

Rex Nettleford bids farewell to Caricom heads

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ST GEORGE'S, Grenada — Rex Nettleford, a household name in Caribbean academia and cultural life, has bid a formal farewell to heads of government of the Caribbean Community as vice-chancellor of the University of the West Indies.

The 70-year-old Jamaica-born Caribbean icon, who has been in the service of the region

and its premier educational institution for half a century, demits office as UWI vice-chancellor on September 30 this year.

In a letter to the heads of government of the Caribbean Community meeting here, Professor Nettleford, viewed as one of the most eloquent advocates of Caribbean social and cultural integration, said:

"I am particularly indebted to the governments of the Commonwealth Caribbean whose financial contributions, moral support and on-going advice have helped to sustain our commitment to the regional character of the University of the West Indies..."

His letter preceded his arrival in Grenada for the current 25th annual Caricom Summit taking place at the Conference Centre of the Grand Beach Resort.

On Monday, Nettleford took the opportunity to formally introduce to the Caricom leaders and top officials of regional institutions his successor as vice-chancellor, Guyana-born Professor Nigel Harris, a world-renowned rheumatologist.

Son of the famous novelist, Wilson Harris, the new vice-chancellor, himself a graduate of the UWI, is currently dean and senior vice-president for academic affairs at Morehouse School of Medicine in Atlanta, USA.

At the formal opening session of the Caricom Summit on Sunday evening, Nettleford, founder and director of the internationally famous Jamaica Dance Theatre, was hailed by host current Caricom chairman, Prime Minister Keith Mitchell, and also secretary-general Edwin Carrington, as a towering son of the region "with legendary contributions to our Caribbean life".

At the same time, Nettleford praised the political leaders for having taken the "voluntary decision" in 1948 not to be represented on the Appointments Committee of the UWI.

That decision, he said, has not only demonstrated "a capacity for disinterested public service in the advancement of higher education region-wide, but also guaranteed to the region the advantages of academic freedom, not commonly experienced in most of the developing world..."



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