V.I Fisherpersons and Concerned Individuals for the Protection of Beef Island, Association of Reef Keepers, BVI Farmers Co-Op, BVI Dive Association

External allies:

Ocean River Institute

Involvement of social elites:

Sir Richard Branson was the owner of Virgin Atlantic Airlines and also the owner of a few islands in the British Virgin Islands. He donated money and provided discounted air transport for the environmental lawyers who represented VIEC in their case.

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- BVI Dive Association
- BVIHCG; B.V.I Fisherpersons and Concerned Individuals for the Protection of Beef Island; Association of Reef Keepers; BVI Farmers Co-Op; Ocean River Institute

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

- Sir Richard Branson

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: 5 months

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Quorum Island British Virgin Islands Limited, British Virgin Islands government

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

Not known

Repressive Violence:

Not known

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

4 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

2 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

VIEC won their case against the government, which forced Quorum Island BVI Limited to revise their development plans. However, this does not prevent development altogether, and future development plans could still prove environmentally detrimental.

The Virgin Islands is a group of islands between the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean. The northeastern islands are known as the British Virgin Islands (BVI) while the southwestern islands are known as the Virgin Islands of the United States. Due to the natural beauty of the islands, developers and government officials have historically had an interest in strengthening the tourist industry.

In October 2006, Chief Minister Dr. Orlando Smith of the British Virgin Islands approved a preliminary development plan for a five-star resort at Smuggler's Cove, a beach on the main island of Tortola. The Planning Authority hosted a public meeting on January 24, 2007, to collect input from residents. The developer claimed that the resort would serve to accommodate the many wealthy tourists who visit the BVI, and would create business opportunities and jobs. The resort owners would also pay millions in taxes, and keep the beaches public so that residents could freely access them.

However, of the over 100 people who attended the meeting, more than 24 people spoke, nearly all in opposition to the development plan, citing reasons such as the dangers to the coral reef, salt ponds, and mangroves, as well as issues with erosion,

runoff, and contaminants in the water. Additionally, the development would mean increased traffic, overcrowding, and sewage issues. The BVI Heritage Conservation Group (BVIHCG) and the BVI Fisherpersons and Concerned Individuals for the Protection of Beef Island served as the main voices of the residents during the course of the following months in a series of public meetings.

Despite the public outcry, on January 31 the Chief Minister approved another development plan, this time proposed by Quorum Island BVI Limited for an \$80 million five-star hotel, marina, and golf course resort on Beef Island, which is connected to Tortola. The proposed golf course and marina would have been located near and partially on the Hans Creek Fisheries Protected Area, upon which, under the Virgin Islands Fisheries Regulations, it was illegal for any development to occur that would adversely affect the area. However, the Chief Minister stood by his decisions and refused to reconsider.

In response to these proposed developments, members of the BVIHCG, BVI Fisherpersons and Concerned Individuals for the Protection of Beef Island, and several other groups formed a coalition in February 2007 that officially became the Virgin Islands Environmental Council (VIEC) in July of that year. These organizations formed VIEC in order to cooperate in collecting information and coordinating efforts in opposing the development projects, both for environmental and residential reasons.

On March 5, residents gathered at Long Bay, Beef Island for a “Family Day” in order to disseminate information about the effects of the developments, as well as to rally support. The coalition hosted a second Family Day rally on March 12 at Smuggler’s Cove Beach, and several smaller protests between March 5 and March 12. One of the better-documented rallies, the Palm Grove Rally, occurred on March 23. Demonstrators held posters of predictions for before and after photos of Beef Island and prepared petitions for BVI residents to sign. Historical and environmental experts gave speeches on the potential impact of development, and organizations hosted booths to sell t-shirts and provide more detailed information. Nearly 50–100 people attended the rally, including drivers passing by who rolled their windows down to listen and employees of nearby businesses.

By July 2007 (BVI Environmental Month), VIEC had collected a 600-page book of 18,000 signatures and 3,600 comments of support from countries all around the world. The book was delivered to various government offices, including to Premier Ralph O’Neal and the public library. On July 10, Dr. Quincy Lettsome, one of the directors of VIEC, spoke on the radio to discuss the importance of the Beef Island case.

Throughout the course of the campaign, rallies and public demonstrations grew infrequent as the focus turned towards the legal proceedings. However, members of VIEC regularly contributed to newspapers and magazines in the form of articles and letters to the editors. In November 2007, the owner of Virgin Atlantic Airlines and two islands of BVI, Sir Richard Branson, generously donated to VIEC and provided discounted airfare for the legal team, UK Environmental lawyers, who represented VIEC in its case against the government.

In 2008, VIEC and the Ocean River Institute (ORI) collected over 10,000 letters of support from U.S. tourists and thousands of dollars from numerous donors to fund the legal proceedings. ORI, a United States-based organization, provided legal and financial help from abroad.

In July 2007, VIEC sought a judicial review of the development plans from the High Court. After two years of fundraising and legal delays, VIEC won its case on September 23, 2009. Justice Indra Hariprashad-Charles declared that approval of the Beef Island Development Project was illegal, since harmful development may not occur in the Hans Creek Fisheries area under the Fisheries Regulations. VIEC had proven that the development would be environmentally detrimental to the Hans Creek area. The case marked the first instance of an organization winning a lawsuit against a government for violating environmental laws in the Caribbean. However, the victory did not mean the end of the development project; developers intended to alter the plans to meet environmental guidelines, but the residential issues still remained. As of April 2011, the Beef Island development project has not begun, but Quorum Island BVI Limited intends to start building in the near future.

Research Notes

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A project of Swarthmore College, including Peace and Conflict Studies, the Peace Collection, and the Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility.

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