



Professor Eon Nigel Harris  
Chancellor of the University of Guyana

## **Installation of the Ninth Chancellor of the University of Guyana**

### **The Chancellor's Address**

His Excellency, President David Granger; The Honourable Prime Minister Moses Nagamootoo; The Honourable Minister of Education, Dr Rupert Roopnaraine; Other Members of Parliament; Members of the Diplomatic Corp; Members of the Private Sector; Members of the UG Council; Members of the UG Senior Administrative Group and other UG Staff; Representatives from local, regional and international institutions and organisations; Special invitees; Students; other well-wishers.

I wish to thank all of you who have taken the trouble of coming out this evening to share in this occasion, particularly those who may have come from abroad. I wish to express my gratitude, too, to all who have sent messages of congratulations and support. My considerable thanks

too, to all those who were involved in the preparations for tonight's ceremony, including Dr Nigel Gravesande, Dr Barbara Reynolds (Acting Vice Chancellor), Ms Karen Wishart and other members of the academic and non-academic staff. I must recognise the assistance of Mrs Joy Pilgrim, who practically invented these occasions at my last dwelling place, the University of the West Indies. Mrs Pilgrim took the time out during this trip to her native Guyana to work with counterparts at UG during the last week, to make things just right. It is a privilege to have been elected by the University of Guyana Council as its Ninth Chancellor. In truth, after 11 very satisfying years as Vice Chancellor of the University of the West Indies, I was looking forward to a quiet retirement of good books and music on the veranda of our house in St Lucia. However, when a call came from a friend of many years, Minister of Education, Dr Rupert Roopnaraine, asking me to consider serving as Chancellor of the University of Guyana, I could not refuse this opportunity to give back to the country of my birth and early beginnings.

I follow a list of notable individuals who have served as Chancellor of UG, including some that I know or have known and respect greatly- Sir Shridath Ramphal, Mr Harold B. Davis, the honourable Rudy Insanally and Professor Compton Bourne. It has not escaped me, too that I am in

the very august company of one Chancellor of UG who was a previous Vice Chancellor of the University of the West Indies and that was Sir Arthur Lewis, Nobel prize winner for economics.

Within the next several days, Guyana will celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of its independence and doubtless there will be numerous speeches, discussions, articles and papers about what has been or could have been achieved in those 50 years. The University of Guyana has itself come a long way from its humble beginning. In a letter written to UG on the occasion of its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2013, Professor Harold Drayton, UG's first Deputy Vice Chancellor and one of its early celebrated academics wrote the following and I quote:

*On many occasions, I have described the establishment of the University in 1963 as an act of "faith". With no capital funds in sight for permanent buildings and equipment, with the prospect of slender recurrent annual government subsidies and the related foreseeable difficulties of staff recruitment, how else can one describe the exciting plunge in 1963? I use the word "faith" in the special sense of a collective confidence of trust that in the long run, all would be well, and that our mission would prosper.....and using any metric, we can undoubtedly conclude that it undoubtedly has...*

Unquote

In its 50 years, UG has produced many notable graduates. President David Granger and our last president, the honourable Donald Ramotar, are both graduates as are several ministers of this and previous governments. So are many leaders and staff in Guyana's private sector, NGOs and civil society. Over the years, the University has counted on its staff luminaries such as Professor Emeritus Clive Thomas, an internationally recognised economist, Professor Emeritus Joycelyne Loncke who is internationally recognised for her scholarship in French and music, Dr Paulette Bynoe, who has established a regional and international place for herself in the Environmental sciences, Dr Paloma Mohamed-Martin, essayist, playwright and director, who is a three-time winner of the Guyana Prize for Literature and a 2015 awardee of the regionally prestigious Ansa Caribbean Award for Excellence in the arts and literature; and Mr George Simon, visual artist and archaeologist who was also an Ansa Caribbean Awardee for Arts and Literature in 2012 and so the list goes on.

While undoubtedly the UG enterprise has prospered in the last 50 years it is important that we reflect on where the world around us has advanced in those years.

