

INAUGURAL ADDRESS OF THE 7th PRESIDENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF BELIZE

**“Building the National University of Belize to support the country’s
advancement –Let us transform it together”**

Governor General, The Chief Justice, Ambassadors, High Commissioner/Members of the Diplomatic Corp, Bishop Philip Wright, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education, The Speaker of the House of Representatives, Ministers of Cabinet and CEOs, Governor of the Central Bank, Mayors and Councilors, Members of Parliament, Heads of Institutions including the Regional UWI, Leaders and members of the Public and Private Sectors, The Chairman and members of the Board of Trustees of UB, Academic and Administrative Colleagues of UB, Staff, Students, Alumni, The UWI Arts Steel and Chorale, The Anglican Diocese, my Family – Rohanie, Cecilia, Nishal, Katyana and in their absence Olivia and Sarisha, friends all.

The Almighty works in mysterious ways, setting us upon journeys that are as much capricious as they are driven by an end in sight. For me and as simply put as I can, while not underestimating UB’s challenges, is to **“build and transform this young seventeen year old Institution, the National University of Belize into an entity that all Belizeans, here and abroad can be proud of –through its teaching, its**

research, its service and its outreach.” So the destination is clear, but the path less so. But there is the good news, and I quote from Ephesians 2:10, **“God has made us what we are. He has created in us Christ Jesus to live lives filled with good works that He has prepared for us to do.”** Today’s installation ceremony of the 7th President of UB is therefore for me like a second coming, a second mission as I have walked this road before, as unfamiliar as this particular environment may be, for most of my adult life.

After having been associated and firmly planted in the regional University of the West Indies, particularly the St. Augustine Campus, Trinidad for near 47 years as a student, an Engineer, and then ascending through various roles of academia and leadership, I do feel prepared for this journey ahead. I must give thanks firstly to the Almighty, my deceased parents Henry and Carmen, who taught and inspired me to do good, and to all those at the UWI who supported and prepared me for this new mission in Belize – Chancellors, Vice Chancellors, Heads of Regional Governments, Registrars, Bursars, Deans, Heads of Departments, Colleagues and friends at the UWI, all. The ability to be innovative and creative, to not be satisfied with the “status quo” are values that my UWI Engineering education shaped and which have served me well. I have always told my students **“whatever we design and build can be done better, whatever we do can be improved upon”**. This is

what makes the world in which we live today, such an exciting place of progressive change.

But preparation must be tempered by humility and fueled by faith as there will be times when the path ahead will be dark, lonely and trying but God knows the way, and as we have been so often told, **“He is the way and those who believe in him, should not perish but have eternal life”**(John 3:16).

So my friends, this installation in this historic St. John’s Cathedral, Belize City, which opened in 1812, is no accident, but the work of the Almighty. I am advised that this is the oldest Anglican Church in Central America and a place where several Miskito Kings were coronated. I think, any President to be, of any University globally, would be very proud to be in such company – but please do not put a crown on my head today as the task is already “heavily laden.” The crown that I wish to wear should be your love, support and good guidance, one that has already been widely given and that has made my entry into Belize easier. I sincerely thank all of you for this. To the Right Reverend Bishop of Belize, Philip Wright and the Reverend Taylor of the Cathedral, thank you for this precious gift you have given today, to celebrate in God’s glory and to seek his blessings to lead with wisdom and goodwill and to continue to give me strength and courage “to do right”.

The confidence expressed by the Chairman and the Board of Trustees of UB, by the Honorable Minister of Education, the Leader of the Opposition and the Hon. Prime Minister in my candidature to be your new President is gratefully acknowledged. This, together with the expressions of goodwill and support made by UB's stakeholders today – Mr. Harrison Pilgrim, Chairman of the Board, The Hon. Patrick Faber, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education, Representatives of the Faculty & Staff, Students, Alumni, the Professions, the Regional UWI and the International Community will continue to inspire and will me on.

