



global witness

Trump business deal in the Dominican Republic may be unconstitutional

New Global Witness investigation uncovers how Donald Trump is pursuing what appears to be a new business deal in the Dominican Republic, exposing him to a potential violation of the U.S. Constitution's Emoluments Clause.

[Read the entire report via Global Witness' website here.](#)

December 17, 2018, Washington, D.C. – Global Witness revealed today that US President Donald Trump is forging ahead with what appears to be a new business deal in the Dominican Republic. This deal poses a conflict of interest for the President and may expose him to violations of the U.S. Constitution's Emoluments Clause.

“After a failed 2007 deal in the Dominican Republic, the Trumps are now back in business with their former Dominican partner, the Hazoury family and their company,” said Eryn Schornick, Senior Policy Advisor at Global Witness. “Trump’s company previously sued the Hazourys alleging “text book fraud on such a wide scale.”

Global Witness went undercover in the Dominican Republic to get details about the suspected new Trump project. Posing as a representative to a wealthy investor looking to buy property, our undercover investigator met with senior brokers and sales representatives at the Cap Cana resort – owned by the Hazourys – on the Dominican Republic’s eastern shore.

A sales representative confirmed that the Trumps are going back into business with the Hazourys and stated that Trump Organization is the developer of a commercial and residential project on the beach at the Cap Cana resort, and has the requisite permits to start building.

Previously, the Trump Organization and Hazourys claimed that the project is a continuation of their 2007 deal, most likely to avoid contradicting President Trump’s pledge to separate himself from his business and pursue no new foreign deals while in office.

In response to our investigation, the Trump Organization now deny that they are involved in any current project in the Dominican Republic.

However, Global Witness has identified features of the deal that suggest that it is indeed new. Hallmarks of a new deal include, among others, a potential change in Trump’s role as developer instead of licensor, and the fact that the new and previous projects are not even close to one another – they are five miles apart.

Provisions in the 2013 Settlement Agreement ending the dispute between Trump’s company and the Hazourys and their company suggest that any subsequent Trump project within the Cap Cana resort could be treated as distinct or different from their first project there, and would not be a continuation of their original project plans.

“Before his inauguration, Trump promised the American public that he would pursue no new foreign deals while he is President. Our investigation suggests that he may have broken that promise,” said Schornick. “What is more alarming than a broken promise is the fact that the president can get away with this because there is no conflict of interest law or rules to hold him accountable.”

Trump's pursuit of private business while in office has opened the door to conflicts of interest and corruption risks. And, what is more, Global Witness' investigation uncovers how this apparently new deal may violate the Emoluments Clause of the U.S. Constitution.

In particular, Global Witness's investigation raises the question: Did Dominican officials change building rules so that buildings could be constructed higher to benefit a Trump company project – changes which could represent an emolument to the president and thus a violation of the U.S. Constitution's Emoluments Clause?

“The President has benefited from his presidency in a way unlike any other president before him. He's made millions and even admitted that his brand was hotter than ever,” said Schornick. “To protect our democracy and institutions, Congress must pass a law that prevents President Trump and any president after him from financially benefiting from official acts or conflicts of interest.”

Global Witness calls upon requisite authorities, including congressional committees (see [here](#) and [here](#)), to investigate these allegations and, if appropriate, hold the Trump Organization, Donald Trump and his family members accountable for their actions.

Global Witness' other recommendations are:

- Congress should pass legislation that ensures the president and vice president address actual and perceived conflicts of interest. Such legislation should, at a minimum, require the disclosure of business records, including and specifically tax returns, transfer of all relevant financial interests into a blind trust and that certain profits resulting from a conflict of interest be turned over to the U.S. Treasury Department.
- Trump should be required to turn over all relevant proceeds to the appropriate authorities to address current conflicts of interest and prevent the president from further profiting from his office.

Footage and photos are available to media, please email jabrobeck@globalwitness.org

Media contact

Julie Anne Miranda-Brobeck
US Communications Manager, Global Witness
jabrobeck@globalwitness.org
202-365-2903