We have witnessed astounding global events that have transformed our world. It is now common place to read of mankind's journeys into distant space, of exploration of the deepest oceans, of deciphering the complex molecular interactions of the living cell – indeed scientists are able to create simple life forms utilising appropriate biochemical technologies. The human genome has been sequenced, potentially improving our understanding of genetically transmitted diseases. Other advances in molecular biology enable the manipulation of plant and animal life for purposes of good and conceivable evil.

The pace of these advances has been increased exponentially by the revolution in information and communication technology enabling ever increasing expanses of knowledge to be shared speedily and universally. The dominance of the free market economy has engendered the ascendancy of corporations and other enterprises that transcend national borders and are global in reach –think McDonald's, Microsoft, Apple, Toyota, Nike, and many more.

There is now discussion of a fourth industrial revolution, a concept introduced by Klaus Schwab who founded the World Economic Forum in 1971. Arguing that the first revolution was of the use of steam and water in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century; that electricity, division of labour and

mass production was the second revolution in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century; that the introduction of electronics, information technology and automated production was the third revolution in the mid- to late 20<sup>th</sup> century, Schwab posits that powerful emerging 21<sup>st</sup> technologies such as artificial intelligence, robotics, autonomous vehicles, 3D printing, etc. provides the making of a fourth industrial revolution

How these changes will affect the world in which we live, is best articulated in a quote from the Introduction of Klaus Schwab's book on the Fourth Revolution.

I quote:

*We are witnessing profound shifts across all industries, marked by the emergence of new business models, the disruption of incumbents and the reshaping of production, consumption, transportation and delivery systems. On the societal front, a paradigm shift is underway in how we work and communicate, as well as how we express, inform and entertain ourselves. Equally, governments and institutions are being reshaped, as are systems of education, healthcare and transportation, among many others. The changes are historic in terms of their size, speed and scope. While there is profound uncertainty surrounding these developments, all stakeholders of global society – governments,*

*business, academia, and civil society – have a responsibility to work together to better understand the emerging trends.*

Unquote

Universities have been prime players in driving these events. They have produced graduates with sophisticated knowledge, skills and creative powers to engineer these momentous changes or through research they have helped generate the concepts and ideas that undergird the global revolution in knowledge that we are witnessing. Arguably, one might say universities are to be praised for most of what is right and perhaps blamed for what is wrong in our world today. Arguably, too, if we are to correct the “wrong”, then that same university communities must play a role.

How has Guyana and its main university, the University of Guyana contributed to this maelstrom of global revolutionary change? And looking to the future, are we to be recipients of change or be participants in driving change. It may be partly true that in the last five decades we have existed on the periphery, but it is not entirely true and we should not be satisfied with merely being on-lookers. There are a number of our people and indeed some of our products that have achieved global visibility. Since its independence, Guyana has produced

statesmen, literary figures, prominent academics, businessmen and others in civil society who have established a global presence. In addition, there are products such as El Dorado rum, Banks beer and Demerara sugar that are prized in many of the world's capitals. While we must not shy away from celebrating our achievements, the most optimistic among us must concede that our progress has been insufficient and considerable work needs to be done to change our future prospects. Given the profound changes in the world to which I alluded earlier, it is an imperative that we understand, link with and participate in that global revolution - the University of Guyana must be a critical component of that participation.

We must choose between two narratives about Guyana.

*One is of Guyana described by the World Bank as a low income country, the second poorest in the Western Hemisphere, just better than Nicaragua and Haiti. That narrative lists Guyana as 124<sup>th</sup> in the world in its Human Development Index – the components of that index include life expectancy – ours is 66 years (which is nearly 10 years less than Barbados, Jamaica and St Lucia); another component is schooling, Guyana's average years of schooling is 10.3 years, which is 5 years less than Barbados and 2 years less than Jamaica and St Lucia. A third component is Gross National Income and Guyana's is among the lowest*



*in the hemisphere, less than half that of Barbados and lagging behind nearly or all of the Anglophone Caribbean.*

There is a second much more hopeful narrative about Guyana which was published in a three-page infomercial in Forbes magazine, entitled “Guyana: A Fresh Approach”.

