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## PRESIDENT ANTHONY CARMONA'S KEYNOTE ADDRESS AT THE 14TH ANNUAL ACHEA CONFERENCE UNDER THE THEME "RE-VISIONING, RE-ASSESSING AND RE-COMMITTING FOR SUCCESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION"

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Your conference motif 'Re-visioning, Re-assessing and Re-committing for Success in Higher Education' could not be more impeccably-timed or aptly-chosen. The education system in the Caribbean- not just our higher education system- needs re-branding and re-inventing in order to capitalise fully on our most important resource- our human resource.

The proof is in the international acceptance of our Caribbean competence. Just take for example, that from our small Caribbean region has emerged in recent times, 3 Nobel Laureates- Sir Arthur Lewis, Derek Walcott and V.S. Naipaul. Just this year, Dr. Wayne Frederick, a citizen of Trinidadian and Tobago, a Caribbean man, was unanimously appointed as the 17th President of Howard University in the United States and he spoke of the solid educational foundation he received in Port of Spain. How many of us know of a young student who migrates to North America and within the first term, tops his class and finds himself in the puzzling situation of having to 're-learn' for example, the scientific names of all 206 bones in the adult human body, which he had already been taught 2 grades lower in his primary school in Grenada, Guyana, Barbados, St. Lucia, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago.

There is no doubt that in some countries in the Caribbean, not all, we have imbibed quality education for our children in their early years of learning. Perched on the rock of higher education, we must always recognise that the formative years of a child's education are critically important to the way that child will view the benefits of staying in school and the persistence to pursue higher education in his adult years. Frederick Douglass, that great American essayist stated, "It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men." This much is true of psychology as it is of education. I will like to recognise that even with our limited resources concomitant with the various challenges we face individually as Caribbean countries, we have been doing a reasonable job in the nursery and primary schools with our children. You the administrators, the educators, continue to fight the good fight in giving our young people an education that will arm them for life's vicissitudes.

In the Caribbean, through your efforts, we can count our blessings because generally we can guarantee that our children secure a primary and secondary school education. Just 2 days ago (on 7 July 2015) at the Oslo Summit on Education for Development in Norway, a clarion call was made aimed at mobilizing strong and renewed political and financial commitment from countries around the world, to reach the 58 million children who are still being denied their right to education, and to improve learning outcomes for those who attend school. It is an international recognition that education is a key that can open not any door, but every door.

This 2015 ACHEA Conference has a similar perspective with an equally honourable aim- to re-position and re-commit for success in higher education. In exploring what it will take to achieve and mobilise the type of envisaged success we seek, we must face some hard facts. Our Caribbean education system needs an overhaul, not just a maintenance work or job. There is a break-down of the system from the secondary school level upward. University lecturers often complain that matriculated students have great difficulty in composing a grammatically correct sentence, cannot pronounce words correctly, and display a lack of deductive reasoning. We need to address an aggressive remedial component at the tertiary level and we must not simply throw our hands up in the air in despair.

In Trinidad and Tobago, I am proud to say that we have free tertiary education. I say this not to boast, but to underscore that it must become the imperative, the right of every child in the region to be given a fair shot at tertiary level education in achieving their professional and career goals- and that chance can become much more realistic if, for example, a bright but impoverished child in the rural Rupununi Savannah of Guyana is able to attend the University of Guyana or the University of the West Indies or St. George's Medical School in Grenada without having to worry about school fees or student loans. - Truth be told, free education is expensive. Notwithstanding financial constraints, education must remain a priority in terms of governmental financial allocation and accessibility. We need to make higher education more accessible, available and affordable to every person, regardless of status, financial capability or geographic location in our individual countries. I know this is easier said than done but it must be done.

