



## UNIVERSITY of GUYANA

OFFICE OF THE VICE-CHANCELLOR

Turkeyen Campus  
P.O Box 101110, Georgetown, Guyana  
Tel: 592-222-3583  
Fax: 592-222-8063  
E-mail: [vicechancellor@uog.edu.gy](mailto:vicechancellor@uog.edu.gy)

---

### Tribute on behalf of the University of Guyana

John Cartey Caesar joined the University of Guyana as a Lecturer II in the Department of Biology 24 years ago, in May 1988. He had just completed a Masters in Plant Physiology at the University of Alberta, Canada, and I've heard it said that he was following his heart when he came to Guyana. Well, he must have found something here because he made this country his home to the extent that 13 years later, in 2001 he applied for the status of Permanent Resident and this was approved in 2002.

I first met Mr. Caesar in 1990 when I resumed my position as Lecturer in the Department of Chemistry after a period of study overseas. Mr. Caesar and I worked together on various University Boards and Committees, and had many conversations outside of formal meetings.

In 1991, 3 years after his first appointment, Mr. Caesar was promoted to Senior Lecturer and in 2011 requested to be promoted to the level of Reader. He served as Head, Department of Biology for 4 years and was Dean of the Faculty of Natural Sciences for 2 years. Over the years, he was asked to serve on a number of University Committees that are too numerous to mention; and at the time of his death was the focal point, academic representative and course developer on the UWI - UG - University of Suriname - University of Belize collaborative Edulink project that is developing a regional Master's degree programme in Biodiversity & Conservation.

He presented many papers at conferences and seminars, both locally and internationally, and his publications were often cited by other international researchers. He often represented the University at meetings.

Mr. Caesar was well read and could always be counted on to express an opinion and lead a discussion: He was never at a loss for words; if he had something to say he said it but in recent years tried to be less vocal.

On the campus it was rumoured that Mr. Caesar was a prince in the tribe that he came from in Ghana, but I can tell that he enjoyed no princely privileges or status at UG but was nonetheless held in high esteem.

What can we say about this person?

There was a time that Mr. Caesar could be counted on to arrive late at every meeting – this changed somewhat, not completely though, after it was pointed out to him that he was not setting a good example.

He had a particular way in the middle of imparting some information, of suspending what he was talking about by saying “eh, eh” and leaving the rest hanging and up to one’s imagination. This was uniquely to Mr. Caesar. After deliberating on this characteristic for sometime, I decided that my strategy would be to question him further whenever he said “eh eh”. However, I always met with the same “eh eh” at some point in the discourse after which he would not discuss the matter further – I finally came to the conclusion that he could not give more information because in so doing he might break a confidence.

His desk was always covered with documents – no secretary or cleaner was allowed to touch the desk because each pile represented something specific. Despite the piles, he could retrieve documents at very short notice.

He was always interested in the welfare of others and regularly put others above self. He was particularly concerned about the performance and welfare of the students he taught and went out of his way to encourage and motivate them in numerous ways that expressed his concern.

Mr. Caesar was an advocate for staff and was noted for the ways in which he personally expressed appreciation for their efforts in organising special events etc. He was also responsible for obtaining national benefits for a retired UG official.

Mr. Caesar was a committed person who I believe could not say no to requests to serve and to assist. His expertise and willingness to be involved and to contribute resulted in his involvement in many off

campus activities and duties. While the University was indeed his primary base, he has given much service on the national front. Permit me to expand on this by giving specific examples.

He was part of teams that represented the Government at many local and regional meetings.

At the time of his death he was chairman of 5 national Commissions/Boards, a member of 3 national committees and a Commissioner on the Public Utilities Commission. I am aware that in these positions he was always on the lookout for opportunities that would promote and benefit the University.

Furthermore, Mr. Caesar was a member of 17 international organisations, some member-ships dating from as far back as 1983 including

- Caribbean Academy of Sciences 1994
- American Association for the Advancement of Science
- International Association for Impact Assessment
- Society for Economic Botany
- American Society of Plant Biologists
- Scandinavian Plant Physiologists Society
- Ecological Society of Germany, Austria and Switzerland
- Innovation Policy group – coordinated by Professor Calestous Juma
- The Nature Conservancy
- Centre for Global Development
- Institute of Nanotechnology

to name a few, and regularly shared information gained thereby with other members of the university community.

Indeed, Mr. Caesar had a truly impressive and distinguished professional profile both within the University community, in Guyana and beyond the shores of this country.

He was also a private person. We did not know how ill he was until about 18 days ago when I contacted him after a group of students had visited me on Tuesday, November 6. Our Personnel

Division was asked to assist him and he agreed to be taken to the hospital 3 days later. That began a journey that that Division had not previously experienced and which has highlighted issues that the University must address when recruiting staff who are basically alone. Early in his hospitalisation I also learnt something about Mr. Caesar that I had not known before - he requested we bring his bible.

As far as I know, the graduation ceremony at the Turkeyen Campus 2 Saturdays ago was the first one that Mr. Caesar missed – and his absence was noted because he usually stood out in the procession since he was always attired in exquisite African garb. I visited him in hospital the day after the graduation and was encouraged to find a newspaper on his bed – the Sunday Chronicle. He advised me that he had bought the newspaper to find out what President Ramotar had said in his feature address at the convocation, and specifically what he had said about the University and what he would do for it. I took this interest as a sign that he was on the road to recovery.

None of us expected this outcome. This appointment that Mr. Caesar has kept is much earlier than the three score and ten, runs contrary to his pattern of lateness, but it is an appointment that each of us must keep. There is no escaping its reality, finality and inevitability.

Mr. Caesar has contributed much to tertiary education. His contribution and service to his adopted country have been selfless and exemplary. Therefore I think the quotation from **19<sup>th</sup> Century** American essayist, lecturer and poet **Emerson Ralph Waldo** is fitting. Speaking on life Mr. Waldo said and I quote: “ **It is not length of life, but depth of life.**” **End of quote.**

Mr. Caesar will be missed. He will be remembered.

In closing: The University community, staff and students, extends sincere condolences to his family, his brother Leonard who is here with us, and to his close associates and friends.

During his illness and in planning this home-going ceremony, we called on a number of officials for support and they responded without hesitation. We know that he received the best medical care. We therefore extend gratitude to his friend Dr. Roger Luncheon, the Director of our School of Medicine Dr. Madan Rambarran, to the Minister of Health Dr. Bheri Ramsharran, the Minister of

Natural Resources & the Environment Mr. Robert Persaud, to Medical Consultant Dr. Ramsundar Doobay, to Mr. Caesar's friend Dr. Coby Frimpong and to the nurses and staff of the High Dependency Unit, Georgetown Public Hospital Inc. and the Intensive Care Unit of Woodlands Hospital.

As news of his death spread, numerous organisations and persons offered support and assistance in organising his home-going. Time does not allow me to name them all but we thank each of you and will do so later in a more formal way.

May his soul rest in peace.

Marlene F. Cox (PhD)  
Vice-Chancellor (ag)  
November 24, 2012

\*\*\*\*\*