



Presentation by

The Rt. Hon. Perry G. Christie
Prime Minister

The Commonwealth of The Bahamas

On The Occasion Of

University of The Bahamas

**The Inaugural President's Distinguished
Lecture Series**

Wednesday, 22nd March 2017

***'AN ESSENTIAL PARTNERSHIP FOR
INCREDIBLE TIMES'***

***- The Significance of Caricom for The
Bahamas' National Development -***

Mr. President and Members of The Council:

Just four months ago, we gathered to celebrate The Charter Day of the University of The Bahamas.

This evening, I am pleased by the honour you have bestowed upon me by inviting me to give the Inaugural Lecture in the President's Lecture Series. This is a special honour, one which I shall cherish long after the occasion.

Let me thank you, Mr. President, for your leadership here at the University. Please convey to your colleagues including the Council and the students my profound thanks for the role which the University is playing in the development of our country. National Development in its truest sense could not be possible without this University. I hereby renew our government's commitment to the University and I look forward to continuing with the shepherding of its success and growth.

Distinguished Colleagues, Guests, Faculty and Students, Ladies and Gentlemen: we live in interesting times.

The world - our world - is changing at an almost dizzying pace.

We know this; we hear it; we even say it ourselves.

But thrown about as a cliché, as though Change is just an expression of current trends, is to disguise the fact that the implications of the current Changes are enormous.

I'm talking about the big changes, the profound changes, the ones which, for good or ill, touch us all. The changes which not only affect the way we go about our lives, but also impact our relationships and reach into our own sense of self.

You have invited me to speak tonight on the topic: ***The Significance of Caricom for The Bahamas' National Development*** -

It is plain and obvious on its face that Caricom is central to the national development of The Bahamas. We are a nation of islands, insular, but not alone. We are a part of a community and we act in our national interests in a community of nations. That is axiomatic. Caricom is that community.

It is essential that we in The Bahamas strengthen our partnership with our Caricom brethren, in order to secure and maximise the potential of our own national development.

That has been central to the foreign policy of my government and I dare to say successive Governments of The Bahamas.

This touches and concerns all areas of national life from education, to commerce and tourism, to financial services and international trade, to culture and sports. We have been part of what has been called the Caricom project, even as we celebrate our own sovereignty now for some 43 years.

I have spoken to this before, and I want to revisit what I said when I spoke in Trinidad and Tobago at the University of the West Indies in 2014 at another

distinguished lecture. I quoted from the announcement by my predecessor Sir Lynden Pindling when we joined Caricom in 1983:

I quote:

Caricom is the principal institution of Caribbean integration and cooperation and is responsible for the consolidation and strengthening of the bonds which have historically existed among Caribbean people.

It represents the common determination of the government of Caricom countries to fulfil the hopes and aspirations of their peoples for full employment and improvement in standards of work and living.

Caricom is the medium through which concerned governments expect to attain most rapidly the optimum utilization of available human and natural resources of the region by accelerated, coordinated and sustained economic development, particularly through the exercise of permanent sovereignty over the natural resources by the efficient operation of common services and functional cooperation in the social cultural education and technological fields; and by a common front in relation to the external world.

Although The Bahamas will be joining the Caribbean Community it will not have membership in the Caribbean Common market which is a separate organ of the Community established under an annex to the treaty.

There are a number of institutions associated with the Caribbean Community of which The Bahamas is a member or has participated in for a number of years. Some of these associate institutions include the Caribbean Development Bank, which The Bahamas joined in 1969; The University of the West Indies at which Bahamians have studied and which now maintains the Faculty of Hotel Management Training in The Bahamas and the Council of Legal Education.”

Tonight in this venue, I propose to revisit some of the aspects of policy which are central to our national development and show you how these are advanced, have been advanced and can be advanced by the functional cooperation which we now enjoy with our Caricom neighbours.

