



THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES
Chancellor's Inaugural Address
Installation Ceremony, Saturday, March 15, 2025
Cave Hill Campus, Barbados

Ladies and gentlemen,

In the summer of 1989, as a new employee of the then Barbados Mutual, I played a cricket match against the University of the West Indies (UWI). It was during this match that I first encountered the Vice Chancellor. Those who knew Sir Hilary's formidable personality at the time would understand when I say that our meeting was both verbally intense and physically spirited. Of course, I played a modest part in those exchanges. Anyone observing that match could have easily assumed we were the least likely individuals to collaborate, yet over the past three decades, the Vice Chancellor and I have found common ground on many issues, none more so than in our shared commitment to the development of UWI.

Fast forward to early 2024, as I began to settle into retirement, I briefly entertained the delightful thought of finally immersing myself in the long list of books I had accumulated over the years. But then came Sir Hilary, and 16 graduations later, here we are this evening.

Honorable Prime Minister Mottley, Distinguished Prime Ministers, Ministers of Local and Regional Governments, Esteemed guests, ladies and gentlemen, good evening.

I have always held the UWI in the highest regard and could not easily ignore its call to serve. It is with deep humility and immense honor that I accepted the appointment as the 7th Chancellor of the University of the West Indies. I am profoundly aware of the incredible contributions of my predecessors—whose legacies have impacted the world, the Region, and this University. My greatest aspiration is to uphold the remarkable standards they have established.

This evening's theme resonates deeply with me. Having spent over three decades in corporate life, this role represents a new innings, and in an environment that is somewhat unfamiliar. Like any seasoned cricketer, I will take my guard, assess the field, and observe the conditions before making any bold plays.

For me, tonight's theme extends beyond personal new beginnings; it is about development and the critical role of education in fostering progress.

Education is among the most valuable gifts a nation can bestow upon its citizens. It not only elevates individual self-esteem but also significantly contributes to societal well-being. As the late Nelson Mandela wisely stated, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to

change the world.” Beyond this philosophical view, there is substantial research in support of the strong connection between education and economic growth.

The ties between education and development—both economic and social—are multifaceted and far-reaching. It fuels economic growth by equipping individuals with the knowledge, skills, and competencies needed to thrive in the workforce. An educated population drives productivity, innovation, and the emergence of new industries, resulting in job creation and improved incomes. Such economic progress enhances living standards, alleviates poverty and inequality.

On a societal level, education fosters social cohesion and inclusivity. It equips individuals with critical thinking skills, encourages diverse perspectives, and promotes informed decision-making. By doing so, it strengthens communities, enhances civic engagement, and fortifies democratic institutions. Moreover, it has the power to dismantle social barriers, reduce prejudice, and cultivate mutual respect among different groups.

An educated population is the cornerstone of a thriving nation. As highlighted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), developing nations increasingly dedicate significant resources to education. This strategy enables these countries to strengthen their capacity for scientific advancement and economic improvement. Furthermore, it often plays a vital role in shaping and preserving a sense of national identity and independence. It therefore transcends mere economic metrics like GDP and interest rates, encompassing broader sociocultural dimensions essential to national progress.

Education is, undeniably, a linchpin of both economic and social development. Investing in education is not only a moral obligation but a strategic necessity for sustainable growth.

I had the privilege during the 2024 graduation ceremonies to witness firsthand the pride and accomplishment etched on the faces of our graduates as they crossed the stage. For many, it was the culmination of sacrifice and resilience, with several being the first in their families to earn a degree. I also saw the joy radiating from the parents, guardians, and friends who celebrated with them—often loudly and proudly. These moments brought into sharp focus the profound impact of education on not only individuals but entire families and communities.

The UWI, with a student roll of near 50,000, a faculty of close to 6,000, two noble laureates and several Prime Ministers and heads of state, stands out as a beacon of excellence in the Caribbean. For over 70 years, it has nurtured generations of leaders while preserving and advancing our shared cultural heritage. No other institution provides our students with the unique combination of academic excellence, cultural alignment, and shared experience that UWI offers. It is ranked within the top 5% of all universities globally. We must recognize our university as the cornerstone of regional development and a vital investment in our collective future.

Last year, as I assumed the role of Chancellor, several individuals took the opportunity to share their views and concerns about the University of the West Indies (UWI). These ranged from critiques of outdated teaching methodologies to the suggestion that some graduates may not be fully equipped to meet the demands of a modern, competitive society. While I acknowledge that there may be some validity to these concerns, I also recognize that UWI remains globally celebrated for the excellence of its research and its highly regarded academic programs. It is evident that a disconnect exists between UWI's remarkable achievements and the public's perception of the institution. To the extent that these concerns have merit, I urge both the public and private sectors to engage meaningfully with the University, as their collaboration is vital for identifying and addressing these challenges. UWI has educated the majority of our region's leaders, executives,

public servants, and workforce. It is therefore our collective responsibility to safeguard the standards that the region rightfully deserves. As Chancellor, I am committed to encouraging and facilitating these essential engagements.

