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Strengthening the Bond-the West Indian Bond
Cave Hill, Barbados*

Let me welcome you to another graduation ceremony of the Cave Hill Campus of the University of the West Indies. It is always a pleasure to see so many relatives and friends present to share this special moment in the academic lives of the young graduands. It is also reassuring to see a goodly number of persons from government, business and other sectors at these ceremonies. It gives us comfort to know that the circle of those who have stake in the continued success of this enterprise is a wide one as no university can prosper on the basis of stakeholder interest in the academe alone.

My warmest congratulations to the graduating class of 2010! You number almost 1,400 and about 10% of you are postgraduates. May this day and all that it signifies remain with you for many a year to come! I wish to congratulate and welcome our honorary graduands. They honor us by having accepted to be numbered among us, and I look forward to the luster they will bring to our University.

Even though many of you will be leaving us physically, it is still good for you and for the Barbadian and Caribbean public to know of some of the main achievements of this past academic year and they indeed bear public mention. Campus enrolment now stands at 8,500 with almost 1000 postgraduates. There has been impressive expansion of the academic offerings in every Faculty, but two particularly caught my attention as being of present relevance to our development. Within the Faculty of Social Sciences the Department of Management Studies introduced specializations in Entrepreneurship; International Business, Marketing and Tourism and Hospitality Management. The tourism and hospitality studies program incorporated a paid internship at Disney World, Orlando with three academic courses facilitated by Central Michigan University (CMU) through the Disney College and International Internship Program.

The Institute of Gender and Development Studies continued to expand its offerings with the introduction of new courses including Feminist Theology; Crimes by and against Women. I mention this latter particularly because of the global thrust being given by the Secretary General of the United Nations to the prevention of violence against women.

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The efforts to increase funding for postgraduate study were substantially enhanced by a special contribution from the Barbados Government which increased the full postgraduate scholarships from seven in 2008/2009 to 28 in 2009/2010. The Barbados National Disease Registries (BNR) a population- based disease registry collecting comprehensive data on the incidence of the three major causes of ill-health and death in Barbados: stroke, acute myocardial events, and cancer is now fully operational. This is a first in the Caribbean.

We are grateful for the many organizations and institutions which showed their confidence in the work here by supporting it financially, and I will mention only some of the grants:

US\$ 375,000 through a renewed Memorandum of Understanding with FirstCaribbean International Bank for several initiatives including scholarships, pilot grant programme to assist student entrepreneurs at Cave Hill who had graduated from the Student Entrepreneurial Empowerment Development Project to establish businesses; a pilot job placement scheme; continued support for research in banking and finance and support for the annual Sir Frank Worrell Memorial Lecture.

932,000 euros from the European Union to CERMES (Centre for Resource Management and Environmental Studies) and Exeter University for research on Reefs.

US\$ 129,00 from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland to CERMES for an Expert Consultation at Cave Hill on the operationalisation of the Caribbean Sea Commission.

US\$ 48,000 from Biovail Laboratories International (Barbados) SRL to the Faculty of Medical Sciences for three teacher grants and three annual student grants.

€344,128.00 for the Office of Research to undertake on behalf of the European Union the Small Developing Island Renewable Energy Knowledge and Technology Transfer Network (Direct) project.

The new Administration building comprising 29000 sq. ft. of space in four and half storeys has been completed and occupied by offices of Central Administration including the Offices of the Principal, Registrar, Bursar and their Registries. The building was officially opened on April 16, 2010 by the Minister of Education, The Honourable Ronald Jones.

The inaugural Cave Hill Campus Research Day was officially opened by the Minister of Education in January, 2010 and featured a massive display featuring over 260 posters. All Faculties and academic Departments were represented together with the efforts of several support units. Other activities included lectures, symposia, guided laboratory tours, cultural activities, film screenings and a health fair. A very successful colloquium on research needs in the Eastern Caribbean sub-region funded by the Office of Research and Innovation was held.

The Campus has created the Sir Arthur Lewis Scholarships sought to empower the disenfranchised indigenous people of the Caribbean to play their rightful role in society. The campus saluted the achievement of Ms. Pearl Williams, an inaugural scholarship recipient who

was recently admitted to the bar of the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court in the High Court of Justice in the Commonwealth of Dominica, She is the first Kalinago from the indigenous community of Dominica, to achieve this honour.

The WIBC High Performance Cricket Centre, which was officially opened by the Prime Minister of Barbados was established at Cave Hill as part of an agreement with the WICB to assist in improving West Indies cricket. The facility is being funded through a gift from Sagicor of BDS\$5.5 m over five years. This Centre will also serve to enhance the status of the University's Cricket Academy. This Center will be the place to produce a new cadre of West Indian cricketers with a West Indian philosophy and sense of purpose and we are excited that this will be the seed from which a renewed West Indian cricket pride will spring. The icing on the cricket cake is that Cave Hill won the BCA first division and is the ruling champion of Barbados cricket.

We should congratulate Sir Hilary on this achievement.

We are often asked why, given the size of our graduating classes do we not adopt the practice of some other institutions and graduate students en bloc. So far we have demurred, as I believe that the simple walk across a stage in full view of your peers and the public is symbolic in itself. It marks the passage from being a graduand to being a graduate, from being a student to being an alumnus and joining the thousands of other who have taken this walk. The formal graduation tradition is not new. These ceremonies stretch back over eight centuries if not further and are one of the almost universal rites of passage. They have become hallowed by tradition and we are proud to follow that tradition of marking the passage of young men and women from one stage to another. Every aspect of the ceremony has its significance-the gowns or togas, the diploma, scrolls and the academic processions. I hope you appreciate the significance of the rite.