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We need to re-think and re-strategise how we can make this goal of free, or at least subsidised, and accessible tertiary education in the Caribbean, possible. This is why the role of the Caribbean administrator is so pivotal- because as policy-makers, as the movers and shakers behind our education system, you have the unique capability to devise plans and programmes to implement the change we need in our higher education system. You need to aggressively lobby your governments to subsidise tertiary education where free education is not immediately possible; as administrators, look at your tertiary level programmes and determine how best to combat the rising costs of tuition for particular programmes such as law, medicine and engineering; your intervention as administrators must include a rally call for a corporate-sponsorship component in the university curricula and you must impress upon the business community that corporate social responsibility is not only about buying football jerseys for football teams. The time has come for the private sector, for example the oil and gas industries and tourism, to have a substantial hand in designing the appropriate secondary and tertiary curricula. This will not only financially benefit the student and the university, but will ensure that students graduate with the skills and knowledge that will best service the needs of the respective corporate and private sector industries.

It will then logically become important to reference higher education to a needs-analysis of jobs required in our region. We must not continue to train students in particular fields of endeavour who have to wait months and sometimes years after graduating to secure a job in their particular field. When we begin to train 100 nurses, teachers, engineers and doctors, provisions must be put in place to ensure that all graduates will be employed immediately on graduation. This is what I have coined "labour-employment foresight" and it will serve well to allow persons to prosper in areas of work best suited to their individual expertise and passion. In that regard, if we are to create a launch pad for real higher education learning in particular fields, we must look at the course component of the student in the primary and secondary schools. This is why I referred earlier to the value of injecting industry partners into the education system at all levels, and even in the primary school.

I have always been amazed, and I have stated this time and time again- that we in the Caribbean are tourism-based generally, and specifically, oil and gas based in Trinidad and Tobago, yet there has been no specific subject in tourism or oil and gas taught at O levels or A levels, and to date, at CXC or CAPE. Although these subjects are part of the tertiary education programme in some territories, when our young people enter the world of work in these fields, they must still go through extensive training because our Caribbean education system simply has not prepared them as adequately as we should from the ground up. Where are the oil and gas vision and the tourism and eco-tourism vision as it relates to our young people? We are forever aspiring for the fruit-laden tree even when we forget to plant the seed and the seed begins at Primary school level. Ladies and gentlemen, administrators here today, I suggest that if we are to reap the full potential of higher education in the Caribbean, we must start with the primary school student and the primary school syllabus.

One subject, for example, that should be compulsory from primary school to university is computer science/information technology, which should not be made an elective in the same way that Maths and English are not. I do recognise that owning a laptop and having access to the internet are still luxuries in many parts of some Caribbean countries. As administrators, push your governments to pay more attention to this and other technologies in our primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. If we don't, we will be left behind in this digital world and find it very difficult to emerge from developing to developed status.

This brings me a statement which I came across on ACHEA's website as part of the 'Overview' of the theme for this Conference, which reads, "Today's educational institutions are operating in times of great uncertainty as a result of rapid technological and social changes, dwindling economic resources, and a globalized tertiary level educational environment." It is therefore commendable that as part of its focus and theme, this conference will deal with repositioning our educational institutions to be effective in today's world where the technological and social dynamic are ever evolving, ever progressing and becoming ever more present in every aspect of our education system. We are no longer living in a global world. We are living in a global village but we need to go a little further and recognise that we are global villagers. We often fail to define and interpret who the global villager is and the responsibility that comes with it. The world as we know it now is a much smaller place than it was 20 years ago. And smaller, not only because global warming is melting the world's ice caps, but smaller because technological changes now allow for us in the Caribbean to follow closely, for example, the Greece bailout proposal by the Eurozone; the human trafficking that is taking place in the Mediterranean Sea in the island of Lampedusa; we are all able to keep track of the news and developments, in real time, as it unfolds in our Caribbean neighbours and fellow global villagers; universities are able to offer on-line classes and the working students can now log in to a computer or iPad when they can steal a quick half an hour break and be part of a virtual classroom experience and programme that is on-line and interactive.