Nothing has changed with regard to Caricom and our rationale for being a member from 1983 to now. This policy as you will come to learn has stood the test of time.

The future leaders of our country, who are forming their ideas now in this University and sitting in this room, who are hearing me by live stream, would do well to read and inwardly digest, because it will be for you to carry this forward. I commend it to you. I say it is a good work.

I want to talk about the functional cooperation. That is the lynchpin of our membership.

Functional cooperation is how The Bahamas participates in Caricom. We coordinate our foreign policy with our Caricom neighbours. We are not a part of the single market and economy, nor are we a part of the Caribbean Court of Justice.

This allows us the maximum exercise of sovereignty while reaping the benefits of close cooperation and dialogue.

I turn to cooperation on **National Security**:

All of our law enforcement officers, the Commissioner of Police, the Commodore of the Defence Force and the Customs Comptroller and the Director of Immigration meet regularly with their counterparts of Caricom on what is called CONSLE. They plan common strategy. There is IMPACs which provides for our common security and for access to a common data base across the region and the United States. This helps our border security. Our Attorneys General and Ministers of National Security meet annually to discuss matters of common concern and to discern common threats and exchange views on best practices.

I turn to **Climate Change**

The Bahamas joined with Caricom in order to plot the Climate Change agreement in Paris in December of 2014. This was a land mark agreement and it would not in my view have been possible unless CARICOM joined its 14 votes with the other Small Island Developing States (SIDS) around the world to indicate the serious and existential nature of the threat of climate change to our nations. Our national development, indeed our very existence was threatened and is threatened by climate change.

We have seen two major hurricanes in the last year. Our country's national budget was thrown off course by over 400 million dollars of additional funding that had to be found to recover from the hurricanes that passed through our waters. This promises to be an even greater threat. So our voices must be heard.

Financial Services

In the area of financial services where we have the second largest contributor to our economies, we have been working together with our Caricom neighbours to ensure that the present attempts to de-legitimize this sector of our economies is stopped. Our Attorney General has headed the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force which reviews all the legal regimes throughout the region and ensures that best international practices are adhered to.

That is why we are working together now on the current efforts in the developed world mainly the United States of America to stop our banks from being able to trade across national platforms in US dollars on the grounds that our nations provide too great a risk for their financial services sector.

This is being done in concert with all CARICOM countries. I am certain that The Bahamas standing alone would not be heard as powerfully and as forcefully as we are if we were not advocating our interest within the CARICOM context.

I turn now to **Tourism**.

It is in Tourism that The Bahamas is a leader. The late Sir Lynden Pindling was able to secure the Tourism Management School of the University of The West Indies in the Bahamas back in 1983. He argued to his colleagues then that The Bahamas was

the leader in Tourism and so the school should be in The Bahamas. His colleagues agreed.

The University of the West Indies intends to remain in The Bahamas. Their plans include the construction of new facilities towards ensuring that the UWI Campus and the Tourism Management School remains in The Bahamas.

At the recent Heads of Government meeting in Guyana, the Caribbean Tourism Organization adopted a platform which was a result of the leadership of The Bahamas. This platform committed all of our countries to ensuring that tourism cooperation is front and centre across the Caricom region whether it is the sun sand and sea of the island states or the eco-tourism of the land based CARICOM states. We pledge to work together. It was our country's argument that was accepted by the Leaders of CARICOM that tourism should be on the agenda of every Heads of Government meeting. I head the Tourism and Cultural Industries in the quasi Cabinet in Caricom.

It is important for this cooperation to continue because it is clear that the world sees the Region as one, and we can develop synergies by working together to lower costs, to ensure greater safety and security, to ensure best practices, to ensure that services are improved, and that our young people have a multinational platform across which they can work in the sector.

Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen,

It is important for me to say that we must pay particular attention to our young people.

When I spoke at the University of the West Indies 2014, I reminded the audience, as I do now and as I do on almost every occasion, of the need to ensure that our young people get the opportunity across the region to participate in the benefits of the economies of our countries.

