



**address
BY THE**



**SECRETARY-GENERAL
CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY (CARICOM)
Ambassador Irwin LaRocque**

**on THE occasion
of the**

**FORTY-EIGHTH CONVOCATION AND
GRADUATION CEREMONY
OF the university of guyana**

**GEORGETOWN, GUYANA
8 NOVEMBER 2014**

- ❖ **Honourable Samuel Hinds, Prime Minister;**
- ❖ **Honourable Ministers of Government of Guyana**
- ❖ **Professor Jacob Opadeyi, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Guyana;**
- ❖ **Members of the University Council;**
- ❖ **Staff of the University**
- ❖ **Members of the Diplomatic Corps;**
- ❖ **Parents and Guardians;**
- ❖ **Graduands;**
- ❖ **Specially Invited Guests;**
- ❖ **Ladies and Gentlemen.**

Thank you very much for the privilege and pleasure of speaking to you today.

Before I address myself to the graduands, let me pay tribute to two other very important groups of people here.

- First, the Faculty. It has been well said that “a teacher affects eternity. He or she never knows where their influence may be felt”. I remain deeply grateful to my own teachers over the years, for the grounding and foundation they gave to me – the values and the principles they imparted – the role models they provided – all of which are as equally important as any specific academic knowledge. So let us pause, and acknowledge the debt we all owe to our teachers.**
- And second, the parents and guardians. I myself have a daughter completing her first degree. She is the third of my children to attend university. So I know first-hand the challenges and the sacrifices of being a parent of university students. At times, it may even feel like a bit of a thankless task. But days like today make up for that, with well-deserved emotions of pride and satisfaction.**

So thank you to the parents and all those who look after our young people.

And now, of course, to the graduands themselves.

First and foremost, congratulations to you all. You have worked hard, and you have earned your reward. However, as you bask in the glow of this occasion, I invite you to think of today, not as the end of something, but as the beginning of something. Today truly is “the first day of the rest of your life”. It is a turning point.

As you enter this new phase, you will do well to ponder upon the mission of your soon to be alma mater, and I quote, “*to discover, generate, disseminate, and apply knowledge of the highest standard for the service of the community, the nation, and of all mankind within an atmosphere of academic freedom that allows for free and critical enquiry*”. Up to now, you have been focussed on “discovering and generating knowledge”. Now, you have a different calling, to “disseminate and apply” that knowledge.

The mission goes on to say why you are called upon to do these things, namely “for the service of the community, the nation, and all human kind”.

Those are noble sentiments. I urge you to embrace them, and turn them into action.

Given my own position as Secretary-General of CARICOM, I naturally hope that the “community” you choose to serve is our Caribbean Community. We don’t want to lose you. After all, this University serves our Community as I am aware that there are a number of students from other CARICOM countries studying here.

You are very fortunate, in being among the less than 15 percent of people in our Region with a university education. Now, it is up to you to determine the path you wish to follow in applying and using the knowledge and skills that you have gained here at UG.

I realize that in today's world, there is the choice of which nation will benefit from what you have learned. Globalisation, advances in ICTs, and entrepreneurial enterprise have transformed the labour market, and the way business is done.

In today's world, the smartphone you're carrying may have been engineered in South Korea, had the chip developed in Germany, the hardware manufactured in China and the marketing and distribution handled by a company based in the United States.

And why not an app for this smartphone being developed right here in the Caribbean.

In such an interdependent global economy, the deployment of resources, wherever they are best suited and most needed, is a critical success factor. You may wish to pursue your careers here in Guyana, elsewhere in the Caribbean Community, or in the wider world. But given the advances in ICTs, I would urge you to seek to serve the wider world from right here in our Community.

Just remember that you are fortunate in another way, as CARICOM nationals. Now that you are university graduates, you should apply for your CARICOM skills certificate in order to seek professional opportunities in any of the twelve countries currently participating in the CSME. Some 14,000 such certificates have been issued to date. Get yours – and use it!

