

UWI FIC SPEECH BY SIR RICHIE RICHARDSON GCM

Protocols (to be advised by the UWI)

It is an immense honour to be a part of this ceremony this evening in Antigua and Barbuda, to share the platform with the ABC of calypso, Mr. Alston BECKETT Cyrus, my fellow honorary doctorate, and most importantly to be honoured in my own hometown, Five Islands, by The University of the West Indies, the #1 university in the Caribbean as ranked by Times Higher Education. As a little boy growing up in one of the smallest villages in Antigua and Barbuda, a village called Five Islands, I would not have imagined then that I would be standing here today as a former captain of the West Indies Cricket team, a member of the Elite Panel of Match Referees of the International Cricket Council, or even as someone to be recognised for the honour being granted to me this evening. Furthermore, I would not have dreamed that I would see **The UWI's 4th landed campus right here in my village, in my country.** This is an accomplishment that **every Antiguan and Barbudan should smile about, and grasp at the very affordable opportunity, in our country, to advance educationally in higher education and lifelong learning at a prestigious regional institution.** You- the graduands, in this evening's ceremony represent a special early cohort of students who took this opportunity and decided to harness your strength, throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, amongst many challenges, and emerge here today, **victorious and ready to have a positive impact on so many.**

You are the **beginning** of a **cultural change** in your families, communities and countries having **achieved a higher education**. We, the honorary doctorates, share a similar passion with you the graduating class of 2022. Our levels of determination, drive and love for sport and music led to our successes. We have excelled and let the world know about our countries and our Caribbean through cricket and calypso. Now it is your turn to **find your niche and excel at it!** Today marks the continuation of your success as you go forth and be **great!** There are a few common themes between cricket, calypso and being UWI alumni of which you will soon become. I will now highlight a few that you should consider as you move forward on your respective paths.

The first is **patriotism**, never forget where you came from and the opportunities that came about because of **your people** and **your country**. The greatest aspect of the cricket game was the pride that I felt knowing that I was **representing my country** and our **Caribbean region**. I love being an Ambassador for Antigua and Barbuda and I was proud to be a West Indian representing all the people of this region whenever I donned the uniform of the West Indies. This special pride and appreciation for all those who have helped shape me as an individual, and a cricketer, warrants and encourages me to do the same for others. I want to see the game develop and grow in the hands of our current generation of players.

I enjoy **embracing every** opportunity that I can to **mentor** the younger cricketers. Many of them see me as a role model and I think it is important that we **give back** to the communities who gave so much to us. It is why I, along with Antigua and Barbuda's three other cricketing Knights – Sir Andy, Sir Viv and Sir Curtly – have **committed to developing the Four Knights Cricket Academy** to support the identification and development of emerging talent. Perhaps as the Five Islands Campus continues to grow and build out, this is an area that we can work on collaboratively. I enjoy seeing new talent emerge in young cricketers, and I think that once they remain focused and disciplined, Antigua and Barbuda and the West Indies can continue to produce some outstanding future cricketers. I remain optimistic and hopeful that the West Indies will return to being the best cricketing team in the world once more.

Graduands, you too, are able **to mentor others, to guide and use your talents and skills** learned and developed at The UWI, to help those in your **communities and countries** as you give back in appreciation of those who helped you stand here today during this milestone. Consider even **starting your own charity organisations** or helping with an existing one. I currently use my love of golf and the music of the band Spirited to bless the life of others who are in need.

In addition to patriotism, it is important that **you know your history and identity**, and use it to **cultivate your present and your future**. We are all from Small Island Developing States and the harsh reality is that many persons in other parts of the world are not even aware of what our respective Caribbean islands are called or what ethnicities and cultures make up our people. But **you can change this**, as you utilise your knowledge to **strengthen** sectors and create **awareness** of our existence and cultures. I used cricket to do this, it gained me the respect and adoration of thousands, if not millions of people and most importantly allowed me to show the world that country size and skin colour is not a determinant of the level of one's talents or trajectory. I was tremendously **proud to be a black man from Antigua and Barbuda** representing my country and my people across the world. The sport also allowed me to network.

Networking is important to produce results especially within organisations. Your social skills developed through many group assignments at UWI can help you merge deals, negotiate contracts, start businesses, create organisations and so much more.