Sadly, crime violence and unemployment are what we see too often affect young people. This did not just happen overnight. It happened because we did not pay sufficient attention to the development of youth across our nations in our public policy and in our education systems. We, perhaps, accepted that youth development in society would be organic but we know today that it must be done through deliberate policies aimed at youth development.

We must take the steps to ensure that the dysfunctions in society amongst young people, the exposure of violence and conflict declines and ceases.

I am particularly concerned about the issue of young males and the social issues which seem to affect them greatly whether through accidents or by homicide.

You ask yourself the question: why do the women continue to outshine them in school and across the economy? In this institution, the University of the Bahamas, the ratio is perhaps as high as three females to one male. This has all sorts of implications and ramifications for the general society and its development.

The question must, also, be asked is there a link between the educational dysfunction of young males and the exposure to domestic violence among women and society, generally.

That, too, is a central focus of Caricom. There is an urgent necessity for this matter to be addressed by the University of the West Indies and the Pan-Caricom institutions. It must be addressed also by the University of the Bahamas. What are we going to do to save our boys? What are we going to do to ensure the equal participation of our girls and protect them from gender discrimination and domestic violence?

That is what you are called upon at this University to advise governments on. What should be the public policy?

I look forward to your views in the dialogue.

Here is what we, as a Government, have done to tackle the issue of youth development and social dysfunctions affecting young people.

During this term of office we decided to double the investment in education. This has manifested itself many ways but none more clearly than in the number of scholarships that have been provided for education opportunities at the tertiary level. The University of The Bahamas is a beneficiary of that decision. The University itself is an example of our commitment to education.

Back in November, at the Charter Day, I set out what I described as a 'Road' to the possibilities of the University of The Bahamas: the responsibility to help shape national identity; to live fully the values of the institution in the pursuit of Knowledge and Truth, and in the exercise of Integrity; to be relevant and also to do good work while exercising good governance.

In these early years of the transition, while the University's culture and practices become embedded, it is crucial that the ambition of students and faculty alike, is not limited to being just the next step in higher education.

The country now, rightly, expects much more from you: to engender and promote the kind of creativity, innovation, critical thinking and problem-solving that will provide the foundation of our national life; to develop our brightest and best, who will provide leadership in public and corporate life, in civil society and the community; and, as a matter of public policy, to help create and drive the economic engine to help improve all our lives. It is a tall order. I have no doubt that you will rise to it.

And in return, I make a continuing commitment on behalf of this Government - to build on what we have started: to offer the support necessary for education in our country to flourish.

I would like you to tell us how sports and the creative industries can better be utilized to bring wealth and opportunities to our people. What should we do? What should we invest? How do we do it, particularly, given the fact that we are an Island Nation separated by expanses of ocean. Mr. President, I challenge this University to help provide the answers.

I return to my address at the UWI in 2014 when I said and I quote:

... *“I continue to insist that the greatest form of security for any state is the education and development of its people. Poverty and underdevelopment is the source for instability, unrest and insecurity. Yet, too many developed countries take this region for granted until it is time for us to vote for some cause or other. Then when we do not perform according to the preordained script, we are castigated for being uncooperative. That is why I think the region must engage. The region must leverage what it has in numbers and use its collective voice to make sure that the world understands the stake it has in the region, and what the expectations of the region are. Security, however, is just one aspect which is important to the developed world. The use of our natural resources is another which is important to some of our partners in the developing world. What is important to us, however, is economic growth and development, the development and nurturing of the skills through the education of our people; the support for our cultural heritage; and the facilitation of our business people as they travel the world. Our collective voice must be heard in foreign affairs. This reaffirms one of the principles of the Treaty to which we in Caricom subscribe”.*

I also said and I quote:

“I adverted to the view that some view The Bahamas in relationship to Caricom as a world apart from the region: with one foot in and the other out. Nothing can be further from the truth. However, perceptions persist and I would like to change these perceptions.

