

Embrace the global culture

By ROBERT BERMUDEZ



The Chancellor of The University of the West Indies, Mr Robert Bermudez, gives his graduation message at the St Augustine Campus.

Chancellor of The University of the West Indies, Mr Robert Bermudez, spoke at each of the six graduation ceremonies held at The UWI, St Augustine Campus from Thursday, October 25 to Saturday, October 27, 2018. This is his message to graduates.

Good morning, Class of 2018. Welcome to your graduation. What does it feel like to get here at last, all the stress and exams behind you? Today is the time to have fun, to enjoy yourself with your family and friends and bask in your glory! I know from personal experience that as a parent, it is one of the happiest days of your life! Now it's time for you to start taking care of us.

I know that you want to get started, so I'll keep my remarks brief.

I want to deal with three issues:

- 1) How lucky you are to be graduating at this time.
- 2) The need to become environmentally conscious.
- 3) The importance of recognizing opportunity.

You are graduating at a time of much hope and excitement. Technology is rapidly changing our world; what is impossible today will be easy tomorrow. In spite of whatever fears you may have of the immediate future or the changes that lie ahead, you are entering a wonderful period of your life and at a time when the world provides so much opportunity.

We at The University of the West Indies are celebrating our 70th Anniversary. Having started in 1948 with 33 medical students, a set of donated medical textbooks and some barracks buildings at Mona, we have grown to nearly 50,000 undergraduate and graduate students. Today your University is recognized amongst the best in the world. This should give you the confidence that the education that you have received is as good as any and that you are properly prepared for the tasks that lie ahead. You are capable of anything that you put your minds to and only limited by your ambition and the size of your dreams. This age of technology has opened doors to you that did not exist in the past. Technology flattens the playing field. It is egalitarian in its nature; anyone who can access it can use it.

It calls for an adjustment to our thinking. No longer can we limit ourselves to our island homes. We need to adjust our minds to the thought that we are part of a much larger community of over six billion people, many of whom are now already connected to us, and

that we must embrace becoming global citizens. This creates an immense opportunity to reach out to fulfill our ambitions. We are no longer tied to our physical location, but rather are able to live in a global space.

The challenge is to adjust to a global culture, one where our common values allow us to work together. At the same time, we need to be sensitive to our differences to be able to maximize on our similarities. Those of us who can overcome this hurdle are destined to succeed.

The Climate Change Crisis is our crisis. Many of us have seen first-hand this week its devastating effects on our communities. Many of our students – some of you – and their families, as well as faculty and staff were adversely affected, some of them having lost all of their possessions. We looked on in horror at our fellow citizens sitting on rooftops waiting for relief and others being rescued from their homes by boat. We also saw an outpouring of generosity and neighborliness that is a hallmark of our country.

Hurricanes are becoming more severe and the rainfall more intense. No amount of box drains or water courses could have dealt with that volume of rainfall. There is no guarantee that what we witnessed was a freak incident and that it won't happen again. Is this our future? We must take climate change as a personal challenge, as it will affect each of us eventually.

It's easy to say that one person can make little difference, but this is not true. If we become engaged, we will collectively make an immense difference. We need as a nation to support and encourage renewable energy projects. Trinidad & Tobago, as a consequence of its petrochemical industries, is on a per capita basis, a leading emitter of greenhouse gasses. To compensate for this, we need to do everything possible to reduce our emissions from other sources, such as electricity generation and automobiles. We need to find innovative ways to recycle and reduce our plastic waste which presently pollutes our watercourses and eventually ends up in the sea. Between oil spills and plastic waste, we are destroying our marine environment and the food source that it supports. We must preserve our environment as it is this environment that supports human life and allows us the privilege

of living on this beautiful island. We cannot say how much we love T&T and at the same time destroy the environment.

I have often heard young people say that there is not enough opportunity available for them in Trinidad & Tobago. I could not disagree more. Trinidad & Tobago and its CARICOM neighbours are lands of opportunity. My experience has been that people define in advance what opportunity is going to suit them and close off their minds to other options that may present themselves.

Do not allow yourselves to be boxed into the field you studied for your degree. Let that be your starting point. Maintain a high degree of curiosity in everything and everyone. Opportunity often stares us in the face and we fail to recognize it. Sometimes it is packaged differently to what we expect. Often it seems to present itself at an inconvenient time. Beware of passing up any opportunity, as there is no guarantee that it will come to us again. Grab it and hold on with all your strength.

In summary, you are the luckiest of generations. Your future is lit brightly by rapidly developing technology. You will have to solve the greatest challenge of our time: climate change. Opportunity will present itself to each of you in many forms. Keep an open mind, do not miss these opportunities. Go out and mold Trinidad & Tobago into the country of your dreams; allow nothing to stand in your way. You have the education and youth. Dream large! You can do it!