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November 4-5, 2005

Listen to the Chimes of the Bell
(Mona-Kingston, Jamaica)*

The night of Saturday, October 1, 2005 was one of the most enthralling and captivating that I have spent in many a year. That was the night the bell of the old Gibraltar Camp was handed over to Prime Minister Patterson of Jamaica by Prime Minister Manning of Trinidad and Tobago in the presence of Prime Minister Owen Arthur of Barbados in a ceremony whose significance not even the persistent October rains could mar. This bell which is a part of the lore of this Campus is now firmly encased in steel and mounted on a pedestal in a beautiful small park on the site of the old nunnery which is dedicated to those of the graduates of the University of the West Indies who have been, are, or will become Prime Ministers or Heads of their governments. I wish to congratulate Pro Vice-Chancellor Hall for preserving in such an elegant and fitting manner an icon that symbolizes so much of the early spirit and character of the University.

It was a night for the ages, as we were regaled with the true history of the bell as well as a doctored version that reflected the prejudices of the Chancellor. Pro-Vice Chancellor Hall gave a fascinating account of the work done to establish the park as a permanent resting place for the storied bell and emphasized the achievements of our graduates who, apart from the seven of prime ministerial rank included those who were occupying most of the important posts in the Caribbean. Vice-Chancellor Harris eloquently expressed his hopes that the bell should toll many times over for those achievements in the Caribbean in which this University would play a part. But the highlight of the evening was the reminiscences of the three Prime Ministers, who in light vein described their lives and times on campus, much of it related to the various vicissitudes of the famous bell.

As I sat there, I was filled with an enormous pride for this institution, what it had done and what it had become. It is clear that we have fulfilled many of the hopes of our founders in the creation of the public goods that the Caribbean needs. I also reflected on the concept I first heard from Sir Arthur Lewis--that of the university being responsible to create the cadres of functionaries who are the salvation of any good society. His thoughts as he was installed as Chancellor of the University of Guyana thirty-eight years ago have salience for us all, and more particularly those who are graduating this evening. He said:

“The supremely important task of receiving this knowledge, adding to it, and handing it down to the next generation has always devolved on a very small body

* Graduation Address, Mona-Kingston, Jamaica, 4 and 5 November 2005

of people who specialized in using their brains. They were known as clerks. These clerks have always been an intermediate class, in the social sense. The clerks have been poor, and have wielded influence only indirectly because of the power of their ideas, or because their services were needed in occupations where brains were indispensable.”

And he went on:

“Here we come to the fundamental purpose of education: to produce young men and women who will join the small band of clerks stretching backwards through history and forward through generations yet unborn: who will receive our truths, embellish them, defend them against numerous and powerful enemies. If our graduates do not help to keep civilization together, to reduce the sum of human misery and to advance the cause of human brotherhood, then our university will have labored in vain.”

I thought of those sons of the Pelican honored in the park as very worthy clerks indeed

Last year I started what I hope will become a tradition-inviting the graduates-the clerks of our early years to participate in our ceremonies. I do this not only to reengage them with us, but also to have the new graduates recognize them and thank them for what they did to make this place what it has become. Some of them may well have been here on that memorable night forty years ago when the Chancellor delivered to the graduates the first degrees of the University of the West Indies. On that occasion, the Pro Chancellor, Dr. Eric Williams lauded the development of the University into an independent institution free to chart its own destiny.

We have in large measure been faithful to most of Sir Arthur’s concepts in terms of whom we have produced and what we have become. There are thousands of other clerks in the Caribbean who labor mightily to keep our civilization together and reduce the sum of our misery. This misery is not only in economic terms, but also in terms of health, education and in the maintenance of the political freedoms that are critical for the flowering of human development. I have said elsewhere that the fact that so many of our leaders in the Caribbean are graduates of this University is one of the best auguries for the kind of Caribbean unity and integration in which I believe, and to which I subscribe. I trust that you clerks who go out from here this evening will perform as well or better.

The majority of the ancient clerks were poor and it is the same for the majority of those who graduate from this University. Research shows that more and more graduates from this campus are coming from the poorer stratum of society, and I regard this as a very positive datum in that the institution is fulfilling its role in providing the upward social mobility that is critical for our societies. In a real sense we have moved from being the university of the elite to become the university of the many and long may this continue.

If we are to continue to produce the clerks that the Caribbean needs, we will have to face two problems which are also being faced by every university in the developing world. How do we maintain excellence and at the same time increase access?

