



**Address by**

**The Rt. Hon. Perry G. Christie  
Prime Minister and Minister of Finance**

**On the Occasion of  
The Charter Day of the University of  
The Bahamas**

***"From the Road to Transition to the  
Road of Possibilities:***

***The Role of the University of The  
Bahamas in National Development"***

**Thursday, 10<sup>th</sup> November 2016**

Protocol having been established, I extend warm congratulations to you, President Smith, the faculty, staff and student body, and greetings to all the distinguished ladies and Gentlemen, especially our illustrious visitors, who have come together in joyous convocation today to mark the official inauguration of the University of The Bahamas.

In all my 40 odd years of public life, I am challenged to think of another occasion that can match this one in terms of the promise it encapsulates for the future of our country as an intellectual powerhouse for our region and, of infinitely greater consequence, as a fertile ground for the fulfillment of the highest academic aspirations of our nation's youth.

This day has been long in coming. It has been in incubation for many a long year.

But it has at last arrived! And for that we must recognize this occasion as a time of thanksgiving; thanksgiving to Almighty God, of course, but also for the successive generations of policy makers, public servants, educational executives and administrators, successive Chairmen and members of the COB Council, teachers and COBUS representatives, and leaders of civil society who in their time and in their own way have played a role in bringing the University of The Bahamas to a functioning reality.

I think especially of those who are no longer with us but who are highly placed in our collective remembrance today because of the pivotal role they played in laying, and then securing, the foundations for the institution we officially inaugurate today.

I call to mind successive Prime Ministers and successive Ministers of Education in the successive governments we have had over the past 40 years and more.

I also call to mind and pay tribute to the successive Principals and Presidents of the College of The Bahamas, in particular, the late Dr. Keva Bethel who was COB's fourth Principal and first President - and later the first President Emerita - of an autonomous College of The Bahamas. Her contribution to the growth and development of COB and, in particular, the foundational work for the University can never be overstated. She was for many years the public face of COB and its primary standard bearer.

The inspired leadership she consistently demonstrated and the standards of academic excellence that she always sought to apply throughout her tenure as Principal and College President continue to reverberate. She was a lady of great accomplishment to whom we all owe a tremendous debt of gratitude. I know that she must be looking down on this glorious day with rapturous delight and satisfaction.

But I don't stop there. I extend my praise to all the Principals and Presidents of COB we have had over the years from the beginning to now.

Without in any way derogating from the contributions of others, may I also single out for special mention this morning our current President, Dr. Rodney Smith, to whom has fallen the singular and historic honour of presiding over the completed transition of the College to University status.

Like the College itself, Dr. Smith's own travels to this important milestone have not been without bumps and bruises along the way.

But I have always had tremendous faith in this exceptionally gifted and visionary man who has embraced the mission of the University of The Bahamas with such passion and steadfast purpose and with such administrative competence as well.

Dr. Smith: I commend you for the outstanding commitment that you have demonstrated in bringing us to this point of transition to University status, and to that I add my assurances to you and your colleagues of the full support of the government, and of my personal support, as you go about the vitally important business of making the new University a viable institution in the life of our nation in the years and decades and centuries to come.

And let me say on that note, ladies and gentlemen, that this is a moment of immense personal satisfaction for me as well. I believe in the University of The Bahamas and have long been committed to its actualization. I would be grateful, therefore, if you would allow me to spend just a few minutes to speak to my own vision for the University of The Bahamas in the context of our national development strategies and goals.

### **The Road to Possibilities**

The core role of a National University goes well beyond the inculcation of subject-knowledge in its students. More fundamentally, a National University helps to shape National Identity.

What you teach, research, lecture on and discuss here at the University of The Bahamas will help determine, in no small way, the destiny of The Commonwealth of The Bahamas of the future. The responsibility that this involves is therefore immense for you, administrators, professors, lecturers, and students alike. It is neither an exaggeration nor anything in the least bit melodramatic when I say that you are shaping the future of The Bahamas for generations to come.

As a University committed to academic excellence, it will be of the first importance that you commit yourselves to the values and best practices of research, study, teaching and scholastic writing. In this regard, you must forego all short-cuts and unwholesome compromises that would only weaken the new University's reputation both at home and abroad and, in so doing, cause the University to fall short of the high standards expected of it. Indeed, the values that form the aspirational cornerstone of the University of The Bahamas - Knowledge, Truth and Integrity – must not be abstract or fanciful but must instead represent the values that truly inform and guide the teaching and research faculty in all their endeavours.

At the University of The Bahamas, much of what is done must revolve around the respect and care for students, and their potential for innovation and creativity.

