I must begin by saying a heartfelt thank you to all who have joined our Chancellor Sir George Alleyne and me in sharing this day of celebration and re-affirmation of support for The University of the West Indies, which in so many ways is an enduring and proud symbol of Caribbean accomplishment in education, scholarship and public outreach. My thanks, too, to Principal Bhoe Tewarie and his team at St Augustine and other individuals from other campuses and centres for their exceptional effort in planning today’s event.

A family friend has been asking me every few years for the last decade “where do you see your career going next? What is your five year plan?” I must confess that at no time over the years did my answer include a plan to become Vice Chancellor of The University of the West Indies! Indeed, had my good friend and fellow UWI alumni, Dr Lois La Grenade not called me two years ago to tell me that the post was advertised and had my wife not conspired with her to get me all of the relevant documents, I would never have taken that first step. Had friends like Drs Victor and Yvette Boodhoo and others not given me their vote of confidence, I may not have stayed the course during the lengthy decision-making process. To become Vice Chancellor of this Caribbean intellectual powerhouse, to partner with so many talented people both within and without the walls of this University, and to do so now as we are poised on the brink of new advances toward Caribbean unity is an opportunity that I would have hated to miss.

Our University has played a vital role in forging a Caribbean identity, and, if we appropriately mobilize ourselves, and if appropriately utilized by our governments, businesses and public, we can be a central player in that drum roll that must sweep us forward towards Caribbean integration. It is no accident that three of our outstanding graduates are expected to be the initial signatories of the Declaration of Intent for the creation of the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME) – Prime Ministers Patrick Manning of Trinidad and Tobago, Owen Arthur of Barbados
and P.J. Patterson of Jamaica. In the course of the next several months, we anticipate that more leaders will commit to this historic agreement and among those will be others of our graduates who are Prime Ministers – Kenny Anthony of St Lucia, Denzil Douglas of St Kitts, Ralph Gonsalves of St Vincent, and Keith Mitchell of Grenada. Indeed, it is also highly likely that several of our alumni and some members of our academic staff were involved in framing the CSME agreement, and some of those graduates will be involved in its implementation.

Few other universities in the world can boast of having contributed graduates to as many significant positions in their country or region as has UWI. Other notable graduates include our Chancellor, Sir George Alleyne; the Secretary General of CARICOM, Dr Edwin Carrington; the Director General of the OECS, Dr Len Ishmael; the President of the Caribbean Development Bank, Professor Compton Bourne; the Governor of the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank, Sir Dwight Venner, and the list goes on – many of our Ministers of Government, senior public servants, leading justices and lawyers, tertiary and secondary school principals, leaders of medicine, law, nursing, engineering, agronomists, CEOs of leading private corporations, the security forces, and last but by no means least, several of our Bishops and other senior church leaders. We are also proud of the thousands of other graduates who are rooting for us in North America, the United Kingdom and elsewhere in the world. All are high achievers, leaders, agents of change, and proud bearers of the pelican standard. In addition, we boast proudly of the President of Trinidad and Tobago, His Excellency Professor Maxwell Richards, who is here with us today, is a past Dean of the Faculty of Engineering and Principal of the St Augustine Campus, and the Deputy Secretary General of CARICOM, Dr Eddie Greene, is a former University Director of the Institute of Social and Economic Research and Pro Vice Chancellor.

While I have accepted this position with hope, I am not blind to the difficult path that lies ahead. My life has been replete with challenges and hurdles. In my extended journey through time, geography and circumstances, I have had to cross many rapids, encounter a few demons and I have undergone several metamorphoses – student, physician, bench scientist, teacher, senior administrator - from duckling to black swan, peacock palace of the father transmuting to swan syndrome of the son. At each step along the way gaining strength by having to tackle and overcome huge gaps in my knowledge, assimilate vast quantities of new information, relate to large numbers of new people, even adopt
new nuances of language, new dress codes, new customs and new institutional cultures. I come to this job with optimism, rooted in my confidence in the intrinsic vitality, creativity and intellectual potential of the Caribbean people. I know what the UWI has achieved in the past and feel certain that our leaders and people understand the importance of a regional university in furthering Caribbean development and integration. It is on this basis I say that I have become Vice Chancellor at the right moment in time with the right people, in the right place. As this day’s programme progresses, you will learn that I am making the transition from Mozart back to the Beatles, Bob Marley and Black Stalin of “Caribbean Man” fame.

In envisioning the future of the University, I believe that there are four questions we must address:

The first is how must the University re-position itself to enhance its services to its stakeholders? The second is how might we better partner with Caribbean governments to propel sustainable development in our region? Thirdly how do we markedly and measurably improve our outreach and delivery of programmes to the so-called non-campus countries? And lastly how do we generate more non-governmental revenues to better support growth of our enterprise?

