

## **INCOMING PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS, MR. DAVID DRYSDALE 2023-2024**

**Delivered at the 51st Annual Conference of the Association of Caribbean Universities, Research, and Institutional Libraries (ACURIL) held at the Curaçao Marriott Beach Resort on June 9, 2022**

Colleagues, friends, ladies and gentlemen.

It is with a great sense of humility that I rise to address you as the new president of this august regional body, the Association of Caribbean University, Research and Institutional Libraries (ACURIL), which has played such a significant role in bringing library and information professionals together for well over 50 years.

When I got my first job as a young high school graduate and started working in the public library system of the Jamaica Library Service (JLS) on December 1, 1980, I never imagined that over 40 years later I would still be working in a library, let alone rising to a position of leadership in a regional professional body for librarians.

You see, as a young man from rural Jamaica, I was just looking for a job to help improve my economic situation. But the magnetic pull of the library profession held me in its embrace from then. So here I am now, having made librarianship my profession for all these years. I now feel deeply humbled to be asked to serve alongside so many wonderful professionals from across the Caribbean, transcending geographic, language and cultural boundaries to be part of this great movement called ACURIL. It is indeed a great honor and privilege to be asked to serve in this capacity.

Thank you most sincerely for the faith and confidence you have expressed in my ability to provide leadership in ACURIL by your elevating me to this privileged position.

Congratulations are in order for my president, Jeannette Lebron Ramos, who steered the ship of ACURIL during the turbulent sea of the global Covid-19 pandemic. Jeanette, thank you for your kind and astute leadership, and for paving the way for me. I must also mention Dr. Berthamae Walker who served as president prior to Jeannette, and who did a tremendous job in organizing the first virtual conference of ACURIL in 2020, after the Bahamas conference had to be canceled due to the impact of the pandemic.

Becoming president means standing on the shoulders of stalwarts of this noble profession who have paved the way for us. Indeed, ACURIL and the Caribbean generally, has benefited tremendously from the great service provided by some of these giants of the profession. And so I pause to remember two of the founding members of ACURIL whom we have lost in recent times: Executive Secretary Dr. Luisa Vigo Cepeda, and Dr. Alma Jordan, two of the organizers of the very first ACURIL conference in 1969.

I turn now to the organizers of this wonderful conference here in Curacao. Nitzah Jacobus, you and your team on the Local Organizing Committee (LOC) have done a fantastic job to stage a successful conference, even with the pandemic still gripping the world in its tentacles. Well done!

As we speak about this pandemic, I want to use this brief address to salute our library and information professionals all across the region for the amazing work they have been doing to keep their institutions open and continuing to offer quality service to users while COVID-19 continues its rampage in every country. Many institutions have had to make major adjustments in pivoting to mostly online services. Some have introduced new services, such as curb-side pick-up of library material, all because of their keen interest in meeting the needs of users.

In recent years, many have questioned the relevance and continued existence of libraries, pointing to the fact that information can be easily retrieved from the internet. I would like to suggest however, that this pandemic has helped us to see that our library and information units are now even more relevant than ever.

I would therefore urge all our colleagues in the various countries that are part of ACURIL to let us use our collective voices in being stronger advocates for library and information units. Yes, lobby our policy-makers to give greater support to information units. Now is not the time to cut support to libraries and information units, but far too often all we are hearing about is budget cuts and less resources for our institutions. The people we serve deserve better than this.

In fact, all our information units are critical towards meeting the UNESCO Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Webpage, “the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity.

The 17 SDGs are integrated—they recognize that action in one area will affect outcomes in others, and that development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability.

Countries have committed to prioritize progress for those who are furthest behind. The SDGs are designed to end poverty, hunger, AIDS, and discrimination against women and girls.”

Without strong support for libraries in our countries, we will never achieve these goals. ACURIL therefore provides the ideal platform for us to be stronger advocates for greater support of our information units.

Let us use the year ahead, under this new presidency, to make this our main objective: greater advocacy for support of library and information units in all our countries.

Colleagues, I once again thank you for your kind support. Enjoy the rest of the evening, and all the very best to you when you travel back to your respective countries and territories.

June 9, 2022