In The Bahamas, we sit at the cross roads to the Americas – between the north and south. Our development model has focused on openness – from trade in services in tourism and financial services to trade in goods. We trade with our brain power, we attract through our culture, and sustain ourselves with our productivity.

It is our fervent hope that the University will take its place as a leader of international education – attracting students from around the world to study in The Bahamas while at the same time attracting specialist researchers and professors as well.

Nurturing the University of The Bahamas' community must also continue to involve the promotion of creativity and innovation. Students must leave the University with the confidence that they can create something, take advantage of opportunities, become specialist professionals or entrepreneurs, enter the national stage as political or business leaders – or all of the above!

Our National University must also play a catalytic role in the development of arts and culture. The College of The Bahamas has consistently produced some of the truly outstanding artists of our times. Lillian Blades, Tavares Strachan and Jessica Colebrooke, amongst others, are all exemplars of this. The University must, however, redouble its efforts, and work on building a Fine Arts programme.

Students must have the proper facilities to work in and this should include a modern, state-of-the art performing arts theatre; a musical conservatory; and ample studio space. The nation will increasingly be looking to the University of The Bahamas to provide the public with a robust and active arts calendar.

There is a growing public appetite for more musical concerts, dance performances, plays, poetry recitals, book readings, and art shows, to meet our need for these finer pleasures.

The civilizing effect that such cultural experiences can have on the nation should not be underestimated. With a greater focus on the Arts, we will have the capacity to expose our young children to a wider range of artistic expression on a more consistent basis.

When creativity and cultural diversity and artistic expression is nurtured in the way that I have suggested, our humanity is deepened, our contemplative study of who we are is facilitated, our appreciation of the constituent ingredients of the Bahamian soul and ethos is developed exponentially, and, in the final result, we are immeasurably, if intangibly, enriched as a people.

#### **A. Be Relevant**

The University must be a place of relevance within both the national and global contexts. It is, therefore, critical that a University not only “Respond to national needs,” but also “Engage the country” in meaningful discussions. The University must continue to have a voice in matters of national and global importance.

For this reason, the right of academic freedom must always be jealously protected, and solid research, through well-resourced centres, must be encouraged and supported as well. We must encourage the students and faculty of the University of The Bahamas to be at the forefront of the national discussion, and to expand the horizons of our knowledge in all disciplines of study.

Of particular importance to our country is the need for research in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). Through the STEM subjects we venture into so many disciplines that are critical to long-term planning for the future well being of our country.

The recent hurricanes, Joaquin and Matthew, have also rudely reminded us that the University must continue its scholarly research and studies into climate change, especially in relation to the menacing prospect of sea level rise and its implications for the low-lying areas of our archipelago. Courses on Disaster Management with particular reference to pre-hurricane evacuations and post-hurricane recovery and restoration, must also receive special attention. Similarly, issues of urban planning, land use, and non-fossil fuel-based energy diversification must also figure highly in the University's research agenda.

And while on the subject of energy, let me express the hope that the University will soon have a definitive plan to have its entire campus moving forward towards the use of solar energy.

Relevance also means that the University must be cognizant of the needs of the entire country from Inagua in the south to Abaco in the north. We should therefore be able to look forward to an expansion of the system of mini-campuses, research centres and institutes across the country.

**B. Do Good Work while Exercising good governance**

Finally, as the University looks for new opportunities to do good work and expand its horizons, I implore you to remain focused on achieving strong results and operating accordingly to the principles and best practices of accountability.

**Conclusion**

I know that the University of The Bahamas (UB) is not a finished canvas. There is still much work to be done. More partnerships remain to be made; new programmes remain to be dreamt of and brought to life; and greater expansion across our country and into the region will continue to challenge us.

But, today, more than any other time before, I am supremely confident that all our dreams and aspirations for the University of The Bahamas will in the fullness of time be realized.

To our nation's youth, let me say finally that through the work we have undertaken on the National Development Plan, we in the political leadership of our nation remain resolute in our commitment to the progressive, orderly and rational development of our nation and its resources. We invite you, therefore, to partner with us as we collectively work towards the building of a better, more modern, more relevant, more upwardly striving and sustainable Bahamas. This is the promise of the people of my generation to yours.

We ask you to seize this opportunity to be a transformational participant in the history of The Bahamas that is in the making.

In the words of our beloved National Anthem:

***“Lift up your head to the rising sun, Bahamaland  
March on to glory, your bright banners waving high.  
See how the world marks the manner of your bearing!  
Pledge to excel through love and unity.”***

May the Lord our God, who covers The Bahamas from shoal to shoal, guide and protect the University of The Bahamas and her stewards and students.

And may Almighty God continue to bless the Commonwealth of The Bahamas!

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