

## Economic Gains Anticipated From UG's Diaspora Conference – Vice Chancellor

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Any university that has suffered the kind of neglect that the University of Guyana [UG] has experienced needs not only money to recover, but other support as well. This assertion was made during the past week by



From left: Mexican Ambassador, Mr. Ivan Roberto Sierra Medel; UG Vice Chancellor, Professor Ivelaw Griffith; Dr. Fitzgerald Yaw, UG's Director of the Office of Strategic Initiatives, and UG Registrar, Dr. Nigel Gravesande.

UG Vice Chancellor, Professor Ivelaw Griffith. It was with this, among other things, in mind, that the University has collaborated with key stakeholders to organise a Diaspora Engagement Conference [DEC] which is slated for July 23 – 28, 2017 at the Ramada Princess Hotel, Providence, East Bank Demerara. At a recent press conference held at the Mexico Embassy – which is also collaborating with UG to convene the DEC – Professor Griffith said, “we will be asking, and have been asking Diaspora Guyanese and non-Guyanese, not only to give money. We are not only looking for help in monetary ways, but we are also looking for people to open doors...part of it is monetary; part of it is non-monetary.” As such, the intent of the Conference, is to ascertain, “how Diaspora Guyanese and non-Guyanese can help to give not only financially, but time, treasure, talent and open doors to help us connect, to help our students, help our faculty, help our university overall”. According to Professor Griffith, the week-long Conference,

which was in the making for just under one year, will not take on a traditional form. “We are spending a week doing a variety of things; only two days of which are the traditional conversations, but those conversations are not only by academics...we have businessmen, we have civic society, we have diplomats, we have government officials as part of the conversation mix,” Professor Griffith noted. The DEC will see Guyanese participants travelling from as far as Nigeria, Russia, the United States, Jamaica, Trinidad and other countries. In fact, the event is even slated to be attended by the President of the Caribbean Development Bank. It is anticipated that some 500 individuals will attend an investiture ceremony for the Vice Chancellor on the final day. “We will have an opportunity to not only have dialogue of academics, policymakers and businessmen but the investiture ceremony on the Friday of the conference is an important part of the mix,” Professor Griffith assured. President David Granger is scheduled to host the welcome reception and deliver a keynote address to declare the conference officially opened. Speakers will include: People’s Progressive Party Chief Whip, Ms. Gail Teixeira, several ministers of Government, and it is expected that there will be video messages from Baroness Valerie Amos, Director of the School of Oriental and African Studies in the United Kingdom and Gina Mille, the founding partner of Spencer Churchill Miller, an investment company of Brexit fame. Other speakers will include Mexican Ambassador, Mr. Ivan Roberto Sierra Medel; Mr. Glen Khan, Chairman of LAPARKAN and Mr. David Lammy, British Member of Parliament. And since Guyana’s Diaspora and Guyana’s homeland have a wonderful cultural diversity, the Vice Chancellor added that “we want to end the conference by showcasing some of the cultural diversity, that mix of music, and dance and culture.” This will translate to a cultural extravaganza also on the last day of the conference which is being organised by renowned flautist Keith Waithe. Waithe, who is one of Guyana’s musical icons, resides in London. According to Professor Griffith, he had a hand in including Waithe in the Conference, “to be our distinguished artist and resident. He will be coming back in that role. He will be organising Guyanese at home and in the Diaspora for that extravaganza that showcases the right talent of our races, culture, our sports.” Tasked with the role of being Chairman of the Planning Committee of the entire conference is Dr. Fitzgerald Yaw, UG’s Director of the Office of Strategic Initiatives. Dr. Yaw returned to Guyana last year August to take up the appointment at UG. According to him, he has returned to work with the University and help the Vice Chancellor with the project of rebuilding and restoring UG to the place it has to hold in the development of Guyana. As such, the Conference is expected to play an integral role in this regard. Dr. Yaw has been working with a diverse group both in Guyana and other parts of the world, helping to organise the Conference. “Working in Guyana and seeing the challenges directly, living in it really just reinforces for me the importance of the Diaspora in the rebuilding of Guyana...” Dr. Yaw noted, even as he disclosed that the Conference is one that is expected to lead to the establishment of a Diaspora Centre at UG, that will help to deepen and strengthen the engagement of the Diaspora with Guyana and the Caribbean too. “We are not saying that the Diaspora is not being engaged... we all know that it is. It is just a matter that we want to deepen and enhance it,” related Dr. Yaw. Persons locally and broad, including students, business persons, among others are encouraged to register to participate in the Conference. Registration is being done at varying costs to the participants. But according to Professor Griffith, the hosting of the Conference will have significant economic benefit for Guyana as a whole. “Think of what this week – even if we have only 200 people

come to this Conference, think of what that does to an economy. Each of those people who comes for the investiture from abroad, paying an airfare, part of it comes to this country, staying at a hotel, part of it comes here, taking the taxi around, buying souvenirs...there is economic value added," Professor Griffith asserted.