I shared at the last Heads of Government meeting the fact that in many areas, my government was inviting professionals to come to The Bahamas to offer advice and expertise on the conduct of Environmental Impact Assessments, to share the results on research and development and to advise on new policies. In my discussions with fellow Heads I discovered a wealth of information and expertise available within the region itself.

Further, when there are shortages of skilled artisans in The Bahamas requiring the country to recruit from outside The Bahamas, the region is the place to which we should be able to look to find workers to supplement our workforce. We both suffer from the lack of proper exchanges about information and development. It is important for us to change these perceptions and for there to be an increased exchange of ideas.

In pursuance of this, I have suggested that at the earliest opportunity, fellow Heads should visit The Bahamas and take the opportunity to meet our people and speak to the issues of the region at an appropriate forum in both Nassau and in Freeport. The University of the West Indies, as the premier regional institution should be front and centre in this interchange. I should not have to look to the University of Florida or the University of Miami alone for the expertise to develop some of our own institutions. As we speak, we are seeking to develop the Bahamas Agricultural and Marine Science Institute (BAMSI). This is being developed in Andros which is the largest island in The

Bahamas. This is a landmass which is larger than the island of Trinidad but with a population of less than fourteen thousand people. We are seeking to make a concerted effort for The Bahamas to develop its agricultural potential, and train farmers and fishermen who will not only conduct research and development but will grow food for our country. This is a determined effort to make the country more self-sufficient in food production.

An expert from the Caribbean was central to developing our ideas on the subject. However, more of this can and should be done.

I think this expertise can be supplied from the region, particularly in the area of tourism which is now the premier industry in the region, supplying billions of dollars to the gross domestic product of the region. Tourism is very much our bread and butter. The University should be front and centre in the forward movement of our tourism product, particularly as the product moves to an even higher end. It should be front and centre in preparing the management talent and in designing synergies so that our countries can develop and obtain more from the tourism product in a sustainable manner.

The all-important area of climate change and the management of the environment is another area where the regional University can help. It clear from the latest report on climate change that unless there is some dramatic turnaround in the policies of consumption on energy we are in for dramatic shifts in the climate: longer drought cycles and more intense rains and hurricanes.

This poses life-changing dangers, especially to low-lying island nations like The Bahamas. If sea level rises over one metre there will be catastrophic consequences. I am advised that in Dominica there is already evidence that the growing cycles are changing because the periods of rainfall are increasing. Our scientists and academics should be front and centre in the management of these issues for us. This should include not only research and development and advice on what we can do to ameliorate the effects of climate change but also how we can get the capital to manage the issues that we face.

I believe in education”.

This brings me to the creative industries.

This government has committed to substantially develop the Cultural Infrastructure of The Bahamas, to fully maximize the potential of the cultural and creative industries in our country.

Here is the scenario we will present: we will set a target of earnings of National Revenue per year, from the Creative Industries.

How is this possible?

The arithmetic is compelling. If each of the approximately five million tourists who visit us annually, if each of them spent an additional \$200, that would bring \$1 billion into the economy.

How would that \$200 be spent? Well, that's cracked conch dinner, some drinks, one or two tours at Clifton Heritage National Park or Fort Fincastle, maybe a Bahamian fashion item and a Junkanoo souvenir. They listen to our music and dance to our rhythms and take them home with them. Our musicians can travel abroad and take our music to the world.

It is said that the Bob Marley estate is the third highest earning estate for music royalties in the world today.

The basic framework of those creative industries is already in place, but by developing the cultural infrastructure, by developing the talent, the skills, the spaces, the economic framework and the supply chains, we can set specific financial targets and then work strategically to achieve them.

The creative industries can provide all this and more, and in the context of Caricom, where we are charged to take the lead, it is the kind of Change we heartily welcome.

