

R&D FOR A CARIBBEAN FUTURE

 by Edward W. Lempinen

When TWAS joined top policy and science leaders in Grenada, they heard a pointed message: a better future for the Caribbean Basin requires the political will to support research and education.

Despite chronic poverty and public debt, Caribbean nations must increase investments in research and development and science education, top science and policy leaders said at high-level regional conference in Grenada.

Led by Grenada Prime Minister Keith Mitchell and joined by TWAS Council member Harold Ramkissoon and TWAS Executive Director Romain Murenzi, speakers at the conference urged nations of the Caribbean Community to summon the political will to support new investments. Without a sustained commitment, they suggested, the nations will struggle to address economic growth and science-related challenges such as climate change and disaster preparation and will continue to suffer from debilitating brain drain.

"Inadequate expenditure on R&D has been for too long our greatest obstacle to development in the region, and we must now make investment in R&D a top priority," said Mitchell, a PhD-level mathematician, in the keynote address "We have no choice, if we are going to ensure a secure future."

Mitchell is the prime minister in charge of science and technology for CARICOM, an organization of 15 Caribbean nations and dependencies that was founded in 1973. His remarks came during the 2nd High-Level CARICOM S&T Meeting, "Strengthening and Utilizing S&T in the Caribbean", that ran from 26-28 March 2015 in Grand Anse, Grenada. The meeting was organized by the CARICOM Science, Technology and Innovation Committee; CARISCIENCE; UNESCO; and the TWAS Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (ROLAC).

The meeting was attended by science and education ministers and other top-level government officials

▼ Prime Minister Keith Mitchell of Grenada (right) met with TWAS Executive Director Romain Murenzi during the CARICOM High-level S&T Meeting.



from Antigua and Barbuda; the Bahamas; Barbados; the British Virgin Islands; Dominica; Grenada; Jamaica; Trinidad and Tobago. It also featured representatives of the private sector and the Caribbean diaspora.

In addition to Murenzi and Ramkissoon, speakers included TWAS Fellow Anthony K. Cheetham, vice-president and treasurer of the Royal Society, and Carlos Alberto Aragão de Carvalho Filho, former ROLAC chairman.

▼ TWAS Council member Harold Ramkissoon.



Ramkissoon serves as the head of the CARICOM S&T committee and was the chief meeting organizer. Formerly an independent senator in the Trinidad and Tobago Parliament, he serves on the board of UNESCO's International Centre for South-South Cooperation and as a professor emeritus of mathematics at the University of the West Indies. In an email interview, he noted that no country in the region spends more than 0.2% of its gross domestic product on R&D.

The meeting endorsed the Grand Anse Declaration, which called on Caribbean nations to make a stronger, more coordinated commitment to economic development through science, technology and education. ■

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