It is important that we first address the issue of better meeting our stakeholder needs. There is good evidence that we are experiencing increasing loss of some of our best students to institutions outside of the region and even to extra-regionally owned institutions now present in the Caribbean. This movement of our students to North American universities, in particular, is not just a loss to the UWI and other nationally run tertiary institutions, but it is a loss for our region as a whole, since it is very likely that the majority of those young people, our brightest and best, will stay in North America once they have completed their studies. Our University’s approach to this competition must not be to cower and be afraid, but to demonstrate decisively that we are better than the rest. We must show unquestionably and unassailably that we are FIRST in Education, FIRST in Research and the port of FIRST call for our governments. We cannot, nor should we aim to, educate all students wishing a tertiary education in the Caribbean, but we want the 30,000 to 40,000 plus students who choose to come to the UWI, to do so because of the high quality of our programmes, our exceptional ability to prepare students with knowledge and skills relevant to Caribbean society in the 21st century and our ability to produce graduates who will
become “agents and leaders of change”. I want Caribbean parents
to say, as they did when I was growing up in Guyana in the 1950s
and 1960s, “The University of the West Indies is the place of first
choice for educating my child because I am confident that they
will get a superb and exceptional learning experience. Let me
assure those parents and their children that attention to providing
the very best education for your children will continue to be our
first priority, and let me remind members of our academic and
non-academic staff that we must re-double our efforts to ensure
that we continue to improve the quality and relevance of the
Teaching programmes that we offer and that these be delivered
more efficiently and in a more user-friendly manner. As we
advance in this new age of information and communication
technology, we must also assure our students everywhere in the
Caribbean that they can gain access to a UWI education “at any
time, from any place”.

Our institution must also be FIRST in Research. This means that
by measures such as publications, citations, patents and
production of marketable products, our University will be the world
centre for creative and innovative research relevant to the
Caribbean.

Finally, we must become the port of FIRST call for our
governments and businesses, meaning that any Minister,
businessman, or individual in a regional or national organization
in the Caribbean can easily call a single number at the UWI and
get access to high quality, timely advice, at a competitive charge,
from any of a vast array of experts in our region, whether those
experts are at UWII or part of another organization. To this end, I
have asked Pro Vice Chancellor Errol Morrison to facilitate creation
of such an entity by May 2005. I am told that currently only 2% of
the Caribbean dollars spent on advisory services stay in the
Caribbean. I challenge Caribbean governments to propose that
even in instances where they cannot contract primarily with this
University entity, and they have to look to consultants outside the
region, they should demand that at least 20-30% of the service be
provided by individuals in regional organizations. This would not
only provide additional sources of revenue for the University but
more importantly, such a plan would support growth of our
graduate programmes and enable building of local experience for
the future. If we must pay international consultants with hard
earned dollars – let them leave something tangible behind.

But if we are going to be truly FIRST, our University community
must also make a firm commitment to bring teamwork, quality,
accountability, timeliness in completion of tasks, and regional responsiveness and relevance to our work. I repeat teamwork, quality, accountability, timeliness, relevance and regional responsiveness. To this end, let me say that I have already dipped the bucket in the well of our University, and even in the first few loads found a treasure trove of talent, ideas, creativity and commitment, but sadly there are reports of a little chaff among the good grain! Let me state with certainty that I shall collaborate with the able at all levels of our institution to transform and re-orient the uninterested and unwilling, to retrain the unable and unimaginative, and to redirect those who are cynical and unmotivated. I shall insist that we introduce performance reports and other instruments and surveys that measure productivity, for we are all accountable, Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Principals, Pro Vice Chancellors, Deans, Heads of Departments, and all others – the conductor, band master, orchestra and band. If we are part of the UWI community, then we must accept and deliver on the charge that the Caribbean Community has given us to excel in the services we provide – no less a result can be acceptable.

