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Attorneys await ship staffer's release

BY DONNA BALANCIA
FLORIDA TODAY

Attorneys for Reshma Harilal, a crew member who has filed a lawsuit against Carnival Corp., alleging she is being held against her will on the ship, are hoping she will be removed from the Carnival Glory today, when the cruise ship docks in the Bahamas.

Her attorney, Tonya Meister, an associate with Miami-based Lipcon Margulies & Alsina, said Harilal is working aboard the Port Canaveral-based Glory, which left last Saturday for a Caribbean cruise and is due to return this Saturday to its home port. It was expected to make a port-of-call stop today in the Bahamas.

Harilal this week filed a lawsuit against Carnival in federal court, accusing the Miami-based cruise line company of "forced labor, slavery and/or human trafficking" of her and other crew members aboard Carnival ships. She contends she was hired to work as a stateroom stewardess, but was told she had to take a lower-paying position after she boarded the ship last Saturday.

In court papers filed in U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Florida in Miami, attorneys for Harilal, a 33-year-old citizen of South Africa, ask that she be removed from the Glory and be paid wages that she agreed to work under.

In a statement, Carnival said: "The allegations contained within the suit are patently false, and the company looks forward to vigorously defending itself."

In the meantime, Carnival issued another statement Thursday that updated its earlier position that Harilal is working as a stateroom stewardess on the Glory. The current statement says, in part: "In early February 2008, she was assigned to the Carnival Glory. A stateroom stewardess position was not immediately open on the ship. However, she was advised that, within a maximum of two weeks, she would be placed in a stewardess position. In the interim, she was given a temporary, alternate assignment."

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