As I alluded to a few moments ago, although the economic imperatives strongly motivate the Caricom ideal, so, too, do the social and political dimensions. Socially, throughout the region, we wrestle with very similar challenges, and pursue very similar opportunities. And we all live in the same rapidly-changing world.

How do we deal with a number of Human Rights issues, some of them born out of a lack of social inclusion, others stemming from the weight of illegal immigration that originates from Haiti and other places steeped in poverty?

And what of the Caricom organisation itself, which historically has been woefully under-resourced and under-funded?

Should the organisation widen to one which includes all the countries in the Caribbean Sea, so as to allow Cuba to join our family of nations?

And it is here that I come to the central point of my thesis: because of our current stage of development, and in the context of an uncertain and rapidly-changing world, in order to secure our own future The Bahamas must now boldly step forward onto the world stage, and secure our partnership with Caricom to meet the challenges of our rapidly-changing world. This is not a statement of ambition, but one of developmental necessity.

If we are to mitigate against the effects of climate change, we must purposefully move ahead.

If we must become even more economically self-reliant, we must diversify our economy such that Bahamians are able to export and trade in order to generate wealth.

If we are to secure our borders, we must have the wherewithal and the influence to do so.

If we are to seize the opportunities presented by Cuba and other Caribbean countries, we must seek to enable Bahamians to become direct foreign investors elsewhere.

If we are to maximise the benefits of our bloc of votes at the United Nations and in other international settings, we must ensure that our interests are well-served by leveraging those votes for the best interests of the region.

We must be prepared to tell the Caricom story: a story of the common features of our peoples, from Bermuda to Suriname, an idea described by Minister Mitchell as one “born from the genetics of the people themselves”.

And partnership requires that we must both lead and follow, walking with our Caribbean brothers and sisters.

To be an effective leader you may have to be the brave one, striking out ahead, cutting down the trees in front of you in order to clear a path for others to follow.

At other times you have to lead from behind, encouraging everyone else to rise to their full potential, to cast aside their fears, and trust that you are covering their backs.

Having committed so much of my life in public service, I can tell you that relationships matter. We must invest in them wisely.

This is especially true on the international stage.

Amongst fellow world leaders, Ministers of Foreign Affairs and so on - there must be ‘chemistry’, that indefinable ‘something’ whereby they understand you to be representing the will of your people.

They must know you to be a man of your word.

They must know you as someone in whom they can place their confidence.

Whether it has been while speaking at the United Nations, in my role as Chairman of Caricom, meeting with His Holiness, Pope Francis, or with President Barack Obama, I have sought to keep the Bahamas at the forefront of regional and international conversations to promote the best interests of our country.

My Charge to you is that this is now what our country must do.

This is what we all must do.

And it is tied up in the very essence of Education: the ‘leading out’, the ‘sculpting’, the ‘molding’.

The University must lead.

The private sector must lead.

Civil society must lead.

As these organizations grow and mature, they must not just be against things, but be a part of the solution.

As a country, we cannot afford to remain inward-looking, to be solely concerned merely with the ebb and flow of our daily lives.

We must look to the bigger picture, for painted there are the bigger opportunities, the bigger solutions.

And so this is the significance of Caricom for the national development of The Bahamas: a clarion call to full partnership, an invitation to stand tall, and take on the mantle of responsibility to help determine our lives into the twenty-second century and beyond.

Last week, one of the great Caribbean Men of Letters passed away.

Sir Derek Walcott from St Lucia, was a literary giant, a Nobel Prize-winning poet and playwright. Along with Rex Nettleford from Jamaica, he helped to shape and define the cultural landscape of our region.

It was Sir Derek who in his adaptation of *'The Odyssey'*, reminded us that:

"The future happens. No matter how much we scream."

Let ours be the future that we determine.

Mr. President, Council Members of the University, Faculty and Students, Ladies and Gentlemen: I pray inspiration upon you, and once again, I thank you.

Thank you.