

# Haiti, CARICOM and UWI: Rising to the Challenge

## E.Nigel Harris

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E. Nigel Harris

Tonight's chosen topic is "Haiti, its many crises and its place in the Caribbean". My central thesis will be that despite its many crises, the catastrophic earthquake of January 12, 2010, despite its terrible immediate consequences may prove to be the moment of greatest opportunity for Haiti. For the former Imperial powers of Europe and the USA, this is a moment of opportunity unequal to any other to redeem the past wrongs done to Haiti over the past two centuries. Indeed for our global community this is a time when a country so terribly misunderstood and misrepresented can be wrapped into the bosom of the world community with dignity and respect. This is a moment of no less importance for CARICOM, since that organisation can lead the world in bringing Haiti truly into the global fold. It is a moment when CARICOM can expand its reach in a more meaningful way beyond the narrow Anglophone

Caribbean to partner more effectively not only with Haiti but with the Spanish, French and Dutch Caribbean.

Had he been alive today, I am certain that Dr. Eric Williams would have seen possibilities in this moment for both Haiti and the broader Caribbean. While proud to be Trinidadian, his was a vision of an integrated Caribbean, the boundaries of which extended beyond the confines of the Anglophone West Indies. Drawing on a quote from a paper presented by Colin Palmer entitled “Eric Williams and the Continuing Challenge of a Diverse Caribbean,” Eric Williams wrote in 1943:

*“We who have the interests of the West Indies at heart must therefore realise that in the world of the future, the West Indian Islands, if they are to play any part, must cease to think of themselves as island units and must think and plan in terms of a federated West Indian group. Jamaica by itself, Trinidad by itself and I must say Cuba and Puerto Rico by themselves will always be at the economic mercy of the more advanced and more powerful countries of the world.”*

Eric Williams may not have mentioned Haiti but he would certainly have wanted its inclusion in envisioning an integrated, more vibrant and economically robust Caribbean. He would have wanted this because the alternative of our countries existing as proverbial bits of individual rocks afloat in the unforgiving and unloving seas of the world in which we live is an untenable

one. Haiti and other countries in the Caribbean basin are not merely linked geographically, but ours is a shared history and circumstance.

We are peoples transported from Africa, Asia and even parts of Europe to become the enslaved and indentured agents of wealth production for imperial powers of the North. As Eric Williams so persuasively demonstrated, it was the profits from sugar production that drove the industrial revolution and it was the profits of that revolution that contributed to the magnificence and power of Europe and North America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Ours is in many ways a new civilisation of people blended by blood and history, brought forcibly by conquerors from the North to replace a native people whose lives and civilisation had been extinguished in a few decades by the canon, musket and disease – it is upon this bed of genocide and greed that we were first spawned and it was from this place that brave enslaved people of Haiti won their freedom more than two centuries ago – it is true that the escape was followed by two centuries of many tragedies but it was an escape that was nevertheless spiritually redemptive.

I repeat the simple words of the Negro spiritual reputedly sung by Black soldiers fighting in the American Civil war of 1862

Oh Freedom, Oh Freedom

Oh Freedom over me

And before I'll be a slave

I'll be buried in my grave

And go home to my Lord and be free!

One cannot appreciate Haiti today without an appreciation of its unique history, at once magnificent and inspirational but also filled with betrayal and tragedy – it is a story in many ways unparalleled in the New World as we know it. The most important Treatise on the Haitian Revolution is that written by another Trinidadian twentieth century intellectual giant, CLR James, *“The Black Jacobins: Touissant L’Overture and the San Domingo Revolution”*. James managed to capture this story in a way that demonstrated how the Haitian revolution inspired oppressed people in all places and for all time to come. It was from the shores of Haiti (in 1814) that Simon Bolivar took off with arms and men for the struggle that liberated South America.



Toussaint L’Overture

As most of you know, Toussaint L’Overture, the first leader of the Haitian revolution, drawing on the lessons of the French Revolution, initiated the famous struggle against France but was betrayed by the French and died in a French prison. Jean-Jacques Dessalines, a lieutenant of L’Overture, with valiant men and women organised around him was not to be denied and together they defeated an army of 28,000 drawn from the great Napoleonic army. On the first of January 1804, the Republic of Haiti was declared. Drawing on a quote from Paul Farmer’s Book, *“The Uses of Haiti”* –I quote



Statue of Jean-Jacques Dessalines

*“Haiti became the only country in the New World in which the enslaved successfully won State Power, the first black republic and the second republic to be formed in the Americas.”*



## LA CITADELLE, Milot, Haiti

A UNESCO World Heritage Site

*“Every Caribbean child should be taken to see it” – Lloyd Best*

Tragically, the very nature of the times and circumstances of this glorious, unique victory turned out to be the reason for the dreadful events of the subsequent 150 years. Haiti was the sole black state in a 19<sup>th</sup> century world in which the imperial powers, all European, all white held sway over all the world of colour – Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Central and South America. It was a time when the supremacy of the white race and belief of the inferiority of people of colour was largely unquestioned and even justified sometimes utilizing biblical and similar treatises.

