

George A. O. Alleyne
Chancellor
University of the West Indies
October 28, 2010

Celebrating our Jubilee
Saint Augustine, Trinidad*

Let me welcome you to this graduation ceremony of the St. Augustine Campus of the University of the West Indies. It is good to see all of you under one roof. We have been concerned to ensure that there is no division of the audience with some of you having to see the ceremony on television. This has meant having six ceremonies which is a reflection of the growth of this campus which now with just over 18,000 students, is the largest of the University campuses and also a tribute to the interest of the public of Trinidad and Tobago in our University. The majority, 90%, of our students are from Trinidad and Tobago, but there are students here from every one of the CARICOM countries, and I am pleased to note that there are 33 other nationalities represented here. The campus continues to expand physically as well as academically and in the past year several new academic programs were introduced. My eye caught the Masters in Sports Management with FIFA, the MSc in Public Health with the University of Alabama and the MSc in Advanced Nursing.

I wish to congratulate our honorary graduands. You represent a special group in any university, and I must remind you that you are entitled to all the rights and privileges of our other graduates, including being members of our alumni associations and of course paying your dues to them.

My congratulations to the graduating class of 2010! You are a very special class, and graduates in years to come will recognize you as special, not only because of your numbers and the excellence of your academic achievements, but because you are the graduates of the jubilee year. This class is just over 3,000, with 2,400 first degrees, the majority in the Social Sciences. I am pleased to note that 9% of the class obtained first class honors. This year the Campus celebrates its 50 years of existence-50 years since the Imperial College of Tropical agriculture ceased to exist and the St. Augustine Campus of the University of the West Indies was born. But it has not merely existed over these past 50 years, it has grown and flourished and has carved out a special niche for itself in the Caribbean and in the host country of Trinidad and Tobago. Jubilee years are often marked in Universities by historical treatises that recount the glories of the institution and the celebration of those leaders who contributed to its success. Ours has been no different and over the course of the past year there have been several occasions and

* Presented at the University of the West Indies-Saint Augustine Campus Graduation Ceremony, St. Augustine, Trinidad, October 28, 2010

publications which describe the events of the past half century in positive terms. I recommend to you particularly Professor Bridget Brereton's excellent history of the past 50 years.

Without exhibiting hubris, I do believe that there is a great deal to celebrate. We celebrate first the number of graduates from this campus who have brought luster to it. Just over the past 10 years this Campus has produced 20, 000 graduates. They can be found in every sector, in every walk of life in this country and throughout the Caribbean. We can celebrate the research that has come from all the Faculties –the work in the humanities –the path breaking work in areas such as gender studies and the development of the steel pan. And like all good universities we recall the student activism of the early days which had a marked effect on the political life of this and other countries. Our celebration must also be for the steadfast support of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago which although as is natural with governments sometimes showed some discomfort with its protégé, has been magnanimous in its support of this campus for the academic programs as well as for its physical expansion. The financial contribution of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago in 2009/2010 amounted to TT\$ 729 million and for 2010/2011 is projected to be TT\$ 771 million. And while I laud and applaud the major support of the host government, the Campus as a part of a regional institution has also benefited from the support of the other Caribbean governments. And it is not self congratulation which makes me say how pleased I am to note the response of our University to the catastrophe in Haiti and our embrace of several Haitian students. I wish we could do more.

But celebration and rejoicing must be accompanied by some thought of what the next 50 years will bring to the University and to you. Throughout the latter part of the last century, it was popular to predict the demise of the university as an institution. There would be no structures with walls, but only massive learning centers with what would be the equivalent of Hollywood like professors paid according to their star quality. The extreme would be supermarkets into which you came at any time, wrote a contract for whatever you wished and ended whenever the contract had been filled. This has not happened and there is still a loud call for and acceptance of physical places of teaching and research which foster human interaction-masters with scholars and scholars with scholars.

Let us be optimistic that there will be progress, but let us accept the dictum of Martin Luther King, Jr. that "Human progress does not roll in on the wheels of inevitability". Obviously we cannot know the extent of future progress, but we do know that we have the capacity to influence that future by creating in our minds and in the minds of others what would be the desired future. My desired future is one in which our University and this Campus will still be flourishing 50 years from now because it has adapted to the changing social and environmental conditions predominantly of the Caribbean.

I will outline briefly five aspects of the social environment which will be critical in determining our face in 50 years. We will still be living in and be in awe of the age of knowledge –perhaps more so. The speed of interconnectedness will be even more vertiginous. There will be increased clamor for acquisition in different ways of the new information that is the foundation of knowledge. There will be diversification in terms of opportunities for more people to acquire the new information. We are amazed now at the facility of the young to manage the technology of the instant connectivity. You too will have that problem although

there is serious questioning as to whether there is a limit to which humans can receive information from so many inputs at so rapid a pace.