From my early interactions with the dedicated men and women of UWI, it is clear that the institution is not oblivious to the need for constant improvement. This understanding is embedded in the strategic plan currently being implemented, which acknowledges the importance of evolving to meet new demands. While education remains fundamentally an academic endeavor, the plan emphasizes the necessity of robust internal governance and efficient organizational processes. These planned improvements, aligned with global best practices, will strengthen the University and enhance its contributions to the region.

As Caribbean citizens, we have a duty to champion and support our regional institutions, even when they face challenges. Institutions such as West Indies Cricket, the Caribbean Development Bank, the Caribbean Court of Justice, and UWI are indispensable pillars of our society. When these institutions falter or do not meet expectations, our focus should be on rebuilding and strengthening them, rather than indulging in criticism or attempting to devalue their significance. Furthermore, we must resist the temptation to prioritize national interests over regional unity when assessing them. Having spent much of my professional life leading a regional organization, I have seen firsthand the inclination to default to local priorities. While this tendency is understandable, the strength of our region lies in our collective action. My experience supports the principle that we achieve more together than we do apart. As Science Officer Spock from *Star Trek* aptly puts it, “The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few or the one.”

I equally am aware of the economic challenges that our countries have faced, and in some cases continue to endure. The allocation of limited resources is undoubtedly a daily challenge for our governments. Within this context, contributions to UWI may sometimes appear burdensome. However, I urge you to view these allocations not as expenditures but as strategic investments in our region’s long-term well-being. UWI, for its part, is committed to improving its governance and internal structures to enhance its revenue-earning capacity and reduce reliance on member governments.

In this regard, I observed that the funding model for the UWI is centered around the university as an undergraduate teaching institution. This is an important foundation, however the opportunities for order of magnitude change for our region will likely come from graduate research, which largely go unfunded. I appeal to the private sector in particular to engage with the University, gain an appreciation for its portfolio of globally recognized research and assist the UWI in moving many of these excellent projects to commercial viability.

Alumni associations also play an essential role in sustaining universities and building resilience. These organizations create a vital link between graduates and their alma mater, fostering a sense of community and loyalty that extends well beyond graduation day. I look forward to working with the UWI alumni associations to build an enduring community for the benefit of our entire UWI family.

To the students now and in the future, university life is an important phase in your development. Immerse yourself in all that it has to offer. The UWI provides a rich tapestry of Caribbean culture and opportunities to network, build lasting friendships. I have heard stories from many of our leaders both in the Public and Private sector of their rich experiences; Barbadians studying in Jamaica or Trinidadians and students from the Eastern Caribbean studying in Barbados. It is these stories that remind us of the need for the certainty of the Caribbean Community, and it starts with your experience at the UWI.

Ladies and gentlemen, the global environment today is increasingly hostile to the development aspirations of nations like ours. Economic crises, the pandemic, and rising geopolitical tensions have fostered isolationism, with many countries closing both their economic and physical borders and turning inward. As our Prime Minister The Hon Mia Mottley rightly observes, "the old-world order is dying, and the emerging new world order is untidy and as yet unclear." As a region, we must prepare to navigate this uncertainty and position ourselves to compete and in the new global environment. Institutions like UWI will play a central role in equipping us for this transition.

Today, the development challenges of health, education, food security, and poverty alleviation remain critically important and relevant. However, these must now be addressed within a broader context of urgency: the need for climate adaptation and resilience. If ever there was a time that demanded global cohesion and cooperation, it is now. Yet, regrettably, the tides seem to be shifting in the opposite direction.

At home in the Caribbean, we are grappling with another significant challenge: rising levels of crime and senseless violence. The causes may be debated, but the consequences are painfully clear. Some have theorized that our institutions are failing young men, who fall by the proverbial wayside and ultimately gravitate to crime. In this regard, I noted with interest that at our 2024 graduation ceremonies, more than 80% of the graduates were women—a trend seen globally as well as regionally. While I do not claim a direct link between these graduating patterns and the rise in crime, it does invite deeper inquiry into how we can better support all members of our society. UWI remains committed to understanding and addressing this critical issue, as it is imperative to curb this troubling trend and promote social cohesion.

An educated population is therefore essential for the economic, social, and psychological development of the Caribbean. This is fundamental to the cause independence. We must remove any remaining shackles of colonialism and assert our rightful place in the world—not by invitation, but by our inherent right to be there. Only then can we fully realize the promise of independence. The University of the West Indies, with its focus on development and social justice, will continue to play its part in this journey, and I ask for your unwavering support for this vital institution.

Allow me to express my gratitude to my family, who graciously delayed my retirement plans so I could serve as Chancellor. To my friends, thank you for your encouragement and support. To my predecessors, Sir George Alleyne and Mr. Robert Bermudez, I am deeply grateful for your kind words and open offer of assistance. And to Vice Chancellor Sir Hilary Beckles, Lady Beckles, the UWI Registrar, Bursar, Principals, management, and staff, thank you for making my transition into this role seamless and meaningful.

Ladies and gentlemen, as we journey through life, we never walk alone. There are always seen and unseen hands guiding our way. We are all beneficiaries of this divine providence, and when called to serve, we must rarely decline.

And now, as the umpires remove the bails, signaling the close of my innings this evening, I thank you for being a part of this new chapter. May the light continue to shine from the West.

Dr. the Most Hon. Dodridge D. Miller, FB, FCCA, MBA, LL.M., LL.D. (Hon) UWI