It was not only Europe that was hostile, but the United States of America recently triumphant in their revolution against their British colonial masters that were also hostile. Drawing on a quote from Paul Farmer's "Uses of Haiti" –

*"The United States blocked Haiti's invitation to the famous Western Hemispheric Panama Conference of 1825 and refused to recognise Haitian independence until 1862. This isolation was imposed on Haiti by a frightened white world, and Haiti became a test case, first, for those arguing about emancipation and then, after the end of slavery, for those arguing about the capacity of blacks for self-government."*

Haiti's isolation made it an easy target for bullying and plunder by the Imperial Powers of Europe and the USA. In 1825, the French succeeded in having Haiti commit to paying a debt of some 150 million francs in supposed compensation for the losses of French planters. It is a debt that took another 100 years to repay and contributed in no small way to the crippling of the Haitian economy for many, many decades to come. One hundred and fifty million francs then is equivalent to several billions of dollars today. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the British, the United States and Germans, like the French, extorted in a similar fashion, large sums of money from the Haitian Treasury under the pretext of debts owed to them.

It was not uncommon for gunboats to go into Haitian waters and simply demand compensation for some arbitrary debt owed and to extract these sums from an intimidated government.



US Invasion of Haiti 1915—capture of Fort Riviere

Between 1849 and 1915 ( a period of about 60 years), the United States Navy reportedly sent warships into Haitian waters about 30 times, under the pretext of protecting property and lives of American citizens and

on occasion demanded money for debts owed. Another story details the egregious incursion of two German ships commanded by one Captain Karl Batsch, which in June 1872 sailed into harbour and demanded payment of alleged debts of \$15,000 – payment was required by the end of the day. The Haitian government stalled then raised the money to pay what was a “ransom”. Apparently the Germans boarded one of the few Haitian ships, spread the Haitian flag on the decks and left “calling cards” expelled from their bowels – it was an example of the disgraceful disrespect to which these proud people were subject.

Internally, Haiti’s tale became one of continued factional struggles, the growth of a privileged landed ruling class at war with a landless peasantry and at war among themselves, forming alliances as opportunities presented themselves either with some of their own or with external forces. Government after government pieced together either by force or subterfuge was formed, only to be swept aside by another successor. Eventually in 1915 the internal disarray became so extreme that it created the opportunity for the military occupation Haiti by the USA- as I pointed out earlier they had come calling virtually every other year since the middle of the

previous century. During the period 1915 to 1934, the USA held absolute sway over the various governments of Haiti.



The Duvaliers: 'Papa Doc' and 'Baby Doc'

The Americans eventually departed and while there was much hope and optimism for a more stable and prosperous Haiti in the mid-30s after their departure, there developed another period of factionalism and internal dissention that lasted largely without

interruption until 1957 when the fearsome rule of the Duvaliers, Papa and Baby Doc

began. The period 1934 to 1957 is nicely documented in a recent book by one of our academics at Mona, Matthew Smith, entitled "Red and Black in Haiti: radicalism, conflict and political change -1934 to 1957". Papa Doc became president after a questionable election and while apparently mild mannered, he soon built a personal army, the Tontons Macoutes, and with the complicity of the real army, judiciary, church and, the ruling class, he brutalised, intimidated and otherwise pillaged the Haitian people. The USA, locked in the Cold War in the 1960s and terrified by the apparent threat of communism enveloping the Caribbean after the Cuban Revolution offered support to Duvalier, who justified the excesses against his own people under the guise of fighting communism. Papa Duvalier was dethroned only by death in 1971, and was succeeded by his son, Jean Claude, who came to be called "Baby Doc". Baby might have

changed the vicious rule of his father – *he had opportunity for change thrust upon him, but he ducked!*

“Baby” continued the vicious regime of “his dad” and it was not until 1986, when the intensity of opposition and riots against the government became unsustainable, and the revulsion of the International Community so great, that “the babe” was forced to flee Haiti in a USA plane sent to get him out.

