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## **The Philippine Pavilion Triumphantly Opens Exhibition at the Historic 17th Venice Architecture Biennale (2021)**

**VENICE, ITALY** - The Philippines opened the country's National Pavilion, with the exhibition Structures of Mutual Support, at the historic 17th Venice Architecture Biennale last May 20, 2021.

Located alongside other national pavilions at the Arsenale in Venice, the Philippine Pavilion exhibition is curated by Framework Collaborative (members of GK Enchanted Farm and Architects Sudarshan Khadka, Jr. and Alexander Eriksson Furunes).

The 17th Venice Architecture Biennale was postponed twice due to the COVID-19 health crisis that spread throughout the world, with Italy as one of the first countries to be affected. The event was originally scheduled to open May 2020, reset to July 2020, and will officially open on May 22, 2021.

The organizer La Biennale di Venezia decided to pursue a 'physical exhibition' and committed to strictly implementing health and safety protocols. As a precedent, La Biennale organized the Venice Film Festival last September 2020. The first major in-person cinema showcase required participants to wear face masks during screenings and anyone arriving from outside Europe to take a COVID-19 test.

During the press conference, the curator of the Architecture Biennale Hashim Sarkis said that there is "perseverance and optimism" with the opening of the Biennale. Sarkis explained, "These discussions have been very enriching. They turned the Biennale from an event into an experiment, a process, an open discussion, and a true collaboration in the spirit of the theme. The expanded and inclusive platform would not have been possible had we not paused this past year. As difficult as it may have been, it was also a year that we gained."

The Philippine participation in Venice is a project of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) and the Office of Deputy Speaker and Congresswoman Loren Legarda.

### ***Bayanihan in the times of COVID-19***

Structures of Mutual Support explores how the principles of mutual support would shape architecture by involving people directly in the determination of values embedded in it.

Architects Khadka and Furunes together with members of the Philippine Pavilion Coordinating Committee conducted a 22-day workshop in Brgy. Encanto in Angat, Bulacan. Thirty-two representatives of the GK Enchanted Farm community, composed of farmers, carpenters, housewives, students and other laborers, attended the workshop. Through the workshop, the members discussed the merits of building a structure within the community and democratically deliberated on where the final form would be located, as well as the components to be included in it based on the common needs of the community. Together with the architects, they planned, designed, and built a library and conflict-resolution space.

As bayanihan was used traditionally to move a house from one village to the other, so has the building traveled to Venice for the duration of the exhibition before returning home to the village.

“We believe in the relevance of the conversation our exhibition is raising. More than ever, we need to revisit how traditions of mutual support systems, such as bayanihan, have allowed us to create societies that are equitable and able to survive seemingly insurmountable circumstances such as the one we face today,” stated Khadka.

Furunes added, “Collaborative traditions, largely in rural parts of the world, have offered a different perspective on how to get things done and how to decide what needs to be done. There is value in looking at these traditions and seeing how they can be applied during these times.”

According to GK Enchanted Farm community member Aliza Mae Antonio, the experience of creating a structure with the architects was not only new but it was memorable. She said that, “One day, when we look at the structure, we’ll remember how we took part in building it.”

The Philippine Pavilion focuses on how mutual support can propose alternative methods of building spaces and communities that give primacy to collaboration and participation, challenging dominant discourses of sustainability in architectural practice and the larger global context.

“Before the total lockdowns were put into place, the Philippine Pavilion already shipped the exhibition’s structure to Venice. Last April, with a lean team, we flew to Venice to install it and open the exhibition. We felt it was our responsibility that no matter what happens, we would represent the Philippines this year,” Khadka explained.

He added, “The exhibition is alongside other National Pavilions, and it’s enriching to see how the themes of the exhibition provide an experience that people can contemplate on and find inspiration from. This pandemic has taught us the importance of working together not just as citizens of our nation-states but as part of humanity.”

The curatorial concept of the Pavilion is rooted in the practice of the two architects Khadka and Furunes as well as the ongoing artistic PhD “Learning from Bayanihan/Dugnad” (Alexander Eriksson Furunes, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, 2016-21). One of their projects is Streetlight Tagpuro, a post-disaster rebuilding project in Tacloban after super-typhoon Haiyan. The project won the Civic and Community Category and the Small Project of The Year Award at the World Architecture Festival 2017. Their practice has been nominated for the Architectural Review Emerging Architecture Awards 2021.

The Philippine Pavilion will also be made accessible through its digital programs and virtual tours, which will be accessible to the public, anywhere in the world. To learn about the digital agenda and offerings, go to [philartsvenicebiennale.org](http://philartsvenicebiennale.org) Updates are made on Facebook and Instagram via @philartsvenice. To watch video documentaries on the exhibition, go to: PAVB Youtube ([https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCiBD6kLhhM4Lpgkh\\_q04rwA](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCiBD6kLhhM4Lpgkh_q04rwA)).