



Eastern Caribbean Central Bank

KEYNOTE SPEECH BY

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**AT GRENADA CO-OPERATIVE BANK LIMITED'S 90TH ANNIVERSARY
CELEBRATIONS AND BOOK LAUNCH UNDER THE THEME**

“90 YEARS OF NATIONAL PRIDE –

CELEBRATING OUR PAST, INSPIRING OUR FUTURE”

St. Andrew Room, Spice Island Beach Resort

26 July 2023

Salutations:

Hon. Dennis Cornwall, Minister of Finance

Mr. Darryl Brathwaite, Chairman of the Board of Directors and other Board members

Mr. Larry Lawrence, Managing Director

Mr. Richard Duncan, OBE, retired Managing Director

Mrs. Valerie Steele, Widow of Mr Gordon Steele, former Managing Director

Shareholders

Specially Invited Guests

Executive Managers and staff of Grenada Co-operative Bank Ltd. (GCBL)

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good afternoon.



Eastern Caribbean Central Bank



Introduction and Acknowledgements

I am delighted to be a part of this doubly momentous occasion: the celebration of Grenada Co-operative Bank Limited's 90th anniversary under the theme “**90 Years of National Pride - Celebrating Our Past, Inspiring Our Future**” and the launch of this wonderful book on the history of the bank, aptly titled “***By the Hand\$ of Grenadian\$: A Tale of Commitment, Fortitude & Leadership***”.

The timing of this event is highly propitious. Ostensibly, it is to celebrate Grenada Co-operative Bank's 90th anniversary, but it is also on the cusp of Grenada's celebration of her 50th anniversary of political independence.

I thank the Managing Director, Mr Larry Lawrence, for his kind invitation and for an advanced copy of this wonderful book. It is a treasure trove of Grenadian history and a seminal contribution to financial sector development in Grenada.

This book is clearly a labour of love and I commend those who had the vision, those who made contributions and those responsible for execution. Kudos to Simon Lee and the team for bringing it to fruition.

Celebrating Our Past

As a Grenadian, it was a delectable treat to delve into and digest the captivating story that is the making of the Grenada Co-operative Bank. As I flipped the pages, studied the pictures and read the stories, I was drawn in, fully engaged and deeply invested. I felt—and do feel—a strong sense of pride and deep admiration for the visionaries, founding fathers and the multitude of stewards or, perhaps I should say, “army of co-operators” over these 90, now 91 years, of the Grenada Co-operative Bank.

By the Hand\$ of Grenadian\$ is well-researched, well-written, heartfelt, witty, accessible and rich in historical nuggets and insights. The book is very easy to read because it is written in the rich tradition of storytelling. It was Rudyard Kipling who said, “*If history were taught in the form of stories, it would never be forgotten.*” The book



tells the story of a seed being sown; of a grassroots movement; of nation-building; of the adaptability, transformation and resilience that is woven into the tapestry of Grenadian development. It is simultaneously a fitting tribute to the stalwarts and stewards and an inspiration to a new generation.

I commend ***By the Hand\$ of Grenadian\$*** to every Grenadian and to anyone with an interest in Caribbean history, banking or economic development. I even spied a bit of our Central Bank's history in there.

The Characters

As I pored over the character sketches of the stalwarts, I was enthralled by the story of their struggles and strides to establish and grow the bank against the backdrop of Grenada's often stormy political climate. The trials and triumphs of these larger-than-life characters kept me invested: the sheer grit and ingenuity of W.E Julien; the escapades of plucky S.A. Francis; the selfless service of Samuel Brathwaite; the late, great Gordon "Knocky" Steele, who modernised the bank and brought it into the information age; and the retired, great Richard W. Duncan, characterised in the book as a "pragmatist as well as a strategist" (p. 159), who led the bank into the premier league of ECCU banks.

The Grenada Co-operative Bank is a Grenadian icon, for which we can all be justifiably proud. I pay homage to all who have laboured in this vineyard. Please join me in rousing applause.

Commendations

It is sometimes observed that as a batsman approaches his century, he slows down, gets defensive and experiences what is referred to as the "nervous nineties"; not so for the Grenada Co-operative Bank. Instead, we are observing the "notable nineties", for in your 91st year, you scored a maximum with the acquisition of FirstCaribbean's operations in Grenada. With that stroke, GCBL moved to an asset base of \$2.4 billion and is now not only the largest bank in Grenada, but the third largest bank in the Eastern Caribbean Currency Union—not bad at all for "The Penny Bank"!



The historical and symbolic significance of this acquisition in the context of Grenadian and Caribbean history should not escape us: for the antecedents of FCIB were Barclays Bank and the Colonial Bank. In a manner of speaking, the noose of colonialism has been severed and a necklace of co-operation and self-reliance now adorns.