I hope to lead the UB on the path to a renewed hope - one that creates new and wider educational opportunities for the young people of Belize to get a sound, quality education; bringing the knowledge resident at the University to shape and facilitate Belize's development pathway through leadership, research, creativity and innovation and all together bringing service to the people of Belize. Universities, and especially publicly funded Universities do not exist to serve themselves, but have an obligation to serve the communities that nurture their existence. Hence the beautiful city of Belmopan, and our flagship campus there, with the continued support of the Lord Mayor, becomes an enlightened, engaged University town not an enclave of a detached, few. I encourage all my colleagues that the provision of a quality service to our students, and partnering with our communities for mutual progress must be lasting, steadfast commitments that define us at UB.

My hope and aspirations for this young institution are to widen our reach providing access especially to the students of the far corners of this land, giving many of them hope for a better tomorrow for themselves, their families, their community and country; through tertiary education to strengthen our responsiveness to the knowledge needs of the Belizean society, and being engaged in problem solving, treating with national issues like poverty and crime, the economy, health care education, the creative arts, the environment, agriculture, tourism, industry etc., thus shaping the possibilities for a better future. The UB must become a responsible, scholarly institution – both to our internal and external stakeholders, recognizing that as an Institution and as individuals of the Academy, we are beacons of enlightenment, hope and good examples for this Society. Reach, responsiveness and responsibility must define us as the National University; that is the mantle of leadership we wear and which sets us apart.

Having said that, let us not underestimate the challenges of sustainability facing national Universities in small, newly developing states like Belize – the virtuous circle of increasing societal demand for relevance, quantity and global quality; the economics of scale; limitations on the reservoir of human talent to support teaching, research and administration and consistent funding both recurrent and capital, in often small, fragile and uncertain economies. Contained within this discourse is the often emotional response to the question of who pays for a University education?

From past and current experiences that are unfolding in the Caribbean, sustainability requires all beneficiaries to contribute to the maintenance and upkeep of this national University. This cost must be balanced with the benefit that this country and its people can aspire to through human development and knowledge that support enhanced growth, socio-cultural and economic progress, through the University's work. One imperative of a National University and the community that I wish to point to is that no deserving student should be left behind, and it is therefore an obligation of all gathered here to find creative solutions that can facilitate this. To ensure its sustainability, the UB must be an enlightened, productive partner with all the constituents of Belizean Society while building bridges to our Regional, Diasporic and International partners and friends. So where do we go after the celebrations of this hopeful day? We return to our drawing boards immediately and create a shared transformational plan for the UB.

My priorities are therefore:-

1. To move the UB from its embodiment as a College to that of a University – one where the majority of our graduates will leave with Bachelor Degrees building in them the knowledge, skills and aptitudes of good professionals, fortified with language and communication, problem solving, team working and entrepreneurial skills. Revisiting our curriculum on a steady basis so that we produce graduates who are confident, better prepared for the world of work and who respect, appreciate

and celebrate the deep history, diversity and rich culture of the people, as well as the magnificent environment of Belize. Graduates who understand our strategic location and the opportunities this provide a country which is the bridgehead between the Caribbean and Central America. A University education is not only about skills training, but about producing future leaders who have a broader, deeper understanding of the world in which they live – social, cultural, economic, global, with all the possibilities to create a better one. Graduate education will also readily support this direction.

2. This leads me from the broad, educational challenge of teaching to the next immediate priority – to put the ingredients including the rewards in place to build a scholarly University focusing on applied research, knowledge, and creativity. My entire career in academia always blurred the lines between teaching, research and service, an approach which captured the creative imagination of our students in the classrooms and brought unison to what a University meant to me. Research for a deep interrogation/understanding of all that is Belizean, for problem solving, creativity and entrepreneurship, opening this country to new possibilities for development. So as we take the first tentative steps to build this research culture at UB, through our Faculty and a small cadre of graduate students, at the Masters level and in very defined areas of our current expertise, the question must be asked about

the contribution of the Government, Business, Industry etc., in investing in research and building a National Innovation System. Are we ready to put this in place? Success can be achieved through this local partnership with the support of Regional and International Governments and Developmental Agencies. Research must be perceived at UB and in Belize not as a luxury but a necessity for advancement, and therefore successful UB Faculty and Students will need to be recognized and rewarded.

