

Pan gets pride of place at the United Nations

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TRINIDAD and Tobago may not have a front row, centre seat at the United Nations, but this country's stamp is unmistakably on the Caribbean region's gift to the UN — two steel pans on a third floor corridor of gifts to the UN community's New York headquarters.

Journalists from around the region who visited the UN as part of a reporting tour of Washington and New York recently (facilitated by the US Embassy), might have found the two silvery tenor pans somewhat forlorn — looking amid the offerings of gold and pearl ornaments (from Eastern countries), ivory carvings (Asia) and gigantic woven hangings (Eastern European states).

But the pans hold pride of place, since not all of the 189 UN members have contributed gifts and the Caribbean is among the fairly small number of states that have done so.

While Barbados, the Bahamas and other Caribbean nations have seats up front in the huge UN General Assembly hall (think Naparima Bowl type setting, magnified hugely), T&T's seat is two tiers back and to the right.

However, it does not mitigate from the country's input. Not only is T&T's New York mission, headed by Ambassador George McKenzie and Yvonne Gittens-Joseph (deputy Permanent Representative), a beehive of activity preparing positions for presentation at the UN, but T&T's work in this sphere has also been lauded by Ambassador Betty King, the US representative on the UN's Economic and Social Council.

King, born in St Vincent, has served as since 1997. She has a long record of public and private sector service.

Speaking from Switzerland in a satellite link-up with regional journalists at Washington's Foreign Press Centre, she said: "You (in T&T) have to be proud if your presence at the UN. Ambassador McKenzie's deputy (Mrs Gittens-Joseph) headed the third committee last year in the General Assembly and in that capacity she was responsible for putting together all issues of human rights. And she did a very, very good job of that. She was the point person on all of those issues and represented your country very well."

She said: "I would say that it is precisely in that area that T&T leads countries of its size because it's a very outspoken proponent of human rights and an advocate of this, not only in the Caribbean but also around the world."

"Another area in which I think you lead, which is also related to human rights, is on questions of the judiciary and justice and international justice organisations etc. That's where your leadership is. I know Ambassador McKenzie is also very interested in development and talks very much and promotes lots of ideas about how the Caribbean can benefit more from the globalised economy," Ambassador King added.