I quote some of it:

*“Bordered by Venezuela to the west, Suriname to the East and Brazil to the South..... Guyana is a land of dramatic contrasts with tropical rainforests, table top mountains, extensive rivers and the world’s tallest single-drop waterfall. It is endowed with immense natural resources, possesses valuable and often untapped deposits of gold, diamonds and bauxite. It can significantly expand its traditional agricultural base into added value activities and offers limitless growth potential in renewable sectors such as forestry. Its unspoiled natural environment is home to incredible biodiversity and outstanding attractions ripe for tourism development. Its location serves as a preferential and cost effective trade route between Brazil, the Caribbean and the United States”*

Unquote

It is for us to decide which Guyana we want – one that is the second poorest in the Western Hemisphere with relatively low life expectancy and average income compared to our neighbours or one that celebrates and sustainably capitalises on our vast forests, diverse bio-systems, mineral reserves, agricultural productivity and that can provide a valuable trade route from South America to the North. Do we want a Guyana on the periphery of the fourth industrial revolution or an integral part of it?

Undoubtedly, we want the second alternative and I posit to you that at the heart of achieving that second alternative is a vibrant education system that is driven primarily by a vibrant university that can graduate and help retain in Guyana, the teachers, professionals, entrepreneurs, scientists and technicians, artists, literary figures, leaders of civil society and god knows, even politicians and statesmen, who can fulfil that dream of a Guyana that leaps far beyond that of being second to last in our hemisphere.

That leap can only occur if university academics and administrators, representatives of the private sector, leaders of government, civil society and academics in the diaspora join to create a vibrant alliance to transform the University of Guyana. We have taken some baby steps to starting that process. In February of this year, the University Council

convened a Transformation Task Force (or TTF) charged with reviewing the status of the University, discussing Guyana's needs and making recommendations for transformational change of the university to meet those needs. We gathered a variety of persons from the private sector, government, civil society and the academic community to brainstorm over two days and construct recommendations for transformational change. We heard from persons like Major General (retired) Joseph Singh, Special Assistant to the President of Guyana, who gave an insightful presentation into some of the intriguing and innovative activities taking place and contemplated to take place in our hinterland. Dr Oudho Homenauth of the National Agricultural Research and Extension Institute spoke to "Priorities and Requirements for Agriculture Sector Development"; Dr Hector Butts, Finance Secretary spoke on Financing Tertiary Education and the University of Guyana – as an aside, let me add that we were delighted that the Minister of Finance, the Honourable Winston Jordan attended part of the sessions; Mr Ramesh Dookhoo, Business Development Executive of Banks DIH spoke about the manufacturing sector and the University. Following these presentations by stakeholders from outside the university, we heard presentations by representatives of the university community including Senior Administrators, Deans and Directors, department heads, the academic and support staff and students, all of whom spoke

to the challenges the University faces and we took note of their suggestions for change.

I must add that during these two days, I had a separate one-on-one meeting with President David Granger about the Transformation effort. Although I know he has written extensively about UG, based on an association with the institution of more than four decades, I was impressed by his considerable grasp of the major issues facing the university and his suggestions for addressing them. He actually handed me a one-page document in which he captured the five major challenges facing the University. These coincided with those identified by the Task Force, namely governance, financing, quality assurance, the student experience, enhancement of UG's research and community engagement and problems with infrastructure and maintenance. In addition, President Granger made some bold suggestions for change, which I believe can create the environment for some of the sweeping efforts needed.

As a result of its deliberations, The Task Force made recommendations in three major areas. First, Governance; secondly Resource Mobilisation and Finance; and third Quality Assurance and Student Services. These

recommendations are available online at the University of Guyana website or they can be obtained from the UG Registry.