I am hopeful that next year's graduating class will be able to apply for their skills certificate fully online. An electronic platform is being developed.

This is a good example of what our Community, your Community, is doing: providing opportunities for our skilled citizens to advance their own careers and pursue their personal goals, while at the same time, contributing to the development of our Region.

The Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas provides for the free movement of skilled Community nationals, and the first category identified was that of university graduates. That provision was expressly made in recognition of the critical role you have to play in promoting the prosperity, security and well-being of all our peoples.

That is why the Community remains dedicated to achieving the objectives of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy: notably, the free movement of skilled nationals, of providers of services, of the self-employed and of those establishing businesses. The rights that CARICOM nationals now enjoy to establish enterprise wherever they wish in their region will release entrepreneurial energy bottled up for far too long.

We still have work to do to put all the enabling structures in place, and see them fully, consistently and equitably enacted, enforced and implemented. I am determined to achieve that. And I am confident we will.

I am acutely aware of the difficulties still being experienced at ports of entry in some of our Member States by those who seek to exercise their rights of free movement and to hassle-free travel.

Certain categories of citizens have the right to work and live in any participating State – that is the free movement of skills provision.

Also, all CARICOM nationals have the right to an automatic stay of six months, subject only to circumscribed exceptions – that is the hassle-free travel provision.

Inconsistent application of the agreed rules has caused some challenges, but training of the relevant points-of-entry officials is continuing in order to reinforce good practices and minimise the difficulties.

To the average person, the success of CARICOM is often measured by the ability to move freely around the Region, in accordance with Community decisions which form part of our body of Community law. With respect to hassle-free travel, the vast majority of persons travel throughout our Region everyday without problems. It is working.

But the reality is that the exception to the rule creates a damaging perception in the minds of our people. Our less than complete success in turning the concept of hassle-free movement, as agreed, into real personal experience has undermined our credibility as a Community.

Last year's ruling by the Caribbean Court of Justice in the Shanique Myrie case has pronounced on this matter. We must take heed of the Court's ruling.

Another piece of unfinished business may have a direct impact on some of you graduating from the Law Faculty of this University, namely the admission of non-UWI graduates to the Law Schools of the Council of Legal Education. The Government of Guyana has brought this matter to the attention of the Conference of Heads of Government.

The limited spaces available for non-UWI graduates constrain the ambitions of many aspiring lawyers in the Region, including LL.B. graduates of UG. This year, there were several discussions between the Community and the CLE to ensure that the 25 Guyanese UG graduates would be accommodated in the Law Schools, in accordance with previous arrangements.

However, this is not a permanent solution, and does not address the non-Guyanese UG graduates, or indeed LL.B. graduates of any other institution in the Region. This clearly shows it is not just a Guyana problem but is in fact a regional issue requiring a Community solution.

Heads of Government have asked the Council for Legal Education to consider all available options for a permanent way to facilitate equitable access to legal education in the Region. It is my hope that the new intake of Law students at this University would have no difficulty in gaining access to regional Law Schools by the time they end their tenure here.

So yes, there are always challenges. Our Region is still struggling to emerge from the worldwide financial shocks that have affected the economies of our Member States. The threat of global climate change to our environment, our economies and indeed our societies looms large, particularly for our Community of Small Island and Low-Lying Coastal Developing States.

And yet, in spite of the challenges, these are exciting times to be a citizen of the Caribbean Community. They are also exciting times to be at the CARICOM Secretariat.