The second question I asked was how might we better partner with Caribbean governments to propel sustainable development of our region? While our region has many challenges, we have several strengths. Some of our strengths include our having for the most part stable democracies, generally with well developed government and legal systems and a relatively well educated population – albeit comparatively deficient in the number of workers with tertiary education degrees. Our health and quality of life statistics are competitive with many developed countries. But beneath all those positives exist a soft underbelly. We are confronted by the dark horsemen of excessive poverty, HIV/AIDS, narco-crime and gun violence. In addition, as with other Small Island Developing States in the world, we have the problems of limited natural resources, heavy reliance on international trade and high transportation and communication costs. We have fragile eco-systems that are vulnerable to the demands of urbanization and tourism which brings with them deforestation, excessive use of limited water supplies, problems with waste management and pollution of our rivers and seas. We are also vulnerable to destruction by the natural forces of hurricanes, volcanoes, earthquakes and floods. The magnitude of our vulnerability was brought home to me last October while standing on the beaches of Grenada, post hurricane Ivan. The unseemly force of nature had destroyed in one night much of what that country as a whole, and families individually, had built over several decades; destruction that will require many years to restore.
Out of my visit to Grenada came the Vice Chancellor’s Hurricane Relief Task Force. I intend that this effort serves as a new model for partnering with Caribbean governments and agencies, such as the Caribbean Disaster and Emergency Relief Agency (CDERA). More than 100 of our faculty members, with expertise in more than 30 areas relevant to reconstruction, rehabilitation and vulnerability reduction are potential participants in this taskforce. Some of these individuals are currently assisting Grenadian ministries in projects as diverse as counseling and agriculture. I expect that the task force will ultimately provide the basis for a regional Center of Excellence in Disaster Management. I wish to publicly congratulate Professor and Pro Vice Chancellor for Research, Wayne Hunte, Mr Raymond Charles of St Augustine, Mr Rafi Ahmad of Mona and Professor Christine Barrow and Dr Robin Mahon of Cave Hill for their leadership and tremendous contributions to this effort.

But the Hurricane Relief task force is an isolated initiative. If the UWI is to better partner with Caribbean governments, we should do so in the context of a defined framework which addresses our responses to both the metaphorical hurricane of global competition, crime, HIV/AIDS, excessive poverty, as well as the real hurricanes, volcanoes and earthquakes.

In January 2005, I led a delegation of UWI academics to Mauritius to participate in the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. This meeting was convened to assess progress with respect to the Barbados Plan of Action, initiated 10 years earlier at the first UN Conference on Small Island Developing States which took place in Barbados in 1994. Individuals who were members of the UWI delegation included Wayne Hunte, Al Binger, Michael Witter, John Agard, Elizabeth Thomas-Hope, Dennis Pantin, and Leonard Nurse, all of whom I am proud to say either helped to organize the meeting or were major presenters at several sessions. Out of that meeting came the Mauritius Plan of Action. I believe that this plan might provide a potential framework around which the University in collaboration with CARICOM could engage regional governments, regional banks, the business community and other tertiary institutions in a partnership for sustainable development. The plan is appealing to me because it takes a holistic approach to growth and development, advocating measures to increase competitiveness and wealth while attending to vulnerability reduction and protection of the environment. Some of the recommendations of the plan include building capacity through
tertiary education, investment in science and technology, increasing access to financial resources, and creating an enabling environment for investment, trade and finance.

At that conference our University took the first step in building a partnership with our governments and other sectors of our society when we joined leaders of four other universities, namely the University of Malta, Mauritius, South Pacific, and Virgin Islands, in signing a Memorandum of Understanding to establish a consortium of universities that would provide practical, high quality training and research to assist Small Island Developing States in implementing the Mauritius Plan of Action. I am pleased to say that the United Nations Development Programme has agreed to contribute US$1M to initiate this effort and that the secretariat of the consortium will be housed at our University of the West Indies, Mona Campus. To kick off this effort in the Caribbean, I am hopeful that I can persuade CARICOM and the OECS to join the UWI in hosting a retreat of senior leaders from relevant ministries of governments, businesses, regional financial institutions, and leaders of other tertiary institutions to devise a roadmap for implementation of the Mauritius Plan for Sustainable Development. Pro Vice Chancellor Wayne Hunte has already prepared a draft document outlining areas of possible collaboration, and he has suggested creation of a Centre for Integration Studies and Sustainable Development comprising both university and regional institutions that would facilitate implementation of the Plan.

Of all the initiatives outlined in the Mauritius Plan, I confess that I am most interested in building capacity in science and technology. Apart from a few Middle Eastern countries in which black gold literally sprung from the soil, no country large or small has in modern times, achieved developed status without a robust science and technology enterprise. We have too few scientists, an inadequate infrastructure and grossly inadequate funding to support research. If we do not invest in this area, we shall not cross the ramparts into the fields of sustainable development and even run the risk of perishing in the trenches of underdevelopment.

