

Reply letter to The Observer 04 October 2012

Dear Sirs

We, the Free Winnifred Benevolent Society, were disturbed by the article we read in the Sunday Observer (October 2nd) concerning the negotiations between the Urban Development Corporation (UDC) and our Society. Mediation is still ongoing and both UDC and the Society signed a confidentiality agreement which requires us not to disclose the terms proposed during negotiation until a final settlement has been reached. We consider the article quoting Mrs Joy Douglas, Executive Director of the UDC, to be in violation of that confidentiality agreement.

As we still regard ourselves as constrained by this agreement, we will not respond to specific comments raised by Mrs Douglas relating to terms proposed during mediation. We do, however, wish to respond to what we see as an attack on the efforts of the community to ensure that the public will always have the right to access Winnifred Beach WITHOUT CHARGE.

Mrs Douglas questioned the motives of the Society. Our only motive is to ensure that Winnifred Beach is a place where rich and poor alike can enjoy one of Jamaica's most beautiful natural assets free of cost and where we would love to promote sustainable tourism and environmentally friendly development.

Winnifred Beach has been traditionally used by the community, visitors and Jamaicans for over 50 years. It was originally owned by Frederick Barnet Brown, a Baptist missionary. By his will dated May 14, 1918, Mr. Brown established The Winnifred Rest Home trust. In his will Mr. Brown bequeathed ownership of the beach and surrounding land to his wife, Annie Brown, for the remainder of her life and on her death the property together with houses, furniture, fixtures, live and dead stock would be converted into and called "The Winnifred Rest Home". According to clause 17 of the will, the purpose of the trust was to:- "be used and kept up and maintained for the purpose of a Rest Home for Missionary Workers, Teachers and respectable poor persons, where they can come for a limited time to rest, such time to be in each case decided on by the Board of Trustees of the "The Winnifred Rest Home".

The beach and most of the surrounding land were sold to UDC in the 1970s. In the firm belief that Jamaicans need accessible community spaces, the community has over the years trained lifeguards, vendors on proper environmental management and maintenance of the beach and has also implemented garbage disposal and plastic recycling initiatives on the beach without assistance from UDC. These efforts are to ensure that Winnifred Beach is a clean, safe place for everybody to enjoy for free. As a result, Winnifred Beach is one of the few free public beaches left in Portland and remains a source of livelihood for members of the community.

Yours sincerely,

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