This past July, our Heads of Government approved the first-ever Five-Year Strategic Plan for the Caribbean Community. The Plan is to be implemented through coordinated strategic management involving the Secretariat, Member States, and other regional institutions. It recognises the need for prioritisation, setting achievable targets and greater accountability, as well as for putting in place the necessary arrangements to strengthen implementation. I urge you to go online and read the Plan. It contains a number of high priorities such as:

- **Accelerated implementation of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy is one of them.**
- **We will be taking steps to build competitiveness and unleash key economic drivers to encourage growth and generate employment.**
- **We are going to work towards the creation of a Single ICT Space in CARICOM. Imagine a space in which the cost of broadband is lowered; there is full portability of cell phone numbers across the Region; and there are no long distance charges for calls between CARICOM countries! That is what we will strive to achieve.**
- **We will enhance our resilience to the effects of climate change and threats to our environment through pro-active adaptation and mitigation strategies as well as improved disaster readiness, response and recovery.**
- **And we will focus on human capital development – including education, training and advanced research capacity.**

Let me zero in on this topic for a moment.

To build a strong Caribbean Community, we must ensure that the skills taught in our education system are the ones needed to fulfil the Region's development goals. To do this, educational institutions, public policy-makers and the private sector must collaborate more closely. The business community knows what skills it needs, now and in the future. It can help design training relevant to the labour market – which directly improves the employment opportunities for graduates like yourselves. There are already examples of this kind of collaboration, but more needs to be done.

Our universities should be centres of research and excellence that inculcate a culture of creativity and innovation – a prerequisite for building competitiveness, which in turn is key to prospering in the new global economy.

Targeted research linked to the creativity and innovation of our youth could lead to a transformation of our economies and societies and ensure we build resilience in the areas which the Strategic Plan identifies as vital for sustainable development.

As Guyana is poised to lead in areas of Climate Change, through its Low Carbon Development Strategy, perhaps this University has the opportunity to develop a Centre of Excellence in this area as well as in areas of forestry, given the country's vast natural resources.

In support of these types of initiatives, a CARICOM Commission on Human Resource Development has been established. One of its main tasks is to develop a CARICOM Education Agenda, with a roadmap for action by Member States, aligned to Twenty-First Century competencies, competitiveness and sustainability. The Commission will begin its work shortly.

All of this is important, challenging, and rewarding work. I would like to use this occasion to invite you to help us do it. It is my hope that you and others like you – products of the education system in our Community – will be inspired and engaged to take our regional integration movement forward. Our very future depends on it. Your drive and energy, your idealism and commitment, are essential if we are to build a prosperous, secure, sustainable, resilient Caribbean Community with opportunity for all.

Let me close as I began, on a personal note. Years from now you may not remember who spoke at your graduation. But I hope you might remember this, which I share with you from my experience.

Your time at UG has helped prepare you for life. No matter what your specific area of study, I trust you have learned: how to think critically and independently; how to delve deeply into issues; how to debate and discuss; how to change other people's minds – and your own.

These things are ultimately as valuable as whatever specialized knowledge and skills you have acquired in your particular field.

In a world of increasing specialization, too narrow a focus may have its disadvantages, and broad general knowledge is a rare and precious thing.

What always served me well was a voracious appetite for reading of all kinds, from the ancient Greek philosophers to contemporary history, politics, and the arts. I encourage you to read widely, constantly and voraciously. And I encourage you to read in the book of life and the book of other people – not just the books on library shelves or downloaded from the Internet.

Engage in life-long learning – both formal and informal – inside institutions, and self-directed. Don't fool yourselves that your days of study are over – they're just beginning!

Never give up, never stop growing, never be afraid of new ideas and new experiences and never be afraid to put forward your ideas – who knows, your idea may be “the next big thing”! Never lose your desire to expand your horizons, and to make a contribution.

Through hard work, dedication and commitment you will succeed. It is a matter of attitudes, and of values.

If you go away – come back! I did, and I’m very glad I did. I am here to tell you that there is nothing more satisfying and rewarding than knowing the work you do is adding value to your fellow citizens and human beings. That can be done through a career in public service, in private enterprise or through your own entrepreneurship.

To quote from one of our Community’s greatest musical and cultural voices, Bob Marley:

***“Live for yourself and you will live in vain;
Live for others, and you will live again”.***

You have the foundation and my charge to you is to use it *for the service of the community, the nation, and of all mankind.*

Congratulations, good luck, and thank you.

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