

FIRST INTRODUCTORY MEETING HELD IN THE BAHAMAS

On July 3, the very first introductory meeting was held in Nassau, a city on the Grand Bahama Island in the Bahamas, a new part of the Florida Region of the SGI-USA. Representatives with ties to the area attended from Florida and New York. In addition, members from three different islands in the Bahamas chain came to the meeting. There were two guests, and all four divisions were represented.

When President Ikeda first came to the Bahamas in 1996, en route to Cuba, there were two members who lived on Abaco Island. Now there are five. Glen Aubry, who met President Ikeda during his trip to Nassau, was the first SGI-USA member to settle in the Bahamas. He flew the half-hour from Abaco Island to attend this historic introductory meeting in Nassau.

Becky Jacobs, vice-region women's leader, who also attended clarified the difficulty in practicing Buddhism here: "There are literally hundreds of islands in the Bahamas. It can be very isolating to practice because in order for the members to get together, they have to take either a boat or a plane to the island where the meeting is. Sometimes there's only one flight a day and it costs about \$100 per ticket. Then, of course, they have to find a hotel for the night. It can cost several hundred dollars just to go to a meeting! Basically we planned this meeting by email, fax and phone — when the phone lines weren't down — over a period of six months. To be honest, the *World Tribune* is the members' main source of encouragement, if the mail comes. These members truly understand the stand alone spirit!"

One of the guests was Beuhla Richmond; her daughter, Allyson Richmond, flew all the way to New York and back just to take her to this meeting. "I am so excited to be at the first introductory meeting in the 200-year history of the Bahamas," Allyson said. "You know, Christopher Columbus' first contact with the New World was when he set foot on the Bahamian island of San Salvador."

Her mother expressed her delight in attending the meeting: "I have learned a lot by coming here. I am very impressed and quite frankly intrigued. I encouraged my daughter to practice, but I never understood what it was really about. I see that Buddhist practice seems to create within each person a driving force to be victorious."

Dianne Alexander, a member from Atlanta who has been struggling to work as a yoga instructor in Freeport, Grand Bahamas, said: "I feel very fortunate to be able to participate. I feel confident that this is the cause for being able to continue to work and live here and promote kosen-rufu."

The next meeting is planned for October on the island of Abaco.

—JIM DREISBACH