These are our realities and it is my fervent hope that from this conference will emerge implementable mechanisms to bridge the wide gaps that exist in our education system, primary through tertiary, in dealing with technology in the classroom, within our organisational structures and in producing young men and women who enter the world of work equipped with the type of education that is practical and acutely refined and tailored to rival any Oxford, Yale or Cambridge university graduate. We have the potential of our people. The imperative is to harness all of that raw brilliance and convert it into use and benefit for our countries. It begins with providing every boy and girl with the access to an education that is not only free, but of a high quality. It begins with you- the administrators- you will make the necessary

representations and implement the necessary policies and technology to see this mission through.

The advent of technology however does not mean that we must forget the human element that is foremost and necessary in our education system-the teacher. The engine in the education system is the teacher. Henry Adams said, "A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops". No amount of laptops or internet access or virtual classrooms can ever trump the human element. With all of this technology, which is necessary for quality and inclusive education, the teacher remains still the foundation of our education system and we must not forget the value of the teacher in this "rat race" of technology. I know many of you administrators and educators here today were once teachers and so you know personally, the benefit that a teacher brings to a child's education and life. I was once a teacher and so I too know. I also know that teachers are the unsung heroes of this world, under-appreciated even and in many of our Caribbean countries, grossly under-paid. This is a travesty and as administrators in the system, whether at tertiary, secondary, primary or nursery levels, you need to use your good office and organisation to assist in ensuring that teachers, our sages must get their financial due for that which they give to our students that no amount of money can buy- education, support, impact and lifelong influence. The days of the Sage taking hemlock are over. As administrators, we also need to create and spread a vocation of teaching to our young men. The male/female ratio of teachers is terribly skewed. In Trinidad and Tobago, over 70% of the teachers are females and they have been doing a fantastic job but there is need for that dynamic man-child requirement, for the male teacher in the Caribbean to engage the man-child to arrest many of our social problems. Teaching also for our young men must not be a stop gap until they get something better and in this regard I make a clarion call to all the administrators to speak to your final year students about the vocation of teaching.

On the matter of teachers and teaching, I observed one of the sub-themes of this 2015 conference is 'Exploring New Frontiers in Teaching and Learning Modalities.' I am heartened by the very relevant themes that will be discussed at this conference- I know our education system is in good hands with such careful and astute planners and administrators. I have already touched upon some of the areas which in my opinion will help in developing an education system from primary through tertiary that is sustainable and viable in our 21st century. I also respectfully suggest, that in exploring new frontiers in teaching, we bring back to our education system, the teacher who invigorates critical thinking in our children, the teacher who teaches the value of deductive reasoning to our children and who ensures that our children do not, for example, short-cut reading the entire literature novel in favour of the shorter online version. This may seem ironically backward if we are exploring new frontiers but I will like to believe that each of us in this room here today can attest to the value of teachers who not only taught us, but inspired us to read the entire text.

In order to effect this purpose, higher education must engage smaller classrooms where teaching and learning are not robotic and mechanical exercises planned out only in the context of a syllabus, but an interactive, fulfilling experience spawned by innovation and critical thinking. Higher education then must not merely be the result of the accumulation of knowledge but must include the requisite analysis and philosophy. In other words, when you teach a child, a student and a young adult to become a medical doctor, a lawyer, and engineer, are we also teaching that child or bringing to the fore, the need for that child to have a philosophy? What is your philosophy as a teacher, what is your philosophy as an engineer, what is your philosophy as a medical doctor? Is it about making money or is it about your Socratic oath? When in fact you are a labourer, what is your philosophy? Is it in fact to build a drain that is washed away when rain comes along or to ensure that the drain can cope with the adversities of floods? We need to have philosophy in our lives and that is why in fact I have spoken to Professor Reddock. I believe that every tertiary education institution in Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean must have a department of philosophy.