3. The third pillar of our transformation must of necessity be the building of a better, higher level environment, both human and physical to drive our advancement in teaching, quality, research, service, outreach and in our aesthetics. More staff with Ph.Ds., more comfortable student and staff friendly, technology enhanced infrastructure for teaching particularly distance teaching and for research.. Creating a Campus Community at Belmopan with residences for staff and students, recreational, and cultural facilities etc. UB firstly and then Belize must exude pride in UB's environment, I am committed to this. A central Belmopan Campus created that is in harmony with the green, surrounding natural environment of Belize, in fact an arboretum - one that could be unique in the world. We must demonstrate pride in what is ours! I can add to this wish list, but this work has begun – through the UB itself with its generous culture of volunteerism that I am witnessing here, and

through the good will of our stakeholders. And this brings me to the final point of the transformation agenda.

4. Managing our finances to be sustainable, balancing our recurrent budget and sourcing capital funding. Ensuring efficiency in all that we do is mandatory for success. While the National University is a “not-for profit entity”, it must be managed in a “business like” manner –ensuring value for all our expenditures and that our products are known, in demand, marketed and competitive. Creating a culture of giving back to the University, managing alumni relations, philanthropy, building public/private local/regional/international partnerships, and developing new business ventures must be approaches aggressively advanced for capital development and creating an endowment fund in particular. The UB under my watch is open for partnerships and appropriate businesses. We cannot do it alone!

I have attempted to share a vision and some key priorities of my immediate stewardship of this University, one shaped by my personal sense of the expectations of a National University. A vision for this University should not be constrained, as a vision is a destination, and great Universities were built through hundreds of years of dedicated, steady, work. We have a long journey ahead that will be sometimes marred by challenges but then that is the role of leadership – to set the course and steer the ship to its port of destination through heady, rocky and calm waters. As

Einstein said **“A ship is always safe at shore, but that is not what it’s built for.”**

I am committed to this, one that must be a partnership of all stakeholders.

In closing let me say my thanks to my predecessors for their contributions to UB.

To my colleague, Mr. Jessel Murray, Head of Department and the ensembles of the UWI, Department of Creative and Festival Arts (DCFA) at St. Augustine, Trinidad - the UWI Steel and the UWI Chorale, who are performing with us today, a special thank you. My installation in 2008 at PVC and Campus Principal of the UWI, St. Augustine Campus, Trinidad was memorable through your music but today, nine years later, and once again, but in Belize, it is momentous. Thank you.

To my wife Rohanie and my children Olivia, Cecilia, Sarisha, Nishal and Katyana who together with my brothers and sisters, Vincent, Stanley, Anjalee and Gargie and my many friends and relatives especially in Trinidad and Tobago who have supported me on this voyage, without this essential support, I will be lost at sea!

And to my caring staff surrounding me at UB – Denise, Georgina, Noreen, Jean, Rose, Jhon, Nectaly, Ewart, Jose, Sheena, Francis, Salam, Executive Managers, Deans, Chairs and Heads of Departments and the many others who facilitated this event, who supported my appointment and sent me congratulations, my sincere thanks. We will build this Team for success

In this blessed environment, on this very special day I am reminded of Psalm 23:3-4 **“He gives me new strength. He leads me on paths that are right for the good of his name. Even if I walk through a dark valley, I will not be afraid, because you are with me. Your rod and your Shepard’s staff comfort me”**.

Thanks for your attention. Thanks for sharing in this ceremony and for your best wishes.

“Let us build UB together”.

Prof. Clement Sankat,
President, University of Belize
St. John’s Cathedral, Belize City
27th July, 2017