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## Text 2

### **SQUATTERS TAKE ON DEVELOPERS**

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Author: BENJAMIN SHORS Special to The Miami Herald

ISLA CARENERO, PANAMA -- In the late 1980s, Nicasio Jiménez built two listing shacks with mangrove beams, a roof of scavenged tin, and rough floor planks that allowed Caribbean breezes and tsetse flies to flit through the cracks.

Jiménez, a 61-year-old retired banana pruner who earned \$1 an hour, did not own the waterfront land. Like hundreds of other low-income people living in Bocas del Toro, a stunning archipelago once relegated to some of Panamas poorest residents, he instead relied on "squatter rights" written into the countrys law.

Now, as foreign investment transforms these languid islands, Jiménez family faces eviction from a Naples developer who claims he bought the property from a third party.

"Before, nobody wanted this land," said Feliciano Santos, Jiménez's 36-year-old son-in-law. "You didnt need documents. This was a garbage disposal area. We are the ones who cut our feet and got dirty working the land."

For centuries, this Caribbean island has been a beautiful place to be dirt poor. But in recent years, a booming real estate market has brought American entrepreneurs into direct conflict with Afro-Caribbean and indigenous Indians who occupy these once-isolated isles.

Now, developers have targeted an emerging demographic: retirees from America and Europe. Although American expatriates have been a part of the funky vibe in Bocas since the 1990s, they remained a relatively minor note in the Caribbean town. But as development in Panama City boomed -- construction permits last year topped \$1 billion -- investors pushed into more remote reaches of the country.

Now, critics say, the size of the new developments threaten to displace hundreds of low-income island residents, many of whom live on prime oceanfront real estate.

In the past year, the conflict has spiraled. Armed private security guards patrol disputed beaches. A powerful union of construction workers has leveled charges of "colonialism" against several developers. Homes have mysteriously burned and been torn to the ground.

"There is this tremendous lust for the coastline," said Osvaldo Jordan, executive director of the Alliance for Conservation and Development, a Panamanian nonprofit based in Panama City. "Developers and speculators will use any means necessary to get the land from the people."