Cricket took a black boy from the small village of Five Islands and gave him the opportunity to travel all over the world and meet people from all walks of life: from celebrities to Prime Ministers, to the millions of Caribbean diasporas in the countries we played in, who **found a renewed sense of identity** and belonging from our presence and performance. Important linkages were made so much so that we can travel to several parts of the region, and the world, and call on friends and individuals in times of need or for business endeavours.

Soft skills are another important theme that resounds well with networking. You must be able to deal with all individuals **respectfully** while at the same time maintaining assertion where appropriate. Cricket was also called a gentleman's sport, so you had to behave honourably. I learned a lot about fairness, respect, courage and boldness. Courage is what it took to face those fast bowlers who were sending balls at my head at top speed after deciding to not wear a helmet for most of my career – or maybe they might say it was madness; I don't know, but I am still here to tell the tale. Graduands, go forth with **courage and respect** as you become our **future** leaders, managers, accountants, entrepreneurs, teachers and any other profession that you may join.

Goal setting is key as you venture into life after a higher education degree. You must determine what you would like to achieve and how your degree will help you reach these achievements. In my case, as my love for cricket grew, I saw in the glorious game the opportunity to make an **impact** on the world stage – to be among the many great West Indian batsmen who came before me including one of my earliest idols, fellow Antiguan, Sir Vivian Richards. It was in watching the performances of these great West Indian batsmen that a fire was lit inside me for the sport that has never been extinguished even to this day. This desire to achieve a goal pushed me and led me to where I am today. Much like you, the graduating class, would have **set a goal** to pursue a higher education degree and pushed through to the success of achieving that degree! You are now strategically positioned to **utilise your achievements and set new goals** towards **significant sustainability and development** within your respective countries. We stand here today with confidence that you will **find the opportunities** within your respective areas and **press forward** to make an even stronger impact on society.

As you press forward, remember that **support and mentorship** are vital to your continued success. As a young cricketer, I realised that my success did not happen over night or without the **support and mentorship** of **many individuals**. Many people saw potential in me and pushed me to excel.

People like Mr Vincent Lewis (*my first sports master and science teacher*), (*the late great*) Leo Gore, Victor Michael (*my mentor, advisor and very close friend from since my young football days*), Guy Yearwood (*the best coach I ever knew*), Hugh C Rashadi X Gore, Fitzroy Brann, Taddy Arindell, Eldine Baptiste, Mark Charles, Rolston Otto, Michael Camacho, Gene Gould, Ulysses Lawrence, Keith Fredricks, John Archibald, Olson P. Paul, and many others refused to give up on me because they saw that I could go all the way to the West Indies side and be counted among the greats of the sport. I am **grateful** to them for all **their mentoring** and **early guidance** because I would not be here today if it was not for **their help**. The people of Five Islands also helped my development as a cricketer. As a boy I was seriously inspired by my older cousins next door. I can recall seeing Joy Richardson with his twirling back-lift, carving the ball to all parts of the field; the elegant and stylish Duncan Richardson, whom everyone would agree was most adept when he was verbally describing the top players of the game in a most passionate and enthusiastic manner; Worrell Richardson running in from the southern end with his unique bowling style and bamboozling batsmen with his pace and swing; Henley Richardson – he was so powerful that an image of burnt grass from an authoritative and powerful cover-drive he played batting at the school end, is permanently etched in my mind; Goldman Richardson – he does not know this but I used to think of him as Mr Prolific.

He was the top scorer in almost every match that he played, especially away matches. I found that to be quite remarkable and started modelling my batting style on his; last but not least, I recall Evie Richardson, young and always elegantly dressed, batting against the big men and refusing to get out. I recall him once scoring a 50 with over thirty singles. All these cricketers, along with Esau James, Toosie & Carl Peters, Stanley 'Peewee' Francis and many more, inspired me as a youngster and triggered my motivation to work hard to achieve my goals.

I will never forget the many long hours I spent practicing on the concrete strip at our school next door and on the road next to my house, and the relentless bowling I received from my very close friends in Dalma 'Lobster' James, William Mathew, Lauchland Thomas, Synclaire 'Dix' Jackson and many others who would assist in retrieving the many balls that were hit away. I was dubbed as arguably the best player of fast bowling in my time. This I attributed to the single-minded practice on concrete, often asking the bowlers to gradually get closer to me from where they deliver. The reason for this was that that there was a **burning desire to represent the West Indies** and avenge the physical hurt inflicted by the great Denis Lilley and Jeff Thompson to the West Indies batsmen in Australia during the 1995-96 test series.

