

THE GRENADIAN

# VOICE

*"The right alone is right – The wrong is always wrong."*

Vol. 41  
No. 21

Week Ending Friday May 28, 2021

Price \$1.25

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Dwain Gill, president of the Grenada Cricket Association



# GRENADA'S PARLIAMENT BUILDING ON DISPLAY IN VENICE

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Architect Bryan Bullen puts Grenada's Parliament building on the world stage

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# Grenada's Parliament building on display in Venice

When Grenadian artist Susan Mains first saw the newly opened Parliament building at Mount Wheldale, Saint George's in 2018, she thought "this is so beautiful; it has to be seen by the world."

Three years later, her dream is realised. The world can now see the architectural wonder where the House of Representatives and the Senate convene and the nation's business is conducted.

"I felt that building deserved the attention of the world," Mains told *The Grenadian Voice* on Tuesday, as Grenada opened its first-ever national exhibit at the '17th International Architecture Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia' that runs until November 23.

"It's like the Olympics for art," Mains said of the Venice event, which is held in alternate years for art then architecture. She served as commissioner of Grenada's participation in the Venice International Art Exhibition in 2015, 2017 and 2019. This year marks the first time Grenada is included in the International Architecture Exhibition.

"For architecture, it is the biggest event in the world," she said, adding that the exhibits attract thousands of visitors from across Europe and the world, many of whom could be potential visitors to Grenada. She explained the 60-square metre Grenada Pavilion faces the waterfront in the heart of historic Venice, on the path between the Arsenal and the Giardini.

Bryan Bullen, the Caribbean Office of Co-Operative Architecture (COCO) architect who designed the Parliament building, collaborated with Mains on Grenada's submission, which has encountered financial and logistical challenges since it was first contemplated, not the least of which has

been the pandemic. "We had to downsize since the exhibit was first envisioned. No one from Grenada could travel to set it up, so we relied on our team on the ground, headed by Luisa Flora of Officina delle Zattere," Mains noted.

Grenadian born artist Billy Gerard Frank, who represented Grenada at the 2019 Venice International Art Exhibition, provided a big screen television and sound system for the documentary produced by Bullen. The video is a main feature of the pavilion, highlighting the process and thoughts of the architect in the design and construction. While having his work featured at such a prestigious international event "is a fantastic opportunity for me personally" Bullen said "Grenada is going to get a lot of mileage out of this, to be there on such a big stage."

This year the architectural event is held under the theme 'How will we live together?' and is reflected in the title of Grenada's exhibit *Coethos*. The display encompasses the building, its location and purpose. In the words of Bullen:

"Strategically situated and imbued with symbolism, this modern icon of democracy and transparency was forged from historical references, geographic imperatives, considerations of sustainability and progressive applications of local materials and techniques."

The original Parliament Building, York House, was destroyed by Hurricane Ivan in September 2004; parliamentary sessions were subsequently held in the Trade Centre until the new building opened in June 2018. Plans for a new structure to house Parliament were contemplated by the National Democratic Congress (NDC) government in 2008; former Prime Minister Tillman Thomas is thrilled that the

building is part of the international exhibit.

"This is good exposure for Grenada. It is very significant," he told this newspaper on Wednesday.

He recalled how the Mount Wheldale location was selected.

"We chose that site as part of our commitment to democracy and had plans for a democracy compound up there," he said, that would include the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court.

Grenada is among 62 countries featured in the architectural event. Additionally, Grenada is among a group of countries participating in the collective, online digital platform Biennale Pavilions, which allows online and walk-in visitors to watch events anytime from the website archive.

Submitting an entry and maintaining staff and security for Grenada's pavilion is "very expensive." While it is too early to determine what the final costs will be, as the event continues until November, Mains said financial support has been forthcoming from the Grenada National Lottery Authority and corporate sponsors. "The benefits of Grenada's participation, and the return on that investment are immeasurable. Grenada takes its place as the leader in the Caribbean. No other island aside from Cuba has had as many or as regular appearances in National Pavilions as Grenada," according to Mains.

Mains said the curators of the Pavilion appointed by the Ministry of Culture are the collective Babau Bureau, comprising Marco Ballarin, Stefano Tornieri and Massimo Triches. "We are very happy to participate in the event. Our Parliament building is featured as one of our outstanding buildings with the design of the nutmeg on the inside. This exposure will certainly do well for Grenada globally,"



A section of the Grenada Pavilion in Venice. Photo credit Victoria Mazzonis

Minister of Culture Hon Yolande Bain Horsford told *The Grenadian Voice* on Wednesday.

The display also features Bullen's vision for revitalising the Carenage. He described the vision "to re-inject public life into the urban space of the town's harbor, and realisation of the Grenada House of Parliament are examined in relation to sustainability, commercial viability, resilience to natural disasters and changes in the global ecology."

Mains reports that collaborators with Bullen on the Carenage project include architects Irina Kostka, Michael Julien, Sharon Bidasee and Dr Angus Friday, Grenada's former Ambassador to the United States and the United Nations.

The video documenting the building is accompanied with hanging columns similar to those at the front of the



Parliament building showcased at international architecture exhibition

actual building. The columns contain ideas for regenerating Grenada's architecture, including refurbishment

of such a public space as the Carenage, creating a new area for leisure and cultural activities, along with

the refurbishment of the National Library and the creation of a Center for Knowledge and Innovation.