Research in that fount of most knowledge-Google turned up a commentary on the essential functions of the rite of graduation. It is meant to:

- (1) Dramatize facing new responsibilities, opportunities and dangers.
- (2) Readjust the participant (and all in their social circle) to these changes.
- (3) Establish solidarity and sacredness of common values or rituals.

There is no doubt about the new responsibilities most of you will face as you go into the world of work, and even for those who will continue with post graduate studies, there will be different responsibilities. But it is the aspect of strengthening solidarity and common values that I wish to stress today. I have commented elsewhere on the difficulties we face in the Caribbean because of distance and dispersion. These often bring with them the difficulties of dualism for young people-the difficulty of adequate commitment to the nation and at the same time the acceptance of a bond to the region and regionalism. Much of the debate on regionalism elsewhere is in the context of regions of a nation and the extent to which these regional differences contribute to or stifle nationalism. I am citing the reverse. I refer to the several Caribbean nations and their relationship to the Caribbean region. It is the regional solidarity and values and the role of your University in maintaining them to which I wish to draw your attention.

I trust my colleagues in physics will not think me naïve if I propose that the analogy can be drawn between the Caribbean and isolated systems tending to the natural state of entropy or disorder. This is a simplification of the second law of thermodynamics. Energy is needed to maintain or restore that order. It has been my experience with networks that they all tend towards disorder and dispersion of the several parts unless there is expenditure of energy to hold them together. I have conceived of our University as one of the critical institutions needed to supply the energy to maintain the regional enterprise intact. The fact that the political system collapsed in the presence of the University would not deter me from proposing that had the University reached anything near the maturity that exists today with roots gone so deeply and branches spread so widely across the Caribbean, the possibilities of dissolution might have been less.

What is the nature of that energy that our University can supply to help to counter that natural tendency to entropy? The first and obvious one is its production of the human resources needed in the region. This may occur in several ways. The bonding between the graduates that comes from belonging to a West Indian institution such as our University can carry over into strengthening a bond between other institutions of the region. There are multiple examples of bonds created at universities working to mould and shape major institutions and even governments. But for this bond to be permanent throughout the life of the graduates, it has to be created and nurtured at the earliest possible stage.

So I was fascinated and immensely pleased by a paper presented to a recent meeting of the University Finance and General Purpose Committee from the Inter-Campus Student Guild Committee, entitled “Renewing the emphasis on our West Indies”. The students recounted with satisfaction many aspects of their lives in the University, but they commented thus “Was the mandate of the University aimed at providing us with simply a University experience? Or was it aimed at providing us with a West Indian experience, encompassing the critical elements of student development that prepares its populace for a globally competitive world?” They went on to say “The Inter Campus Guild Council believes that the true essence of the UWI-its history of developing regional strength, Caribbean oneness and a vibrant exchange of West Indian cultures, which should be at the pinnacle of our student mandate-has been dormant to our operations” They affirmed that although there are differences now, “the importance of Caribbean unity and bond still remain”. My final quote from their excellent paper says: “As the leaders of this University, we believe that an effort should be made to restore the West Indies back to the University of the West Indies”.

First, we must acknowledge that if the students are expressing this desire, not enough is being done. Another reaction is to be enormously pleased that at this stage they recognize that there is some merit to West Indianness; that there is value in maintaining an identity that is peculiarly our own. I reflected on what could be the origin of that urge. Those of my generation who attended the University came to it when the spirit of a West Indian nation was abroad and we felt that a University was a cradle of that spirit and guardian of the flame. Thus it is gratifying that almost sixty years later although the idea of nationhood in the political sense no longer has salience, there is still the spirit of West Indianness which is felt to be something precious.

One wonders if that spirit of the young has been fostered in part by hearing elders rhapsodize nostalgically about the “good old days”, but that is perhaps arrogance on the part of the elders. It is perhaps better to think that there is indeed some basic need for the West Indian young to come together and feel that there is some thing special about being West Indian. The prospects of nurturing the West Indianness and keeping the West Indies in UWI pose challenges. It is no longer possible to think in terms of all 40,000 of our students dwelling together in unity; there must be other solutions. I know that the Vice-Chancellor has established a working-group to look at the regionalism that is clearly necessary and how the University, in spite of the many current restrictions must address it as an imperative. I hope many of you will contribute your ideas on some practical steps to achieve it.

Let me congratulate you graduands again and wish you well. I hope your future actions in whatever sphere you choose to work will bring credit to yourselves, your families and your University. The best advertisement for any institution is its products and I am confident that will do the University proud. I urge that you maintain contact with us and be an active member of your local alumni chapter. We need a strong alumnus presence throughout the Caribbean-indeed throughout the world.

I also wish to congratulate your parents and relatives-those who are here today and those who will hear of this ceremony. Theirs has been no easy task, and I am sure that you who are today’s graduates will be even more grateful as the years pass and you find yourselves in their position. I say this because I trust that many of your children and their children will find an academic home in the University of the West Indies.

Good luck to you all!