A description of the parlous circumstances of the Haitian people is captured in the following quotation from Paul Farmer’s book.

*“By 1985 .... Large segments of the population were on the edge of famine; thousands tried to flee in rickety boats .... The visitor to rural Haiti was often struck by the aridity, the erosion, the limitless poverty. Haiti was used up”.*



Jean-Bertrand Aristide

At about the time of Baby Doc’s departure, a new figure burst on the scene, one who became a hope for the dispossessed, impoverished and poorly educated masses of Haiti. He was the charismatic Jesuit Priest, Jean Bertrand Aristide. Over the next decade, he would be twice elected democratically, one of the few Haitian

leaders to win Presidential Office after relatively free and fair elections, but he was twice

removed because of the machinations of remnants of the Duvalier's government, sections of the ruling classes and a campaign of misinformation that was possibly instigated by the CIA and carried by the US media. It was campaign conducted because Aristide was perceived as communist threatening the interests of US businesses in Haiti and interests of the ruling class. Aristide was removed essentially by US government intervention following periods of unrest in which some argue the same US may have had a hand.

In 1995, Rene Preval, the current President of Haiti was elected and while Haiti continued to be one of the poorest nations in the world, with statistics that bespoke deprivation socially, educationally, economically and in health, there began a period of relative stability and some hope. By 2008 with the collaboration of the international community a promising new plan for development was devised. Haiti's agricultural productivity reportedly grew by 20% in the 2 years prior to 2010.

To its abiding credit, our regional organization, CARICOM, in 1997, under the chairmanship of the former Prime Minister of Jamaica, the Most Hon. P.J. Patterson, granted provisional membership to Haiti, once the first fragile signs of stability appeared following the election of President Preval. At the 1997 meeting, Haiti was immediately admitted to sit in the Conference and all the Councils of CARICOM. CARICOM pressed forward with its intention to bring Haiti into the fold and in 2002 Haiti ratified the Treaty of Chaguaramas, thereby becoming the newest and most populous member of CARICOM. You know everybody beats up on CARICOM these days –I say to critics of CARICOM what a politician said in jest to a set of journalists who

were giving him hell, *“gentlemen I do not know why some of you do not get married so that you can have someone else to complain about than the government”*.

In truth, while fully a member of CARICOM, Haiti has remained on the periphery, on the one hand separated by language and on the other, by the suspicions of many of their West Indian brothers that Haitians would descend in their hundreds of thousands upon their countries as economic refugees. Many West Indian people know little about the Haitian people and have been sold on two centuries of misinformation which depicts the Haitian people only as impoverished, uneducated, unhealthy purveyors of voodoo. In the main, many are unaware of the rich culture, creativity, resilience and generosity of this proud people.

I remember with some personal embarrassment, how two or three year ago when Rectors of four Haitian Universities visited our University at Mona to forge a partnership for which the OAS promised sponsorship, I made a presentation lauding the accomplishments of our then 60-year old University of the West Indies which began in 1948. In his presentation, the Rector of the State University began by outlining the establishment of a University system in Haiti in 1832, a full 116 years before Mona. He went on to recount the growth of these Tertiary institutions over the next 170 years. At the time of the 2010 earthquake, Haiti reportedly had about 200 tertiary institutions, eight of which were recognised regionally and internationally. It is true that these institutions together provided access only to a small percentage of people and a too large proportion of the population remains uneducated. Many of their university graduates have joined hundreds of thousands of their compatriots who have gone to North

America and Europe. That Haitians are a capable, entrepreneurial people is amply demonstrated by the thriving communities they have established in those countries and by the many success stories of Haitian immigrants.

I relate another story where Haiti may be misrepresented in our minds. Two years ago, the inter-campus guild decided that they would provide assistance to Haiti as their main project by donating computers and volunteering to teach school children there. We were worried about the security of our students, but the Haitian Charge d’Affair in Jamaica politely told us that the security situation in Jamaica and other Caribbean islands was probably no better than it was in Haiti. While it is not uncommon for CARICOM countries to think of ourselves as much better off than the Haitians and the relevant figure may show this, it is also true that sizeable sections of our own populations live in poverty and are nearly as badly off as our compatriots in Haiti.