I have found that there is remarkable commonality in the requisites for personal and institutional excellence. There is self discipline, the capacity to listen and hear, and avoid the sinister hubris. Perhaps the most difficult is the capacity for honest self criticism, the acknowledgement that you can and will be wrong often and the understanding that the seal of excellence is never given by ones self.

The answer to the second is clearly that we cannot reduce our intake but we cannot continue to grow indefinitely at our current pace. But the needs for higher education demand that we do everything in our power to assist governments in the development of their tertiary sector. The University of the West Indies welcomes the development of other tertiary educational institutions in the Region, as that is the only way the Caribbean can reach the 15% of the eligible cohort that should enter higher education, and we will do everything in our power to facilitate that expansion. It is inevitable that there should be some measure of rivalry and competition, but I regard that as healthy.

But both questions hinge considerably on the financing of the University. The best universities of the world are those that have multiple sources of funding. The most prominent sources are state support, student fees, endowment funds from philanthropists and alumni and funds generated as a consequence of the research done or other entrepreneurial activities. There was a time when the major financial institutions discouraged governments from spending money on higher education, arguing that the returns for education at the primary and secondary level were considerably higher. Happily those days are behind us and there is universal acceptance of the economic value of the investment in higher education and states should indeed invest, but the problem often is in the quantum and nature of the state involvement and the other sources of that investment.

The governments of the Region have been generous in their support of our University to date, and were originally the dominant contributor. But that support has been declining steadily and will be, if it is not already in some places, be in the minority. This implies that there will have to be a larger contribution from student fees, from endowments and other sources. It must be one of our canons that the level of student fees should not be such as to inhibit the deserving and needy from attending. I believe and would urge that the solution lies in the availability of student loans. The best universities in the world are finding that this is the solution to ensuring access, and I would hope that we could encourage the governments to consider increasing by some orders of magnitude the funding available for student loans and offer better terms.

A Revolving Student Loan Fund was introduced at the beginning of the 2004/2005 academic year on the basis of a recommendation from the Guild of Students. It is administered through the Credit Union and offers a lower interest rate than the

Student Loan Bureau. The Administration continues to encourage students with financial difficulties to make use of this facility.

Alumni provide considerable funding for many universities, but we have not so far been able to reach the level of alumni support that I believe is necessary and possible. A tremendous amount has been done to date by Vice-Chancellor Rex Nettleford and Pro-Vice Chancellor Marlene Hamilton and there has to be a continuous major effort to build on that base. It has been suggested that the alumni of the first few decades when there was a single residential university retain greater affection for the University. I believe that the current predominantly non-residential character of the institution contributes to there being less of the spirit that the three Prime Ministers showed at the opening of the park. But we cannot dwell on that image of a single idyllic vale and residences in which lifelong friendships were established and cemented. All universities like ours have had to find ways to keep their alumni engaged and participating, and I am confident that we are on the right track for doing so.

We have advanced in terms of the activities in our various alumni chapters, and I am pleased to see the president of the Washington chapter here. But there are other aspects I would stress. The creation of alumnus loyalty depends considerably on the experience the student has from the first day and we have to ensure that our concept and strategic objective of student centeredness is a reality in practice. In addition, we need as a matter of urgency to have the means of communicating with our alumni and I hope this graduating class has left email addresses with us. Finally, there are the symbols of belonging to an institution, and I am pleased at the efforts we are making to create and make these symbols widely available.

The University has expanded tremendously in all areas since those early days about which our Prime Ministers rhapsodized. For example, thirty new academic programs were introduced during the year with 11 of these being self financing. The online Master of Education in Leadership in Early Childhood Development was launched and represents an example of blended learning in which online teaching is mixed with face to face instruction.

There was an 8.6% growth in student enrollment in the academic year 2004-05, from 13,388 in 2003-2004 to 14,532, surpassing the 2.4% targeted growth. Eighty percent of these were on-campus students and it is pleasing to note that fully one-quarter of these were registered for Higher Degrees. Growth was evident in all Faculties and the significant growth in the Faculty of Medical Sciences is largely due to the introduction of a full fee-paying category of medical students during the year as a means of diversifying the Campus' funding sources.

It is one of our challenges that only 1027 of the students enrolled for 2004-2005 were from non-Jamaican Caribbean countries, although this represents a slight increase over the previous year. I have said before that we need to be more aggressive in our marketing efforts to make our campuses alternative choices for Caribbean students both within the Caribbean and in the diaspora.

