

UWI-ALJGSB 2015 Graduation Ceremony*

FEATURE ADDRESS

“This is Your Moment”

Presented by

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**Hyatt Regency Ballroom
Wrightson Road, Port of Spain, Trinidad**

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“This is Your Moment”

[salutations]

I must begin by saying what an honour it is to be invited to address the 2015 graduating class of the Arthur Lok Jack Graduate School of Business. The theme of my presentation is “This is Your Moment.” This is a theme which is fitting not only for today’s graduation exercise but also for the climate of the times. We have just entered a new year and at this time of year, it is customary to engage in a process of introspection and reflection. A New Year is symbolic of a clean slate, a fresh start, a new dawn. It presents an opportunity to make a positive change on a personal and societal level. Hence the concept of New Year’s resolutions. Similar sentiments attend a graduation exercise where a new batch of students, armed with their certificates head out into the world to make a positive contribution to the development of the society by putting their new found knowledge and skills to practical use. This is indeed your moment to make your mark in the world.

My aim today is to impart some words of wisdom to assist you in your journey. While this is your moment, the nub of the issue is what will you do with it? In searching for the

answer, I want to urge you to abide by four central principles: strive for the impossible, hold fast to your integrity, contribute to the Caribbean and live in the moment.

This is your moment to strive for the impossible. The most successful people in the history of the world are those who refused to give up in the face of impossible odds. Thomas Edison created the light bulb after one thousand failed attempts. Abraham Lincoln ran for public office six times before winning the Presidency. Vincent Van Gogh sold one painting in his lifetime and his most expensive work is now valued at \$142.7 million. Colonel Sanders' idea for a fried chicken restaurant was rejected 1009 times before being accepted by an investor. Twelve publishers rejected JK Rowling's book about a boy wizard called Harry Potter. Oprah Winfrey was fired from her first job and told she was not the right fit for television. What makes these people great is their refusal to give up on their dreams. I want to warn you that success is not for the faint of heart. It requires the resolute determination to pursue what often seems impossible. According to a Japanese proverb you must be prepared to fall seven times and get up eight. The great Muhammed Ali put it best when he said:

“Impossible is just a big word thrown around by small men who find it easier to live in the world they've been given than to explore the power they have to change it. Impossible is not a fact. It's an opinion. Impossible is not a declaration. It's a dare. Impossible is potential. Impossible is temporary. Impossible is nothing.”

This is your moment to hold fast to your integrity. In today's world we are witnessing a breakdown in morals and ethics at all levels. Corruption and underhanded dealings are the order of the day. This problem is particularly acute in our Caribbean societies with their small populations and high levels of interconnectedness. It is my firm belief that

the systemic breakdown in integrity is creating a climate for criminality and lawlessness to flourish at all levels of society. I want to urge you to resist the temptation to compromise your integrity in both your personal and professional lives. I understand that persons may scoff at the idea of a principled and ethical businessman, much in the same way that they may deride the idea of a principled and ethical lawyer. However the philanthropic work of famous businessmen such as Warren Buffet and George Soros along with the principled leadership of lawyers such as Mahatma Ghandi and Thurgood Marshall serve to silence the critics. In keeping with their examples we must live our lives, whatever our chosen profession, in keeping with the tenets of honesty and integrity. That is the mark of true leadership. In the pursuit of greatness there are no short cuts, no favouritism, no kickbacks. Rather the road to success is paved with hard work, courage, conviction and integrity.

This is your moment to contribute to the Caribbean region. The region is at a crucial crossroads in its development. The problems of crime and rising violence coupled with the economic and financial woes make for challenging times ahead. We need creative and innovative thinkers to assist in the development of the region. Much too often our region's best and brightest leave our shores in search of greener pastures in more developed countries. Instead we should follow the examples of Sir Arthur Lewis and Dr. Eric Williams; both brilliant scholars who chose to serve their Caribbean people.

In my view, a significant factor which may hold the key to resolving many of the common problems faced by our region is the Caribbean Single Market and Economy.

The CSME as created by the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas (RTC) was designed to operate as a single economic space within which intra-regional business and trade would be fostered and promoted. It is founded on the concepts of the right of establishment, the free movement of persons and services and the movement of capital. The Caribbean Court of Justice is given exclusive jurisdiction over the interpretation and application of the RTC. Thus the Court is poised to play a central role in breathing life into the CSME; a task which it has wholeheartedly embraced in the 16 decisions delivered in its original jurisdiction. The Court has stressed the fundamental importance of the free movement of persons and has consistently acted to ensure that a level playing field is created to foster regional trade. However the Court cannot go it alone. Rather the full promise of the CSME can only be realised through the contribution of those present here today, economists and business people, who are the engine room in the quest for regional integration. Through our combined efforts we can act together to convert the theory of the RTC and the CSME into tangible economic benefits for the region and its citizenry.

This is your moment to live in the moment. The concept of living in the moment lies at the heart of a famous Latin expression (and I am sure you are all well aware of how much lawyers love Latin!) - *carpe diem* which when translated means “seize the day.” A natural corollary of this ideal is that all facets of the human experience must be explored and pursued in equal measure. This is particularly challenging given that we live in a fast paced, stressed filled, technology driven world. In our pursuit of academic and

professional excellence, it is easy to lose sight of life's simple pleasures. So we work hard to acquire more money, a bigger house, a better car, the latest technology. While this is all well and good, we must not fall prey to the trappings of materialism. Rather we must devote equal attention to introspection, to spirituality, to family life, to building relationships and to making a positive contribution to the wider community. In short we must aim to become a better person both inside and out while seizing and maximising the potential that each new day brings.

In closing I urge you to remember the excitement, hope, exhilaration and promise which you feel at this precise moment as you enter a new stage of your lives. I would like to close with a quote from Mahatma Ghandi which encapsulates the essence of the theme of my address - *"Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever."*



The Right Honourable Sir Dennis Byron