As I pointed out previously, at the end of 2009, there was a moment of optimism in Haiti and in some international circles about the future of Haiti. Then on January 12, 2010, the earthquake came and in the twinkling of an eye, 99% of the state’s physical structures including the national palace, Hall of Justice, Parliament, police stations, hospitals, libraries, hotels, 250,000 houses had collapsed, over 200,000 people were dead and 1.5 million persons were left homeless. The magnitude of the disaster was astounding, possibly unequalled in modern history. Even the tsunami of 2004 which devastated the coastlands of so many countries on the rim of the Indian Ocean accounting for some hundreds of thousands dead, did not destroy the

very seat of government and commerce in any of the affected countries as has happened with the earthquake in Haiti.

The world, including the countries of CARICOM seemed for the first time ever to link in some psychic way with Haiti and all responded in an unprecedented fashion, providing hundreds of millions of dollars worth of material support and voluntary assistance involving military, medical and other civilian personnel in their tens of thousands. To its credit, the USA under the presidency of Barack Obama with able assistance of persons such as former President Bill Clinton, who had already been doing much voluntary work in Haiti through the Clinton Foundation, led the response. The USA sent materials and personnel and established the sorts of logistical systems necessary to manage a disaster of this proportion. The response of the USA undid, in some ways the dark and tragic history of US-Haiti relations dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> and a good part of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Of course, there were oddballs and racist outliers like Pat Robertson, a spokesman for the ignorant, parading as a Christian Minister, who in the days following the earthquake was quoted by CNN as saying that “Haiti was cursed after it made a pact with the Devil.” At the risk of further offence to you my audience, I utilize the exact words of this misguided churchman:

*“The Haitians were under the heel of the French. You know, Napoleon III or whatever. And they (meaning the Haitians) got together and swore a pact with*

*the devil. They said “we will serve you if you will get us free from the French.”*

*True story. And so the devil said “Okay, it’s a deal.”*

Sadly this statement possibly reflected the views of many people, doubtless Christians among them. People who believed the earthquake was a visitation of some supernatural being on Haiti for their sins. It is a reflection of 200 years of gross misinformation that painted Haiti as a failed state, with starving subhuman people. Unfortunately, we do not control the stories that the dominant powers of Europe and North America paint of us. One is reminded of the African proverb:

*“Until the lions tell their tale, the story of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.”*

As tragic as the Haitian earthquake has been, its occurrence has created an opportunity for Haiti, for the world, for the nations of CARICOM and countries in the Caribbean basin. CARICOM has an opportunity to play a special role in this global constellation, because it is we who first opened our arms to Haiti and it is with us that Haiti has so much in common. This is a moment of transformation and the leaders of Haiti and many members of the international community are talking not about reconstructing what existed but of a “Re-founding” of the country. This means fashioning a new country with stable democratic government, orderly systems of administration that can deliver services to all Haiti’s people with the assistance, but not dominated by NGOs; of government authority distributed across the country rather than concentrated in the capital; of a thriving sustainable economy; reliable management of water

and waste; of buildings erected to withstand the forces of nature in better planned communities; of an effective and accessible system of health care; of a well designed, high standard education system from primary through secondary to tertiary education that provides the knowledge, skills and attributes to drive transformation social and economic growth.

In the months since the earthquake, the leaders of Haiti in concert with the international community have finalised an Action Plan for National Recovery and Development and identified priority areas for action. With promised funding support from the international community, this plan is designed to provide sustainable social and economic development through reconstruction, investment, employment and income generation. The international community has pledged 5.3 billion dollars over the next 2 years to transform Haiti into a modern state.

What role must CARICOM play? We cannot provide much in the way of funds, but our historic relationship to Haiti and our geographic proximity puts us in a significant position to provide technical and professional support. Drawing on an address from former Prime Minister of Jamaica, the Most Hon. P.J. Patterson, CARICOM's Special Representative for the Heads of Government of CARICOM on Haiti, I quote:

*"We are geared to share competent staff in areas such as public sector management, financial controls and accountability, establishment of standards, building codes, land reform, security enhancement and the dissemination of information to the citizenry."*

Assistance can be provided in areas of legislation, tax reform, establishing of a system that enables provision of land titles. CARICOM personnel from the public and private sectors can go to Haiti on secondment and Haitian personnel can come to our countries for training. These are steps that can be made by involvement of all countries and institutions of CARICOM, including academic institutions.