As I have indicated, while technology has its benefits, it also has its abuses. The engine of learning will shut down, in spite of or even because of, technology, if we don't bring back some good 'old-school' teaching techniques. Your job as administrators therefore will be to see the value of incorporating critical thinking practices in the school curricula and teaching and learning modalities along with the technology necessary. Your job as administrators will be to utilise the knowledge, wisdom and skills of so many of our excellent retired teachers, headmasters and headmistresses in chartering teaching and learning techniques that merge old-school critical thinking with new age access to information for our students. You can tap into the immeasurable and invaluable knowledge which these retired teachers and Professors have to offer by incorporating them in workshops and allowing them to be part of conferences such as this one, aimed at bettering our education system.

Penultimately, I am concerned about what I will refer to as the internalisation of tertiary education in the Caribbean region, where every island in an attempt to provide access to education for all its citizens, is establishing its own universities and tertiary institutions. Yes, it can be cost-effective; yes, it can provide opportunities that never existed before but does it result in real Caribbean growth and does it reinforce our 'Caribbeanness'? I sometimes detect that a type of regional divide is setting in and there is a lack of real Caribbean connection among the islands. I am concerned about this. I do recall those hallowed days when students from Jamaica would come to Trinidad and Tobago to study engineering. I remember those wonderful days when I had to go to Jamaica to study what I wanted to study. When, for example, all persons in the Caribbean had to complete their degree in law in Barbados and where all persons who wished to study medicine had to go to Jamaica. Because of that persons like myself, persons like Professor Rhoda Reddock, we now have the capacity to pick up our phones and call Prime Ministers of the region and this to my mind is something of worth. Is it possible then, maybe in the

context of the curricula, the syllabus, that provision can be made to do some kind of course work in the Caribbean region as a part of your elective? -Why is it, for example, in our Caribbean region, airfares for students are just as high as for adults? Why is it that we do not realize that the student of today is the executive of tomorrow? I believe there is still hope because as much as I am concerned about this growing divide, it is ironic that what has begun to help us is 20/20 cricket where teams consist of various citizens throughout the Caribbean region and what is wonderful about it is that they are followed around by fans of the Caribbean so there continues to be that communicative and cultural integration through sport beyond the Carnivals of the Caribbean.

In the end therefore, with the right mix of technology, critical-thinking techniques, financial and other investments, we can re-invent our education system, including our tertiary institutions for success. True to the theme of this conference, I humbly propose that the 're-visioning' must be to provide higher education in the Caribbean that is globally competitive and 21st century relevant; the 're-assessing' must be to take a good, hard look at our primary and secondary school curricula and include specific subjects, examples of which I have given- oil and gas and tourism, if only because our Caribbean countries are in many cases wholly dependent on these natural resources; and finally the re-committing must be to our young people and students, to ensure that tertiary education in the Caribbean moves away from being the luxury that it now is, to being a basic necessity like food, shelter and health care and coupled with that, it must be an engine for social transformation that we must in fact not be creating intellectual monsters but persons who are clothed with dignity, who are clothed with a philosophy of compassion and fairness and justice for all.

These are your responsibilities to our Caribbean education system. I have eternal faith in you all, because I know such wise minds will propel these humble suggestions and many more into the realities our children deserve. I thank you, I honestly thank you for the invitation to address such wise men and women today and wish you a productive and satisfying Conference 2015. I look forward to your distinguished company this afternoon.

- Office of The President

Written by C News

The screenshot shows the navigation menu of the CNMG website. At the top left is the CNMG logo. At the top right is a "Back to top" link with an upward arrow. Below the logo are five main menu categories, each with a list of sub-links: "ABOUT US" (Home, Corporate Overview, CEO's Welcome, Television, Radio, Job Vacancies, Employee of the Month, ...), "C TV LOCAL" (C News @7, First Up, Survivors, TandT On Your Table, Against The Odds), "SCHEDULE" (Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, ...), "RADIO" (Next 99.1fm, Sweet 100.1fm, Talk City 91.1fm, ...), and "FOLLOW" (Facebook, Twitter, Rss). At the bottom of the menu are three links: "Home", "LIVE STREAM", and "Contacts". In the bottom right corner, there is a "Switch mode views" button with icons for desktop and mobile.