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**The University of the West Indies; Symbol or
instrument of Regionalism
Kingston, Jamaica***

On behalf of myself, the Vice-Chancellor, the Principal, the Chair of our Campus Council and all of our academic colleagues, let me welcome you to these graduation exercises of the Mona campus of the University of the West Indies. I will address some comments both to the new graduates-our new alumni as well as to those in the audience who love them and those who love and are interested in the University as well.

But first, I ask you to join me in congratulating our Principal professor Gordon Shirley on the recent award of the Order of Jamaica. We are proud of him and what he has done for Jamaica and the University.

Every University in the world is now concerned with the various crises that confront them and their ability to weather them. Ours is no different. There are economic crises, the phenomenon of globalization which poses challenges or crises and the crisis of values which are all affecting the way we conduct our affairs. The Caribbean is at this moment struggling to give effect to the major decision to draw closer together in a single market and economy, examining what it means and what are the instruments available to cement the notion of community and reinforce the ethic of a West Indian or Caribbean nation in the original cultural sense. Every organization that has a regional remit must surely be examining the extent to which it is a symbol or an instrument of that regionalism to which our political leaders constantly subscribe.

Of course economic crises are not new. I recall very clearly Arthur Lewis in a graduation address pointing out the inevitability of financial cycles. Our symbolic and instrumental roles are even more important in the days of the lean kine. The symbolism of our West Indianness is not only in our name and our beautifully designed crest which depicts where we are situated and displays our famous Pelican. It is also seen in our governance arrangements which depend on the participation of a wide range of Caribbean stakeholders. Our geographical dispersion throughout the Caribbean, the identity of our degrees and even of our togas are symbols of a common Caribbean enterprise. I also

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know from experience that to many in the diaspora our University represents something Caribbean around which they rally-not in large enough numbers yet, but rally they do.

But in this moment of crisis more attention is being paid to the instrumental value we bring. Universities are crucibles of social cooperation and can be the loci for the formation of the networks and civic behavior that lead to social cohesion and the practice of democracy. It is not an unfair assumption that the early experiences in a single residential college or university contributed to some of these characteristics that have informed much of the drive for support of regionalism, but it is pointless hankering after those days which will not return. But we must also dispel the idea that our campuses are exclusively national as they all have a strong international flavor. There are X students from y different countries here at Mona.

But I believe that it is to our role in supporting knowledge –driven economic growth that most of our governments look. I do not think there is any longer doubt that tertiary level education is critical for countries economic health and that the economic returns to tertiary education are huge.

One author concluded recently that on the basis of new data by 5 year age groups it could be shown that educational attainment was the key driver of economic growth. It was also pointed out that for industrialized countries tertiary education mattered most. As the University seeks to be optimally effective, it is adapting to the new realities of tertiary education landscape which is favoring the growth of a borderless education market. There are virtual universities, franchise universities, corporate universities and the media companies are becoming more active in this market which is focusing on the need for life-long learning. The University has spread its Open campus to 40plus sites throughout the Caribbean and employing distance learning and blended learning to the fullest. You have seen here the expansion of the University to Montego Bay in an impressive new development. I can assure you that the regionality of the University and its role in strengthening the notion of a West Indian nation will soon find it expanding to embrace the West Indian diaspora. We believe that our concept of regionalism must include those of the West Indian nation who reside outside the Caribbean.

I mentioned our concern for life-long learning, for as the production and dissemination accelerates, the shelf-life of the knowledge you have when you graduate becomes ever shorter. It is for that reason that the University is offering more and more opportunities to a wider range of students and encouraging students to mix the worlds of work and study. Our evening classes are growing and the campuses have become more and more commuting campuses. This points up the urgent need we have here for providing better accommodation for these commuting students.

But in these times of crisis it is the capacity for resilience that has marked good universities through the ages that comes to the fore. Perhaps the most recent example was the reaction of the Principal and the Mona campus to the sharp reduction in its budget. Let me be clear. No one welcomes budgetary cuts, but we have to appreciate the financial situation of our governments and demonstrate that we will perform our instrumental role in the face of them, I was pleased to see Principal Shirley in good

democratic tradition calling a town hall meeting to share with the Campus the scenario with which they were confronted and outlining the positive measures that would be taken to deal with it. I note that in spite of the cuts, he has made it a point of principle that student offerings would not be reduced and also that the program of beautification of the campus would continue. I was especially pleased to note the development of the heritage program which is being developed to show our origins beyond 1948 and the extent to which you graduates are the inheritors of the hopes and aspirations of the humble Jamaicans here at Mona who could still dream of a better life for their children and their children's children.

Our contribution to the development of our region obviously relates to our production of human capital as reflected in you graduates and we have been good at it. The graduating class this year is 2687 counting first and higher degrees and over the course of the past 15 years 28, 137 persons have graduated with first degrees from this Campus in a range of disciplines as wide as you will find in other first class universities. For us to continue to be symbol and instrument, we need the active support of you graduates; you new alumni. More and more we will be calling on you to maintain your linkages with your alma mater as resources of varying kinds. You can be resources not only in the financial sense, but also in terms of advising young students and potential; students about the possibilities offered in your University. You will notice that there are increasing amount of material being produced; the alumni online is a major effort to encourage you to keep in touch and burnish your Pelican Pride. I place great store by this Pelican Pride and trust that the years pass you will come to appreciate even more the value of the bond that exist with the place from which you got your jump start into the world of work.

One final point to you new alumni and it is that you must not be confused by the inevitability of multiple loyalties. We are loyal to our immediate relatives, to our wider family, to our school, to our country etc. There is no inherent conflict in being a loyal Jamaican or Barbadian and having a commitment to a West Indian institution and honoring that commitment by contribution of one kind or another.

Finally, let me thank the members of the University Faculty who taught and mentored you here. I also wish to thank those of you who supported our new graduates emotionally and I dare say financially. I hope you are satisfied with them and that you will keep fond memories of this place which has trained them and hopefully instilled in them the need to continue learning. I hope that you will feel that you will always have a stake in this place-your University.