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**Confronting crisis, grasping opportunity at Mona
Kingston, Jamaica***

Let me welcome you to another graduation ceremony of the Mona Campus of the University of the West Indies and first let me congratulate you the members of the 2010 graduating class and the honorary graduands who have accepted to be a part of our University.

It is good to see so many relatives and friends and also to see some of our alumni among you. It is also good to have the business and other sectors at these ceremonies, and I like to think that they come because they have some stake in this institution and wish to be part of the rituals and ceremonies which from time immemorial have been part of the academic tradition. I know that the University officials dedicate considerable effort to informing the public about the university and this campus, but I believe that it still useful at what is perhaps the most important ceremony in the academic calendar to speak to the public about what the University and this Campus are doing.

It is true that many of our rituals and symbols have not changed, but no one must believe that this means that there have not been fundamental and radical changes in the institution and particularly here at Mona. The period 2009-2011 will undoubtedly be remembered as one of the most if not the most challenging, as well as defining times in the 62-year history of the UWI, Mona Campus, as it has had to grapple with the consequences of repeated cuts in its annual subvention from government. The reduction brought about on the one hand by a decided shift in Government's funding support away from tertiary education towards early childhood, primary and secondary education and vocational training, and on the other hand by the ongoing economic challenges affecting the nation, has necessitated a complete rethink of how the Campus conducts its business.

To put things in perspective, the Campus has been asked to operate on a budget for the 2010/2011 academic year that is 28.5% less than what was approved for expenditure during the 2009/2010 academic year. Few enterprises would have been able to survive and function faced with such a challenge. It is a tribute to the Principal, Professor Gordon Shirley and the staff that instead of pulling in their horns, they have confronted the challenge boldly. But it is part of my responsibility to so engage the public that there is conviction of the instrumental value of our tertiary education and there needs to be concern that there is a level at which the core operations

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can be damaged by sustained reduction of funding. I am sure no one would wish budget reductions to be the norm.

Against this background, the Campus has accelerated the process of transforming its operations to eke out efficiencies where possible and move towards achieving greater self-sustainability. Guided by the University's 2007-2012 Strategic Plan, the Campus proceeded to streamline its operations, increase productivity and accountability among staff, expand its capacity and offerings, and increase its visibility and relevance locally and internationally, while improving service to its primary clients-the students who are our "raison d'être" and the linchpin of our business. A primary aim of the campus' transformation efforts is creating an environment that encourages life-long learning and facilitates positive student interaction and experience.

Thus, Mona continues its efforts to upgrade facilities and improve the levels of the student administrative and support services, for example by upgrading the Banner Student Administration System to provide students with complete information about course offerings, scheduling/timetabling and instructor information, and permitting course registration from as early as April of the previous academic year. There are more student-friendly spaces. This year saw an expansion of program offerings in a wide range of disciplines in order to satisfy student demand and respond to market needs and national developmental imperatives. I was particularly taken by the launch of the new *Confucius Institute* at Mona on June 19, 2010 which will facilitate the teaching/learning of the Chinese language, as well as research on the Chinese homeland, its cultures and people.

A first-rate faculty, dedicated to teaching and guiding students and equipped with the requisite tools and techniques is central to the development of a world-class academy. Mona, therefore, through the efforts of the Instructional Development Unit (IDU), increased its focus on developing its faculty's pedagogical skills. An important factor in ensuring continued growth and sustainability is the availability of young, talented faculty, equipped with the knowledge and experience to assume academic and other kinds of leadership roles in the institution whenever the need arises. The Campus has sought to ensure that it builds this pool of individuals by increasing developmental opportunities, placing greater emphasis on young faculty accessing available research fellowships and grants to jump start their research career, placing younger faculty in leadership roles, and duly recognizing and rewarding star performers. Approximately 67% of the all new Mona research fellowships and grants awarded during the 2009/2010 academic year went to faculty members within the 31-39 years age group.

The quality of graduate studies has been improved and several new programs introduced such as the long awaited Doctorate in Public Health. I am pleased to note the response of this campus to the devastating 7.0 magnitude earthquake that rocked Haiti. As part of a the University's coordinated response, the Mona Campus assembled and sent a team of medical personnel to Haiti to assist with the recovery efforts; trained relief workers and security forces personnel in Haitian Creole to enhance their effectiveness; partnered with state university of Haiti to host some 100 final year students and hosted/trained archivists to assist in the preservation of Haiti's archival legacy.

As I have argued at a previous ceremony, the university must brand itself appropriately if it is to compete in the new competitive tertiary education arena. The Campus now pursues a dedicated and structured marketing and communication strategy, using all available opportunities and media to showcase its offerings and to promote its attributes. It has embarked on a comprehensive restructuring of the Public Relations Office, transitioning it into the new Marketing & Communications Office, developing a new organizational structure and sensitizing staff to new marketing initiatives. The new Office will focus on building “**brand UWI, Mona**” by enhancing the Campus’ visibility; increasing media coverage, heightening interest in and building awareness of the Campus’ contribution to research and development by expanding the scope, revamping and repositioning of publications.

The current financial challenges confronting Mona, and the Government’s posture for the way ahead, make it imperative that the Campus find creative ways to fund its operations in the short-term, while developing viable long-term options:

- In the short-term the focus will primarily be on realizing potential savings to be achieved through improved efficiency, including a reduction of staff cost through the automation of administrative processes, rationalization of the remaining administrative functions, and optimized usage of faculty resources. We must also exploit available sources of external donor funding, especially in support of student scholarships and faculty research work. I wish to thank those donor organizations and institutions which have supported us.
- In the medium-term Mona will focus on increasing enrolment of full-fee-paying students, including those in law and medicine; enrolment of international students; and implementing plans for developing 1,000-room self-financing student accommodation.