We will be graduating 2,872 students this year, 1939 with bachelor's degrees, 758 with Higher Degrees and 175 with Diplomas and Certificates. I wish to congratulate the 188 students who have been awarded First Class Honours. It is gratifying to see that of the 7 students who have completed the Degree of Bachelor of Science in Physical Therapy, 5 have obtained First Class Honors. This is a remarkable achievement. I am pleased to note that a candidate has been awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in mathematical education and this is a first for the Mona Campus. I wish to congratulate the faculty for these impressive results.

We are proud of our role in supplying the human resources for the Region, so it is a pleasure to point out that over the past 11 years there have been about 20,000 graduates with bachelor's degrees from this Campus alone.

The percentage of female students continues to increase and now 77.7 % of the student body is female: along with this we must note that for each of the past five years two-thirds of the higher degrees have been awarded to females. It is clear that this steady trend of feminization of higher education here cannot be good for our society and the University must engage with the other education authorities to examine the genesis of this phenomenon and look for answers. The solution cannot rest with the University alone as its output is a reflection of the input that comes from the other levels of the education sector.

This year has been particularly challenging for the Mona Campus. A 16½% cut in the budget necessitated a crisis management approach to implementation of the Campus' programmed activities in academic year 2004-05. This particular constraint had the overall effect of limiting the capacity to meet a number of the projected strategic objectives. It also had a somewhat demoralizing effect on staff which was simultaneously asked to do more with less. The difficulties occasioned by the reduced budget were further aggravated by the impact of Hurricanes Ivan and Emily as well as the student demonstration and protests over the Campus' efforts to collect outstanding tuition fees. The Principal commissioned a Budget Adjustment Committee that reviewed each operational unit's budget with a view to reducing these and to making recommendations for income generating projects and initiatives to bolster budgets where required. Every effort was made to ensure that the Campus' academic programming was not adversely affected as the individual budgets were adjusted. Consequent on the budget adjustment process, new mechanisms for monitoring the Campus' budget were required. These included the establishment of a Budget Monitoring Committee and a Vacancies Monitoring Committee, led by the Deputy Principal, which kept vigilant watch on operations throughout the year.

At the end of the fiscal year, that is, by July 31st 2005, the Campus had succeeded in holding to the budget, with only slight infringements, but not without some adverse consequences to its operations. Capital projects such as the expansion of administrative and classroom facilities to accommodate an increasingly expanding student intake,

critical repairs to existing buildings, and procurement of equipment and supplies had to be shelved. Staffing, particularly in the administrative areas, also had to be restricted.

Last year I referred to the efforts at strategic positioning being undertaken by the Campus. The Mona Academic Board approved in January 2005 the final recommendation of a Strategic Challenges Task Force (SCTF) it had formed in May 2003 to consider the strategic challenges confronting the Campus and propose a set of recommendations to respond to these challenges. This recommendation was to create a Strategic Transformation Team (STT) on the Campus. Notably, the Task Force had observed that one of the three major challenges facing the Mona Campus was its precarious funding position.

The Transformation Team engaged a wide range of internal and external stakeholders, prepared policy papers on the implementation of key recommendations, engaged with the leadership of the Campus and reviewed implementation action plans in its effort to catalyse the implementation of the recommendations of the Task Force.

The Team also sought to stimulate new income-generating and performance-enhancing centres in the areas of Caribbean mental health and substance abuse, leadership and governance and slavery research, and promoted research and teaching programmes in areas in which the Caribbean has a distinctive advantage or in which there is a clear need for policy impact, such as occupational health and safety, renewable energy and agricultural diversification. In addition, it worked with other groups to preserve, and take academic and commercial advantage of the multilayered and unique history of the Mona Campus. I note its commissioning of UWI's first workplace satisfaction and gender surveys. Of the seventy recommendations of the Task Force, over one-half had either been implemented or were in the process of implementation by September 2005.

In response to the long recognized need to develop multidisciplinary training and research in disaster management and risk mitigation, the University of the West Indies on Friday, July 8, 2005, launched the Centre for Disaster Management and Risk Reduction which will provide the requisite training and technical expertise to complement the work of the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency (CDERA). The Centre will provide an institutional mechanism for harnessing this capacity at the UWI and using it to develop and implement training, research, advisory and outreach services to enhance disaster management and mitigation in the Caribbean Region.