We need to forge a triangular relationship: funds and materials support from the North, provision of technical and professional support from CARICOM nations and the implementation of the Recovery Plan guided by Haitian leadership. While the press and people remain sceptical about the progress being made by CARICOM towards a Caribbean Single Market and Economy, insufficient attention has been paid to good progress in terms of functional cooperation reflected in commonly shared institutions such as the University of the West Indies, the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC), the Caribbean Association of Industry and Commerce (CAIC), the Caribbean Tourism Organisation (CTO), The Caribbean Disaster and Emergency management Agency (CDEMA), and more.

By linking with Haiti in areas of business, particularly in the fields of reconstruction, agriculture and light manufacturing, areas targeted to jump-start the Haitian economy and by drawing Haiti into the CARICOM network of education, health, tourism, disaster risk reduction and, environmental protection, all elements of functional cooperation, Haiti will benefit and it is

likely CARICOM, if it positions itself correctly, can also benefit. Indeed, if we were to be truly ambitious, we can envision a functionally cooperative and an integrated economic community much larger than CARICOM and Haiti, to include the Dominican Republic, Cuba and Puerto Rico and other islands in the Caribbean basin. In this way, we can realise the sort of productive capacity, markets, economies of scale and global competitiveness which I believe Eric Williams imagined in 1943 when he wrote the piece I quoted earlier.

The University of the West Indies too sees the earthquake in Haiti as a moment of opportunity. Within a week of the tragedy, our leaders met and began constructing a short and long term plan. In the short term, staff and students engaged in collection drives of food, clothing, personal hygiene products and other such items. Bank accounts were opened on all Campuses and funds deposited will be used towards assisting students in need.

Our academic community on all campuses including the Open Campus held Symposia, talks and wrote articles in the media aimed at sensitising and educating the general public and our internal community. This was meant to inform people about the current situation in Haiti and to tell the story of its vibrant history and culture.

Drawing on a database of expertise that our University has constructed to identify academic and non-academic staff who can respond to disasters, two civil engineers from the Faculty of Engineering in Trinidad, Dr. Derek Gay and Dr. Richard Clarke went to Haiti as members of the CDEMA Team. Some medical personnel were also deployed to Haiti. Prior to the earthquake,

Dr. Asad Mohammed had been working on Urban Planning projects in Haiti and Professor John Agard on a re-forestation project.

In truth, we see ourselves as playing a more sustained role in the Haiti re-founding effort. In March 2010, we seized the moment to convene a meeting of UNICA, the Association of Caribbean Universities and Research Institutes, encompassing universities from the Spanish, French and Dutch-speaking Caribbean. Rectors of four of the Universities in Haiti were invited to report on the effects of the devastating earthquake on their institutions which wiped out 90% of the University, killed about 40 academics and over 200 students some of whom were buried in the building in which classes were being held. The UNICA meeting was asked to begin discussions on how Caribbean universities might help in the re-founding of the Haitian tertiary education sector. We hope we can rally Caribbean universities to provide advocacy with their Governments for sustained help for Haiti and that these universities, some bigger and better endowed than we are, can provide, places for students both undergraduate and graduate, provision of academics and provision of expertise in the broader recovery effort.

To lead the way, UWI stepped up to the plate. The Mona Campus offered 100 places, Cave Hill 25 and St. Augustine 75, and based on the wishes of our Haitian counterparts, places were offered to final year students. For a number of reasons, including insufficient fluency in English, an unwillingness of some students to leave their families at this time and logistics, we shall fall short of the 200 for which we were aiming, but we have started something that can continue in the future since we can assist too in graduate education and collaborative research which is not

evident in Haiti at this time. I make a plea to our governments, private sector and civic leaders in the Caribbean to partner with us in helping to fund the housing and living requirements of these students. We need to raise at least 1 million US dollars to house even the present students we shall admit. Some countries of the Caribbean have visited enormous cuts in funding on UWI. Despite this, we believe it is our fraternal duty as a Caribbean institution to assist in whatever practical ways we can in the re-Founding of Haiti. However, we cannot do it all and it is for this reason we issue a public appeal to institutions and persons willing to assist in helping to fund living expenses, books and travel for these young people from Haiti.

