

**CHANCELLOR'S MEDAL AWARD CEREMONY
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ST. AUGUSTINE CAMPUS
TRINIDAD & TOBAGO**

**ACCEPTANCE SPEECH
CHANCELLOR'S MEDAL
BY PROF. R NETTLEFORD**

“There is a force of exultation, a celebration of luck, when a writer [any intellectual, any artist, any dedicated citizen] finds himself/herself [as] witness to the early morning of [a] culture that is defining itself, branch by branch, leaf by leaf in the self-defining dawn, which is why at ends of the sea, it is good to make a ritual of the sunrise. The noun of the Antilles ripples like brightening water, and the sound of leaves, palm fronds and birds, is the sound of a fresh dialect, the native tongue”.

Thus spake the iconic Derek Walcott, a favourite alumnus of this University of the West Indies, in his Speech accepting the Nobel Prize for Literature.

It is such exultation, such celebration of luck, such baptism in the ritual of the sunrise bringing light in the West of which Derek Walcott, and lesser beings like myself, are the grateful lucky beneficiaries – thanks to the University of the West Indies.

In its sixty years of existence there are a couple or so generations of us who can look back, praise the Lord and pass the ammunition of intellect and imagination in creative, conscious transfer of knowledge and know-how to a new generation and, through that generation, hopefully to one yet unborn.

It is for this reason that I have had cause to marvel at a seemingly concerted effort in one part of this region to less-count the

achievements and continuing significance of what I have always regarded as the Commonwealth Caribbean's finest gift to itself as a transforming idea of light, liberty and learning. For in providing for six or so million of our region's tenants the capacity to exercise their intellect and creative imagination, it has helped a great many of us to know that self-empowerment comes with the capability to make definitions about self on one's own terms and to be able to proceed to **action** on the basis of such definitions.

The sixty-year collective investment in our human resources has provided dividends not always as bountiful as one would wish but which have remarkably been at hand to meet many of the challenges which building a nation and shaping a society demand. We have no reason to be self-satisfied however, and I take this opportunity to appeal to my university colleagues to double their efforts, work harder than many of us admittedly now tend to do, to bring to our students (the next generation) the caring and compassion which a true centre of learning must afford its wards, and foster the sense and sensibility that will have the region fully prepared to engage the globalised challenges no one of us can handle on one's own. Paradox of paradoxes: while countries like Cuba and the Dominican Republic are anxious to join us, a number of us are aching to disengage.

The current global economic crisis may indeed drive us to despair and short-cut options. But what our regional UWI as an institution of growth and instrument of development has taught ones like myself (thanks to some excellent dedicated teachers) are the values of critical thinking and a dynamic creativity serving the natural, environmental and medical sciences, the humanities, education and social sciences. It offered, as well, a vision and a resolve to action through community collaboration and an appreciation of the experience of ages which was designed not to entrap us in self-

indulgent circular debate but to serve as source of energy for present and future action.

For the real resources of our regional university lie in the people who teach, conduct research and reach out to the wider society which it was set up to serve. The resources include, as well, all those who administer and who dare to apply the audacity of hope in consonance with the region's founding fathers in their drive to self-government and an independence that would explode the froudacious myth that the likes of us are neither fit to rule nor fit to govern.

The regional UWI has facilitated, fostered and promoted all this through its work in all established campus territories and, from hereon, in the newly conceived Open Campus ancestrally rooted in the outreach work of old Extra Mural and the later School of Continuing Studies in all other contributing countries. They have all made possible the comingling and conjoint operations of folks drawn from all our contributing territories which have shared a common history of exploited labour and colonial subjugation but, above all, that wonderful capacity and will to survive. A great many of us also came to realize that life is long distance running, not sprinting; that sustained professional application is the surest guarantee of excellence and not instant gratification minstrelsy.

Like others of my generation, I have welcomed the many changes throughout the region since UWI's founding. There is no doubt in my mind that the UWI presence over the past six decades has provided for the region tremendous intellectual depth, productive skills of talent and sophistication, with our rich North Atlantic neighbours being decided beneficiaries of that output. But we are also conscious of the fact that progress does not guarantee a linear trajectory of positive products; and that remaining as priorities on our agenda of concerns are the increase in gun crimes and related

drug trafficking, the deepening immiseration of the poor and disadvantaged among us, the coarsening of sensibility up and down the social ladder and other such fall-outs from the obscenity of a history of dehumanization and the failure of too many post-colonial successors to help emancipate ourselves from such transgressions.

But it is the education which the likes of us received at the University of the West Indies which has driven so many of us to innovative initiatives and to serious investigation of the complex nature of our cultural diversity and the dynamic cross-roads civilization it engenders. Added to this is the inescapable responsibility to engage all this in pursuit of equity, governance based on the rule of law, of mutual respect and understanding, among citizens, of a sense of justice and a commitment to have education (and not just training) retain its central place in the investment we must make in ourselves – in our human resources which remain our greatest asset. It is **people** who decide on trade, aid, healthcare, social development and foreign relations, not summits.

For a university is not a trade school. The preparation to make a living is paramount. But no less so is the preparation for life.

Study and experience have taught us that development begins with people, with a release of the creative potential in an individual or society; that science and the arts are merely aspects of that creativity demonstrated in the exercise of the intellect and the imagination; that the harmonization of technological thought and spiritual feeling is a good in itself; that the vitality of a nation's system of education and educational institutions, as well as the effectiveness of our development policies and programmes are best judged by the extent to which they enable an individual or a society to realise their potential, and (thanks to the special character of the UWI), that the shifting paradigms, the textured sense and

sensibility of 21stC youth bombarded with myriad images of self and society, via the media or through personal contact with persons of different backgrounds, races and cultural origin are all challenges to humankind's creative diversity – a diversity which must be managed with sensitivity and daring on all of Planet Earth.

The Caribbean remains a fine example of such acknowledgement and recognition of the e-pluribus-unum concept in the shaping of civil society. It is indeed one world to share and not to arbitrarily divide up as Popes and lay conquerors did in the past to satisfy greed and quench the thirst for conquest. It is to the microcosmic UWI so many of us owe such understanding of reality.

And our Caribbean can lead the way in such understanding – thanks to the heterogeneous character of our polities and the leadership potential this offers the Hemisphere and beyond, with a moral authority based on humane concerns rather than on military hardware and nuclear fire power.

So those of us who have benefited from the UWI which has taught us the value of cultural diversity and of the principle of heterogeneity as a social and political organizing principle, should do all in our power to retain for the region all the instruments that will facilitate our coping with this contradictory, chaotic but exciting 21st century – from cricket and Caricom, through calypso and carnival and all forms of Caribbean popular artistic expressions, to CSME and CCJ, CDB and the UWI.

Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, friends and Colleagues, how could I not graciously accept this prestigious honour with the deepest appreciation, humility and gratitude which I owe this flagship Caribbean institution of growth and instrument of development? This is, indeed, a force of exultation, a celebration of luck!

My thanks.