This massive and somewhat painful transformation that is evolving at Mona is seen throughout the University and has been accompanied by focused efforts towards differentiation in several ways. There has been the obvious differentiation in an almost biological sense throughout the Caribbean with a University presence in all the Caribbean territories. I am pleased that Bermuda is now formally associated with the university, thus we are as far north as the Caribbean stretches, and I hope the day will come when I will see the stretch and reach also as far south as those lands washed by the Caribbean sea.

There has been tremendous growth in the University as a whole. The total student population is about 44,000 and enrollment here at Mona is 14,500. There has been growth in the programs offered at all levels. Our academic offerings can compare with those of any major University elsewhere. This must also be accompanied by a conscious effort at distinction. How should and can we distinguish ourselves in both senses of the word and there are two aspects of the difficulties inherent in differentiation and distinction in numbers and programs that I wish to mention.

The growth in the University and this Campus is a reflection of the thesis that it is the human resource that predicates a county’s capacity for genuine human development. I believe that the growth that is driven by the expressed needs of other sectors, especially business, is not

incompatible with the maintenance of some of the other important characteristics of a university- for example the emphasis on the humanities. One of the consequences of this growth in response to demand or need is to pose a major dilemma from which no institution like ours can escape.

The concept of fostering regionalism through selective offerings in one place has to be reconsidered. I know that this has been the source of much public comment. We cannot continue to believe that the only or perhaps the best way to preserve the regional character of the University is to hew to the selective campus offering. What we must do is to ensure that these kinds of decisions are taken with due deliberation and observing the due process that is the hall mark of good institutions. The St. Augustine campus will begin to teach Law, and sometimes we forget that it was at the very inception of that Campus 50 years ago that the then Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago perceived that our need for that discipline would outstrip the capacity of any one place. My conviction that it is possible to preserve the regional character of the University and respond to the demands for training that is not geographically determined was strengthened very recently by affirmations of the students themselves. At the recent graduation of the Open Campus I heard a most passionate and articulate affirmation of the student resolve not to let the dictates of geography over which we have no control impede the growth and development of the University of the West Indies as an instrument of regionalism.

The fostering of regionalism through a fully residential university is no longer possible, but it is important for the public to know that even although three of the campuses are occupied predominantly by students from that country there are significant numbers of other Caribbean as well as non-Caribbean students. Here at Mona about 10 percent of the student body is non-Jamaican and there are students from every CARICOM country. One of the reasons for the expansion of our residential facilities here will be to accommodate more of the non-Jamaican students and foster even more inter-Caribbean student contact. I continue to hear comment about the virtues of the fully residential institution and the value of Caribbean students intermingling on Campus. This is all true, but I say to those critics, let us get pass the nostalgia and deal with the contemporary reality. Those days will never return. If the goal is to foster a Caribbean spirit, then let us bend our minds to finding other ways to do it. I am pleased that the Vice-Chancellor has established a Task Force headed by Professor Meeks to examine what can and must be done to enhance the University's capacity to foster regionalism even more.

The University must also distinguish itself in terms of its classical responsibilities of its teaching, its research and its service. The fruits of much of this are in our graduates who on a daily basis advertise for us. Our local efforts at service sometimes get forgotten, and I was pleased to note some aspects of community involvement here at the Mona Campus which has identified improvement of the circumstances of less fortunate communities, both within its immediate environs such as August Town and elsewhere, as central to the fulfillment of its mission. Not only does Mona see this as the right thing to do, it also recognizes that to a large extent, its own growth, security, and sustainability depend on it, given that an increasingly significant proportion of our students come from some of these communities.

It was for me a source of pain and pride that the passing of our beloved Rex Nettleford was an occasion to point out the contribution to Jamaica and the Caribbean he had made through unselfish service. His was a light that shone and still shines before men and women not that they

should see his own worth and work but that they should see themselves as being worthy occupants of places that are legitimately their own. Rex is unique, is matchless, but there are still legions of our products shining lesser lights throughout the Caribbean.

But there is an aspect of academic distinction that rarely gets mentioned in public. Every good institution must be concerned about distinguishing itself through the quality of its product. Much of the thinking and practice in this area has its roots in industrial engineering and the need for consistency of product quality. In the past 14 years we have seen tremendous growth of our programs for quality assurance which are of such importance that they are in a special Unit under the direct purview of a ProVice-Chancellor. This Unit reviews teaching at both graduate and undergraduate levels with the objective improving the quality of the students' learning experience and to give assurance to the public which support us that our products are of quality in the sense that they are fit for the purpose for which they are intended. There is a five year cycle for the review of programs which includes examination of the quality of instruction as well as the appropriateness of the curriculum. You graduates are the product of a process whose quality has been assured.

Your class numbers 2363 and there is a small but welcome increase in the percentage of males which now stands at 23.5% and 9.3% of you have gained first class honors. 35.6% of you are from the social sciences, and I was intrigued to note that the next highest number was in the medical sciences at 27%. We have the first cohort of graduates from post RN bachelor's degree program in nursing. You are joining a distinguished and large group as over the past 15 years this Campus has graduated 28,500 persons with first degrees with about three quarters of you between the ages of 20 and 29. It is good to note however that over the years about 2% of the graduates are over the age of 50.

I can only wish you well. Your characters are already formed; I would only ask that one of the habits you seek to cultivate is that of reaching back to your alma mater. We need you! Those behind you need you! I ask that you take part in alumni affairs as there is no excuse for not knowing what is happening here and how you can be of help.

To your parents and loved ones, I say thanks as well for letting us have him or her for perhaps the most important phase of his or her life. I trust you are satisfied and that you too remember that you have a stake in this place.

Good luck to you all.