In addition to admitting students to our Campuses, we are also working on a project that will provide courses by distance to Haiti through the Open Campus. These programmes are expected to utilize both Haiti and UWI academics to construct appropriate and culturally specific programmes in areas such as teacher education, justice and security. In the area of teacher education, the project will adopt a two-tier approach. Initially, it will focus on teachers whose training was interrupted by the earthquake, and then attention will be paid to training primary and secondary untrained teachers, teacher trainers and university faculty. I thank Dr Glenford Howe of the Open Campus for preparing this proposal which we have submitted to one multilateral agency so far. There is also a Proposal that has received some initial funding to revive a training programme in Urban and Settlements Planning in Haiti. Dr Asad Mohammed of St Augustine is leading this effort. As you can imagine, in reconstructing Port au Prince and other damaged areas, urban and settlement planning is a vital requirement.

Recognising that language is one of the most important barriers between Haiti and the Anglophone Caribbean, the UWI in collaboration with the State University of Haiti, the University of Quisqueya and the University of Havana in Cuba have recently proposed the creation of an Institute of Languages and Translation for teaching of English, French, Spanish and Creole. This initiative will be expected to link with our Institute of Language Studies at St Augustine and other similar units at Mona and Cave Hill. Ladies and gentlemen, if this tragedy does nothing else for us in the Anglophone Caribbean, let it make us become resolute in our insistence that every schoolchild at the primary level and by the secondary level should become fluent in at least one other language – Spanish or French – but preferably both. This may well be an opportunity for exchange between Spanish, French, Dutch and the Anglophone Caribbean of young people who can teach their language to countries speaking other languages. This for example teachers from the Anglophone Caribbean can go to Haiti to teach English and some of their personnel might come to the Anglophone Caribbean to teach French.

In relating the activities of the University of the West Indies, let me state what so many of our people do not seem to see about The UWI. We are not only an institution that grants undergraduate degrees, we are a **full service** entity able to impart knowledge and skills not only at the undergraduate level but also at the graduate and post doctoral levels in broad areas relevant to Caribbean self knowledge, growth and development. We are also committed and able to create new knowledge that can drive national and regional development, and through outreach, we can assist in providing the sort of broad-based, meaningful and sustained support

for policy making and planning of our Public and Private sectors, and we can respond in varying ways to a situation such as Haiti.

I believe that no other institution in the Anglophone Caribbean has the capacity to contribute in such broad ways.

Ladies and gentlemen, you have been a good audience and it is time to wrap up – I have said enough.

*The story is told of an Amish middle aged man, Jacob Schneider, who lived in the Pennsylvania Dutch community. Jacob, a shy man, was hopelessly in love with pretty young Clara and after months of taking her on rides in his horse drawn buggy, he stumped up the courage and said,*

*“Clara will ye marry me”. She immediately replied “Yah Jacob”.*

*Then followed a long silence and at last Clara said, Jacob don’t you have any more to say/*

*He replied “Ach I have said too much already”*

I have talked of Eric Williams, extraordinary scholar, statesman and advocate for a Caribbean integration movement that extends beyond the confines of an Anglophone West Indies; I have tried to relate as time permitted the triumph and tragedy of Haiti, for many years mistreated and put upon by the imperial powers of Europe and the USA; of the return to democracy and the inclusion in CARICOM in the late 1990s; of a tentative road to recovery interrupted by a catastrophic earthquake; of the efforts of the international community and of CARICOM in particular, with whom the UWI is collaborating to assist Haiti in tangible ways. I have argued that we can be most helpful through functional cooperation which can promulgate sustainable and embracing partnership by providing technical and professional services. The UWI through partnerships with the Haiti Education Community and government can be part of the CARICOM assistance effort in re-founding Haiti.

I should state that the situation in Haiti remains tenuous at the present time. There are hundreds of thousand still living in tents. Few permanent structures have been built to accommodate people. The hurricane season is upon us and even a heavy rain can wreak havoc on these very vulnerable people. Only a tiny fraction of the promised 5 billion has been received and preparations for elections are behind schedule, with President Preval declaring his intent to demit office by February 2011. There are immediate things that Haiti and the world community must do to avoid another catastrophe.

In closing I use the quotation from former PM PJ Patterson, in a recent speech on Haiti

*“I could not end (this talk) without paying a well deserved tribute to the Haitian people for the bravery and heroism displayed by ordinary people in dealing with adversities beyond description.... We have all witnessed the energy, resolve and spirit of community that must now be further harnessed in the way forward. The ordinary people, the men, women and children have responded with fortitude, dignity and grace which make us very proud of their kindred.”*

We in CARICOM, in the larger Latin America and globe have a duty and obligation to assist these people who have remained resilient in times of great hardship and trials. Assist them so that they can achieve the rightful and respected place that they should have occupied in the global community 200 years ago.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you.

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