I shall take a few minutes to speak to the Recommendations with respect to Governance and Financial Resources. The Task Force recognised the urgent need for a major change in the governance of the University if it is to progress and recommended a re-writing of the University Act and Statutes. These changes would be intended to create a more independent Council, with clearly articulated responsibilities for Policy formation, oversight of Planning and of university finances, but staying out of management of University affairs. Management of University affairs is properly the responsibility of the university's leadership and staff. We agreed that there must be greater empowerment of the Vice Chancellor and major academic committees. In addition, a review is required of the University's rules and regulations which should be documented clearly and made available to all, preferably on the University website as well as in hard copy. The Task Force also called for a comprehensive operational manual which outlines proper procedures of all aspects of the University's operations. The University is moving swiftly forward with implementing these recommendations, hopefully with a grant from the Caribbean Development Bank.

Resource mobilisation to finance the enterprise was also recognised as critically important. The Task Force recommended an increase in government subventions, noting that commendable steps have been taken in this direction with the announcement by Finance Minister, Winston Jordan in his budget speech of a substantial increase in funds to the University. These funds are being used primarily to improve the abysmal compensation of university staff. The Task Force recognised that the University cannot rely solely on government largess – indeed, with the best will in the world, government subventions alone cannot enable the transformation UG requires. Thus the Task Force made other recommendations including a moderate increase in tuition fees over time making sure that students who cannot afford to pay can get loans, with a solid system in place to collect re-payment of those loans. Other recommendations including a contribution to tertiary education from the Lottery and like funds; creation of an Education Levy; enhancement of corporate philanthropy; building relations with alumni that among other things must include enhanced alumni giving; partnerships with other universities to access major funding opportunities from international donor agencies; a contribution of US\$1.00 for all incoming and outgoing passengers at all ports of entry;

and grants or government-guaranteed loans from various development banks.

I have gone through this list of measures to increase the University's finances so that I can urge relevant members of this audience to get on board with us. We must ensure that urgent and aggressive measures must be taken to implement as many of the recommendations as possible. Without appropriate financing the University cannot, I emphasise the word – **cannot** - achieve the transformation necessary to lift it to a level that will serve our country's interests in a rapidly evolving world.

In the interest of time, I shall not outline recommendations with respect to student services and quality assurance, but that must not take away from their considerable importance in the transformational effort. These recommendations are available online as I mentioned previously.

Getting a new Vice Chancellor to lead these transformational efforts was an imperative and in March we completed a process that enabled us to select one of three excellent short listed candidates for the post of Vice Chancellor. I want to make absolutely clear that the process was

not a setup, not pre-determined as I am sure some would suggest, but it was an objective and rigorous process to choose someone who best satisfied the overall requirements for the position at this stage.

Professor Ivelaw Griffith will be the next Vice Chancellor of UG. He is an internationally recognised scholar in the field of crime and security and has extensive leadership experience in several institutions in the USA. He is a proud graduate of the University of Guyana and has a multitude of contacts with academics in the region and wider diaspora, all of which will serve the university well in building capacity through partnerships with other institutions and talented colleagues. He will start on June 14<sup>th</sup>, but judging from the communications he is sending, it is clear that he has already begun and wants to hit the ground running.

Clearly from all I have said there will be much that we shall all have to do. It is an imperative that as a collective body, we must put our shoulders to the wheel and get on with it.

It is time to close –one cannot be deaf to the needs of an audience that has endured a long evening and I thank you for doing so.



In many ways, my return to Guyana is as physical as it is spiritual - a coming home to a place I know more intimately than any other, to serve my people in the memory of relatives who were born, lived and some of whom have died in Guyana, in particular my mother, Cicely, who died when I was 18 but who has served as the primary inspiration through the many good and the few not so good times in my life. I also thank other members of my family for their love and solidarity –my brother, Michael, sisters –Alexis and Denise, my aunt Sheila Carew-Thorpe, my three children, Zaman, Tamia and Sandhya and my dad, Wilson Harris. I save for last the person who is always first in my life- Yvette, my wife, who over the last 37 years has been my primary companion, counsellor, muse, organiser of my life and all other good things - .....

Finally, I thank all my friends of yesteryear as well as new friends I have made in the past year, all of whom have embraced me with considerable warmth and support. It has been altogether a wonderful homecoming, for which I am most grateful.

Professor Emeritus Eon Nigel Harris  
May 11, 2016