When I eventually made the West Indies team and toured Australia, I didn't get my wish to play against Lilley, as he had just retired a few weeks before (*Smart move by him*). However, I had the good fortune to play against Thompson, who was making a comeback, in a tour match. The morning after the match, the general headlines in the national papers was, "Young Richardson finishes Jeff Thompson's comeback bid". Graduands, the point is that *'no person is an island'* and as our ancestors before us say, *'it takes a village to raise a child'*. As you go forth on your new and improved paths, **develop a support system to help motivate you, and find what encourages you to achieve your goals.** Determine your village and **express gratitude!** Recognise and thank your supporters and mentors, maybe a loved one, a family member, a spouse, a child, a former teacher, a dear friend, your fellow classmates, and colleagues. The persons who saw within you the potential to achieve and become great in your respective areas.

On that note, I want to **express thanks and recognise my family** without whose **love and support** I would **not** be here. I want to **especially** thank my late mother. She sacrificed a lot for us after my father died when I was only six years old. She raised me and my three siblings and was one of the hardest working and most disciplined persons I ever knew. She was my **earliest and biggest inspiration**, and I would not be here if it was not for her. She was the greatest person I ever knew.

I still think of her every day and feel her presence as she looks down at me from heaven with her usual reassuring and happy smile!

To **my wife, Lady Arlene**, who has been a **constant** by my side, I extend heartfelt thanks for your support over the years. Being married to a professional sportsperson is no easy gig; but she has stood by me.

To everyone that has believed in me, guided me, and encouraged me throughout the years, **thank you**.

A massive thank you to **The University of the West Indies**, its **council, senate** and the management of the Five Islands Campus for bequeathing me with this very prestigious award. Thank you also to those who found my contributions worthy of this honour – an honour which **I humbly accept and will cherish always**.

To the graduating class of 2022, **Congratulations to you!! You did it!** Today, you are at the cusp of recognising your potential, find a **suitable role and be professional, work with each other and build greatness** in your respective sectors! In my case, as I was selected for the West Indies team, I quickly realised that I represented a region that historically beat the British at their own game. I was a part of a great team, my childhood dream came through and I played alongside some of my greatest heroes of the game including Sir Vivian Richards, Sir Andy Roberts, Sir Clive Lloyd, Michael Holding and others.

Playing for the West Indies filled me with **immense pride**. I remember when I first got the call that I made the West Indies team and the overwhelming sense of joy that it brought me. I found a camaraderie in my teammates that created further inspiration and a brotherhood that gave me guidance and support as a young cricketer. There was also the realisation that playing for the best cricketing team in the world at that time meant that you always had to bring your A-game. You could not let your teammates down and so you consistently had to **sharpen your skills** to match the extremely **high standards** that they were setting. It was one of the best eras of cricket and it was such an honour to have played with these outstanding and amazing cricketers, and even more of a privilege to have been asked to serve as Captain. I will never forget those days as long as I live.

Graduands, you would have spent many long hours studying, completing assignments, pulling all-nighters, all towards success today. The questions that I want to implore you to ask yourselves as you reflect on your journey at Five Islands are:

- Where do I want to be now that I have my degree?
- How can I make a greater impact and contribution **to my country** and more importantly **to my Caribbean region**?

Cricket, in many senses, was more than just a game. It taught me about life just as university, for many of you, shaped who you are today. Cricket taught me discipline and allowed my development of body, mind, and soul. It gave me the mental agility and toughness to persevere through difficult times. The long hours of practice, the travelling and adjusting to different countries and the competitiveness of the game itself, prepared me for life in ways that I could not have imagined. Graduands, in your context, I am sure that you can relate to these same qualities which The UWI Five Islands Campus and the other campuses would have instilled in you along your journey to this graduation day. For those persons who joined us from the other campuses, thank you for choosing Five Islands and beautiful Antigua and Barbuda to celebrate this momentous occasion. Graduands, you are now equipped to handle many different personalities and situations. Reflect on the good days and bad days of your journey and learn from every aspect as you step forward, taking with you the positive outlooks. Remember to be patriotic, give back, know your history and identity, network, utilise your soft skills, set your goals, and express gratitude to your support systems. Harness your creativity and innovative ability, utilise your skills and go forward into this world, **light the way!** You are **the light shining from the West!** CONGRATULATIONS!