Avinash Persaud Pays Tribute to Professor The Honourable Bishnodat Persaud, CHB, PhD, FRSA: 1933-2016

Professor The Honourable Bishnodat (Vishnu) Persaud who passed away on July 24, 2016, was a scholar and practitioner with global reach in the field of economic development. His passing is a "huge loss to the coterie of outstanding advocates of more equitable international economic relations," said Chief Emeka Anyaoku, former Secretary General of the Commonwealth Secretariat where Professor Persaud was Director and Head of the Economic Affairs Division from 1981 to 1992. In this capacity, and as co-Secretary to the biennial Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings, Professor Persaud played a critical role behind the scenes in the development of the economic sanctions that contributed to the overthrow of South Africa's apartheid regime.

Persaud's preference was not to be in the limelight but to identify the technical work necessary to translate the desirable into reality and to make it happen. He was deeply involved in the development of the Vulnerability Index that enabled the creation of insurance schemes against hazards; in the classification of Least Developed Countries that laid the ground for debt relief and in the Human Development Report that empowered policy makers to focus on sustainability and not just output. In 1990, he helped to launch the Iworkrama International Programme that showed how rain forests could be sustainably managed. In the same year he helped to establish what became the Commonwealth Private Investment Initiative, demonstrating that emerging markets could offer attractive returns for private investors.

Persaud's intellectual acumen led him to be an early champion of unpopular causes that later became the norm. He was an advocate of the shift away from the statist and inward-looking models of economic development prevalent in the 1980s. He played a major role in progressing the future Finance Minister and later Prime Minister of India, Manmohan Singh along that path. He was an early champion of sustainable development, shepherding the Expert Group Report on Climate Change, 28 years ago, long before climate change became a cause de jour.

Persuasively but always humbly, his ideas found their way into the many high-level commissions in which he sat - such as the UN Secretary General's High-Level Committee on Development Policy, or where he served as chief economic advisor to Sir Shridath Ramphal, commissioner to the Brandt, Brundtland and South Commissions. "Vishnu's personal contribution in the realm of ideas was one of worldwide proportions," said Sir Shridath.

Those who knew him well consistently say that he was not just a determined advocate for a fairer world; he did so with quiet urbanity and grace. He went out of his way to mentor and support many. He wrongly felt that he had not been sufficiently bold in life and did not realise

how much his guidance and love emboldened all who he touched - colleagues, friends and family.

Born in Cumberland Village in Berbice, Guyana, he was devoted to Caribbean development. He sat on many Inter-Governmental Commissions of Enquiry and was a Director of the Central Bank of Barbados and Chief Technical Coordinator of the Caribbean trade negotiating team. At the University of the West Indies he was head of the Eastern Caribbean branch of the Institute of Social and Economic Research in Barbados and was founding Director of the Centre for the Environment and Development in Jamaica. On the day of his funeral on August 5, 2016, the University's flags will fly at half-mast in honour and memory of his contribution. Persaud was awarded the Companion of Honour in the Barbados Independence Day Honours List in 2014.

Professor Avinash Persaud

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