In truth, despite the shortage of absolute numbers of scientists, we are not short on investigators with innovative ideas. What is tragically lacking is the funding to transform those innovative ideas into marketable products. If we can identify venture capital from private and government sources, we can establish committees of technical experts drawn from tertiary institutions, industry and
government who can select the most competitive projects that are potentially marketable. This selection committee with its sources of funding and some limited administrative support might well serve as a prototype of a Caribbean Research Funding Agency. Such an Agency was proposed in 1999. Six years later, we remain at the starting block. Very recently I have read draft proposals by committees in both Trinidad and Tobago and in Jamaica calling for the establishment of National Foundations in each of their own countries to fund innovative research projects. I urge that, if at all possible, we create one regional, rather than many national foundations, because I doubt any one of our countries has the critical mass of scientists and innovators able to sustain robust growth in research and development. However, if some governments believe they must go it alone and establish their own national foundation for research, I urge them to open competition for research awards to all Caribbean scientists. Let me remind my audience that a Research Foundation can limit grant awards to projects that are primarily relevant to regional or national development. For example, priority may be given to projects leading to agricultural diversification, new software technology, environmental protection, alternative sources of energy and so on.

In addition to providing funding for innovative research, which I believe will bring gains in the short term, I am also an advocate for revolutionizing the way we teach science and technology. We should redesign science courses at the secondary and tertiary levels to limit simplistic ‘book learning’ and emphasize instead analytical and creative thinking. Let us start with the application of science in the real world and work backwards to the equation that was the foundation of the application. Let our brightest young people feel the delight of working in laboratories. Let us seek opportunities to send some of our promising graduate students to work in laboratories and other centres of innovation in Japan, China, India, Germany, Ireland, Denmark, and so on. I name those countries because they have robust science and technology-based enterprises but they are less likely than our neighbours to the North to retain our bright young people. Ultimately, however, we shall have to bring those graduate students home to work with scientists already in the region to build centres of scientific creativity and innovation. It will be the only way to ensure that we are going to be competitive in a new age of globalization and economic liberalization.

If we value our identity as Caribbean people, we must address the third question I raised earlier, namely that of markedly and measurably improving our contributions to the so-called Non-
campus countries. I have made no secret of the fact that I dislike the term "Non-Campus". "Non" has in some ways come to be N-O-N-E. While the number of UWI students from Trinidad, Barbados and Jamaica has increased more than 50% in the last few years, the numbers from the other 12 countries we serve have only marginally increased or remained the same. Large numbers of secondary students in what I call the "UWI-12 countries" are now electing to go to the USA and Canada, either on scholarship or as fee paying students, rather than selecting the UWI. Our University is not the institution of first choice for many of those young people. This outward movement is essentially an outward migration and will result in a profound loss for our region. It is true that we lack the capacity to meet all the tertiary education needs of the region, but I firmly believe that by forging alliances with local community colleges to support their transformation and growth into degree granting universities, as well as by UWI improving the number and quality of programmes they offer students in the UWI-12, we can better meet the needs of our partners in the UWI-12. Our Distance Education Programme must aim for the goal of enabling students in the UWI-12, indeed in all of UWI to access our course at any time from any location. I want to recognize in our midst today, Dr Rodney Smith, the new President of the College of the Bahamas. I hope our university can collaborate with Dr Smith and his colleagues in transforming that college into the New University of the Bahamas. I believe this effort may serve as a model for other community and state colleges in our region. In addition to community and state colleges, UWI will have to work with governments, businesses and financial institutions in each of the 12 countries to define their human resource needs and to determine what part we can play in meeting each of their education, growth and development needs.

Finally I turn to the question of better financing of our university enterprise. Our present level of funding, particularly on some campuses, is inadequate to support the recent and projected growth in student numbers. While we express considerable gratitude to our governments and to the Caribbean people for the resources with which they have provided us, we shall have to generate much more if we are to build the graduate and innovative research programmes necessary to meet the development needs of our region. I have already presented some strategies for generation of new funds, including creation of a business that provides technical advisory services, and generation of research funds on a competitive basis from a Regional Research Funding Agency. Generation of endowment funds from philanthropic sources provides another major opportunity that should be pursued.
Thanks to the initiative of our three Principals and endowment funding organizations on each of our three main campuses, sizeable gifts have been generated for those campuses. However, we have not gone outside the region in a coordinated manner for more funds. I am in the process of creating an Institutional Advancement team within the Vice Chancellery to generate more philanthropic gifts for our University from outside the region. This team will include an alumni representative, as well as marketing capacity. The wonderful story of our whole University needs to be told more effectively to audiences both outside and within the region, hence, the need for marketing skills.