As the representative of the regulator, the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank, I warmly congratulate the GCBL on this tremendous achievement. I must also remind you of your tremendous responsibility for, as Luke 12:48, NIV declares, “From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked” end of quote.

GCBL, you have a tremendous responsibility to, inter alia:

- Depositors (half of all bank deposits in Grenada are now held at GCBL);
- Your 4,000-plus shareholders;
- The financial stability of Grenada as its largest bank; and
- The financial stability of the Eastern Caribbean Currency Union as a systemically important bank.

Speaking of financial stability, I applaud Grenada for having the lowest non-performing loan ratio in our Currency Union. The current rate of 3.2 per cent remains below the prudential maximum of 5 per cent. Grenadians, please keep it that way!

Inspiring Our Future

As important as the trailblazers were as prominent individuals in Grenadian society, the story of Co-op Bank is not merely about these large personalities. Instead, it is about what they achieved together through their collective efforts. Co-op Bank’s contribution to the development of Grenada is their true legacy.

To Larry Lawrence, the current Managing Director, and to this generation, what will your legacy be?



The counsel of Benjamin Franklin offered in 1738 is useful: *“Either write something worth reading or do something worth writing.”*

The quote by W.E. Julien in the book is very instructive:

“Once you believe in your people, unimaginable things are possible.”

What unimaginable things will Grenada Co-op make possible now? How about joining in ***The Big Push***—a call to action that I have issued for the region to work together through innovation and collective action, to double the size of our economies. In the case of Grenada, it means moving from \$3.5 billion to \$7 billion.

What would it take?

Doubling the size of our economies may seem unimaginable now, just as the idea of an indigenous bank being dominant once did. Yes, we are in an inhospitable economic environment: a post-pandemic period pregnant with geopolitical uncertainty. But, do recall the environment in which the vision for Co-op Bank was birthed! As the book reminds us, the bank was launched in the midst of the most inhospitable economic environment of the modern era: The Great Depression.

Consider the following areas for action:

1. Customer Service

It is imperative that you listen to your customers and strive to be best in class for customer service. Indeed, this is the most important lesson shared by retired Managing Director Richard Duncan.

It was Jeff Bezos of Amazon fame who once said: ***“We do not focus on our competition. We focus on the business of the customer.”*** His focus on customer obsession is an invaluable insight that you would do well to emulate.

2. Financial Inclusion



At a time when vast segments of the population were being excluded from the financial system, Grenada Co-op Bank stepped in to fill a need, welcoming everyone—including women and youth. With as little as one penny—an amount deemed to be too small for some other institutions at the time—individuals were permitted to open a bank account. I noted the nostalgia and pride with which Ricardo Keens-Douglas recounted having his first bank account at the tender age of seven at Grenada Co-op Bank (p. 47).

As a region, we have made strides towards financial inclusion but, shockingly, 91 years on, the struggle for financial inclusion rages on. In the ECCB's recently concluded Financial Inclusion and Financial Literacy Survey, we found that only 1 in 2 adults in Grenada (53.2%) have a bank account. The corresponding figure for the ECCU is 3 in 5 adults (64.9%). The full results of this Survey will be shared in September.

I especially invite Grenada Co-op Bank to work with the ECCB to address the vexing issue of opening a bank account. We must preserve financial integrity—especially safeguards for AML/CFT risks—but we cannot exclude legitimate persons, including our youth and small businesses, from accessing financial services.

3. Wealth Creation

It was both enterprising and forward-thinking of the founders of GCBL to open up ownership of the bank to Grenadians from all walks of life, thereby creating a path to wealth creation for a hitherto disenfranchised segment of the population. Today, an immediate next step is to give more Grenadians access to the regional and capital markets, thereby affording them the opportunity for an additional source of income and wealth. After all, only 1 in 25 persons in the ECCU, or 4 per cent, currently access the regional and international capital markets. In contrast, the number in the USA is 3 in 5 persons or 60 per cent.



4. Corporate Governance

Corporate governance matters. Always has. Always will. Continually raise your practice of corporate governance and risk management. Furthermore, give prompt attention to all remedial actions identified by the regulator.

5. Corporate Social Responsibility

Throughout its history, the GCBL has retained its passion for the upliftment of people and for nation-building by supporting many social initiatives, including culture, arts, sports and youth development. That is part of Co-op Bank's DNA, and long may it continue!

Conclusion

I conclude with a challenge to the bank. As you chart your way towards your centenary, reflect on the part that the "beehive" will play in this unimaginable thing of doubling the size of Grenada's economy!

On that note, I extend my heartiest congratulations to the extended Grenada Co-operative Bank family on your 91st anniversary and offer my best wishes for a bright and prosperous future.

May God crown your efforts with resounding success!

I thank you.