This is in keeping with one of the first actions undertaken by the Vice Chancellor, Professor E. Nigel Harris when he assumed office on October 1, 2004 – two weeks after the passage through the Caribbean of Hurricane Ivan. He assembled a UWI Hurricane Relief Task Force and all staff throughout the University was canvassed to determine their area of expertise in disaster management and mitigation and their willingness to participate in the work of the Task Force. The UWI was thus able to respond rapidly and effectively, in lending technical assistance to the worst affected island, Grenada.

It is always a pleasure at these ceremonies to acknowledge our private benefactors whose donations this year totaled approximately J\$158 million. Notable among the donations was twenty million dollars from the Environmental Foundation of Jamaica and J\$ 9.5 million from the UWI Development and Endowment Fund.

A group of private sector individuals committed to funding a Distinguished Fellowship in the School for Graduate Studies and Research in the sum of J\$30million over 5 years. The Most Hon. Edward Seaga was appointed Honorary Distinguished Fellow.

The Digicel Foundation established a Chair in Telecommunications Policy and Management in the Mona School of Business with a grant of approximately one million US dollars over seven years. This is the largest donation that the Campus has had for a sponsored chair. The new Chair will be hosted by and will provide training and research opportunities at the Masters and PhD levels. There are now eight chairs at the Mona Campus that have been established solely through private sector funding, each of which is valued in excess of J\$25million.

The Finance and General Purposes Committee, (F&GPC) Mona approved the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the University of the West Indies, Mona Campus and the Lions Club of Kingston, Mona for constructing and equipping a Resource Centre for specially challenged students. The Lions Club will provide funding for a two storey building for use as a multipurpose resource centre for students with disabilities who require special services and facilities.

The University in collaboration with Guardian Life hosted the first Premium Teaching Award at the Mona Campus on October 7, 2004. The award recognizes the outstanding teaching accomplishments of the university's academic staff, particularly in developing structures and processes that help to create an environment in which teaching excellence is valued and fostered. Dr. Willard Pinnock Senior Lecturer in Department of Chemistry was the first recipient of the award. The second aspect of this collaborative venture took place on October 6, 2005 when the first UWI/Guardian Life Premium Lecture was held on the theme "Exploring the Shoreline of Wonder: Self-directed learning on line". The Premium Teaching Award alternates yearly with the Premium Teaching Lecture.

In giving effect to the strategic objective of being student-centred, and consistent with the recommendations of the Strategic Challenges Task Force, the Campus undertook a number of initiatives including a one-week training seminar for student leaders. This was a pilot activity which, if deemed successful, would inform the development of an Institute for Student Leaders that would seek to recruit potential Caribbean leaders and nurture their development.

The Program provided an opportunity for Caribbean tertiary and higher education student leaders to cultivate an academic approach to leadership through exposure to

contemporary leadership theories; develop valuable skills in effective communication, conducting meetings, team building activities, conflict resolution and personal development. The seminar also broadened their cultural and civic awareness and enhanced their individual leadership potential through residence life activities, opportunities for cultural expressions and exposure to selected aspects of Caribbean culture.

Applicants had to be current elected or nominated student leaders and had to be recommended by their institutions. In addition, they had to be either sponsored by their institutions or to be able to demonstrate the ability to meet the costs of participation in the Institute.

In accord with the focus on student-centeredness, the campus provided J\$ 51.3 million to needy and deserving students in scholarships, bursaries, grants and loans.

I have been particularly enthusiastic about the Caribbean Internship Project through which twenty-six students from the three campuses of the University of the West Indies traveled throughout the Region during the summer of 2005. This is a partnership established between the Centre for Population, Community and Social Change, an outreach thrust of the Department of Sociology, Psychology and Social Work at Mona and the Caribbean Support Initiative. The participating countries included Dominica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Grenada, Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica. The students represented the disciplines of social work, education, sociology and research, psychology, law and media.

This year has seen a number of improvements in the administrative practices such as implementation of the Student Accounts Receivable module of the new Banner Student Administration System which has brought a number of efficiencies to student billings.

Let me now congratulate you new graduates and I hope you have taken to heart my injunction to think of yourselves as continuing that line of clerks who will be the future of our Caribbean. I hope you retain your affection for this place –not only for its physical beauty, but also for the knowledge it has given you. You are the alumni on whom I am counting to keep hearing the chimes of the bell and remember the role you have to play in maintaining the heritage which it connotes.

And finally, let me thank you the parents and loved ones who have come to see one of your own get the seal of having jumped a significant hurdle. I thank you for having allowed us to participate and help in her or his development and I trust you are satisfied with the result. I hope that you remember us with some fondness as your University as well.

And now let us rejoice!