There are those who tell me that some of our alumni do not feel a kinship or that they even feel resentment to the UWI and will not give back to their alma mater. I say to those alumni, Sing AULD LANG SYNE to your resentments! You are now walking with graduates of The University of the West Indies, so you can step securely in this company of excellence. Hold your heads up and walk proudly, because the company you now keep includes the kings, princes, and the noblemen of Caribbean achievement and scholarship. Go with pride in this grand gathering! Do yourselves a favour! Stand up and be proud. Work and strive so that you can truly claim a place of honour in this august parade! In making these statements to those less than enthusiastic alumni, let me also whisper a little something to some of you kings and noblemen graduates out there – please volunteer a little of your time to give a pep talk here or there to alumni groups. Make the Pelican pin part of your wardrobe! You too should contribute to the endowment fund. Kings, princes and noblemen, you are all accountable for the success of our institution. I wish to acknowledge and congratulate our Chancellor, Sir George Alleyne, for the energy, enthusiasm, and entrepreneurship he has brought to the task of re-invigorating our alumni association and in his attempt to contact all of our 70,000 graduates. I pledge to stand shoulder to shoulder with him in this effort.

On a planned trip in the USA a few months ago, I met a prominent UWI graduate now resident in the USA. He said to me, “you are taking on a challenge” – he paused and then went on, “an extraordinary challenge”. Today if I met him I would say – “you may see extraordinary challenges, but I see extraordinary opportunities”. I know I can count on the enthusiastic support of our Vice Chancellors Emeriti, Professor the Honourable Rex Nettleford and Sir Alister McIntyre; on our Chancellor Sir George Alleyne; and Chancellor Emeritus Sir Shridath Ramphal; I can look to Mrs. Joy Pilgrim -- the lady with 50 years of university
experience – to tell me where the skeletons are hidden and what treacherous paths to avoid. I know that our campuses are led by some of the most entrepreneurial and visionary individuals in the Caribbean, including our Principals, Bhoendradatt Tewarie of St Augustine, Hilary Beckles of Cave Hill, Kenneth Hall of Mona and Lawrence Carrington of our School of Continuing Studies and Distance Education. I know that I can count on scholars such as Pro Vice Chancellor Professor Elsa Leo-Rhynie, Professor Marlene Hamilton and many more. I can look to the numerous others that I have met outside of the walls of the University for assistance, Prime Ministers, Ministers, business and other civic leaders, and members of the public. With few exceptions, they have not only welcomed me warmly but have provided a fount of knowledge and information and just generous good friendship and camaraderie.

In the book by Richard Florida entitled “The Rise of the Creative Class”, the following statement is made:

“We live in a time of great promise and unparalleled opportunity in which creativity will be the key that will determine if the promise will be fulfilled. We have evolved economic and social systems that tap creativity and make use of it as never before... there are unparalleled opportunities to raise our living standards, build a more humane and sustainable economy and make our lives complete ... there is no guarantee that this promise will come to fruition. It can just as easily go unfulfilled.”

Our Caribbean society must mobilize itself to ensure that the promise of this new age will be fulfilled for us and our children. Our University must mobilize itself to be the rocket that will play a central role in propelling our region into sustained development in the 21st century. We can be the fulcrum that can tip the scales in favour of higher living standards, a more sustainable economy and away from poverty, violent crime, avoidable communicable diseases and destitution from natural disasters.

I am glad I have come back to assist in this effort to mobilize our institution to enhance regional transformation. I have come accompanied in spirit by good friends and colleagues, many of whom are here today. By the love and support of my siblings - Alexis, Denise, and Michael, my uncle, Jan Carew, aunt, Sheila Thorpe, my dad, Wilson Harris, and by the hope and promise in the eyes of my dearest children Zaman, Tamia, and Sandhya.
I have come back accompanied always by the memory of Granny Dingwall and by Mother Carew, forever saying “Nigel, the book! Books are what are most important!”

I have come back accompanied always by the memory of my mother, Cicely, who 41 years after her death walks faithfully with all her four children, comforting us in defeat, urging us on in difficult times and cheering for us in moments of triumph!

I have come with my wife at my side - companion, confidante, and best friend; her good sense, her courage, her resourcefulness and critical support serving to ensure that our children and I will always walk with assurance, with assertiveness, and in confidence.

I am thankful that I have been granted in the middle years of my life, the chance to ground again with my brothers and sisters in the Caribbean. I am thankful I can walk on the beautiful beaches, dip in the inviting waters, listen to the tumbling tides, and know for certain, that this is my proud heritage, my hearth and my home!

It is with this I accept the charge to become Vice Chancellor so that I may help to sustain and preserve these most beautiful jewels – our Caribbean -- in the global garland. I pledge that I shall work with my colleagues to ensure that our University will enhance our efforts to nurture, cherish, and protect our lands, and the seas in which they are anchored, for all time to come!