In 50 years our university will be extending its influence to people at an earlier age and there will be less of a rigidity of responsibility for the youth at different ages. Socialization into the value of continuing to learn from an early age will go some way to redressing the advantage of family university experience. Our university will be addressing the apparent lack of interest in the male for higher education at a very early age, and there will be less of the angst over the predominance of one or the other sex at the graduate level.

There will be greater involvement of business at all levels of the university and business will take more advantage of the expertise that resides here and see a responsibility to fund various aspects of the University's work substantially. We will see extension of learning into the business sector with true partnerships in both teaching and research. This happens in a limited way at present, but will be the norm in 50 years. One of the caveats is that the commercialization of knowledge must not be to the detriment of those branches of knowledge that represent less immediately obvious capital. Thus there must be affirmative action to protect many of the disciplines in the arts and humanities which may not be the primary focus of business interest.

We will face the challenge of the changing demographics of the Caribbean and of its institutions. Our populations are ageing. While on the one hand we express legitimate concern for the social conditions of the youth, we must note with satisfaction the increasing life expectancy of our populations which brings certain challenges. Increasing life expectancy and the decrease in female fertility mean that the dependency ratio will increase. There will be smaller number of persons of working age to care for the older population. The increasing life expectancy coupled with behaviors that are inimical to our health are already bringing an epidemic of the chronic diseases such as cancer, hypertension, heart disease and strokes. Our University must be the institution that carries out the research that provides possible solutions to our governments. We cannot depend on the knowledge generated from information garnered in other places to point the way for the kinds of social services that our elderly will need. Part of our credibility will depend on the soundness of the solutions we propose to what will be a major problem.

Finally, during the course of the next fifty years all of our campuses will be affected by the economic volatility for which our buffering capacity is limited for various reasons. This will mean that there will be different degrees of capacity to support us, which makes it even more imperative that we be more aggressive in mobilizing resources from sources other than the national governments. I do not foresee a private institution, but one less dependent on the public purse. I am pleased to thank the institutions that make grants and donations to the Campus. These total several millions this year, and I was particularly pleased to note the TT\$17 million from the Ministry of Education to the School of Education and the number of grants that come from outside the Caribbean.

These are some of the ways in which your University will change, but there are challenges you too will have to face and for which I trust your stay in the university has equipped

you. I hope you can accept that there need not be conflict in your accepting different territorial identities. Humans must come to terms with different layers of identity. I hope you can be a patriotic Grenadian and still have a passion for things Caribbean. A West Indian spirit and the survival and prosperity of the regional enterprise depend on you young people embracing this duality of identity.

I trust you will accept the challenge of addressing and coming to terms with the pluralism that is increasingly a feature of our societies. It is not only because our island homes are small that I urge you to face squarely the need for accepting and glorifying diversity. We have to make a virtue of our diversity of ethnicity, culture, faith, geography and gender. One of the celebratory events held in recent weeks was a beautiful interfaith service. There was no one who was not moved by the passion which the Protestants, Catholics, Muslims, Hindus and Orishas expressed their faith and united in blessing the Campus and wishing it well. You must ensure that the idea and practice of the acceptance of diversity that is central to the interfaith movement is seen in what you say and do.

I point out the obvious in saying that the politics of the Caribbean will undoubtedly have a significant impact on our history, as there are no major fundamental policy changes that take place in our region without political input. I urge that you do not embrace that often uncritical and negative comment on politics as a profession. Politics is a noble calling. Technical excellence is not enough and every society needs some of its brightest and best men and women taking an active part in the political life.

Finally, I wish to urge on you a practice which from my personal experience grows more valuable as one gets older. I can put the charge no better than it was given to the first graduates of the independent University of the West Indies by the then Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Dr. Eric Williams. He said 48 years ago;

So ladies and gentlemen, your graduation does not represent the end of your association with the world of books and ideas. I think I can say without exaggeration or being offensive, that I can testify personally to the fact that it is not impossible for you to do your work, whatever it is that you are called upon to do for society and to read at the same time and to write, and by reading I do not mean reading around your particular subject or the responsibility that you have in society. Reading will give you some of the confidence that is so badly needed in this society dominated by a powerful sense of inferiority. You are small and impotent and the countries you come from and go to are not particularly influential in world affairs, but there is nothing in the world to stop you from cultivating and developing independent minds.

Dr. Williams also emphasized on that day the responsibility of the graduates to their alma mater and I echo that call. You should pledge to be part of your local alumni association and through it make your voices heard in the Councils of the University.

Let me say thanks to your parents and loved ones who are here to share this day with you. They have been as much a part of the struggle for success as you. I hope they are satisfied with what you have become and that your prospects in life have been enhanced by your stay here. I hope they help you to keep your vow of maintaining contact and interest in your alma mater.

Good luck to you!