

Rex Nettleford hospitalised in Washington

VICE-CHANCELLOR emeritus at the University of the West Indies (UWI), Professor Rex Nettleford, was last night still in the intensive care unit at a Washington Hospital in the US capital, where he collapsed in his hotel room on Wednesday night.

Up to press time, the 76-year-old, considered as one of Jamaica's leading figures in Caribbean culture and academia, was said to be still unconscious.

A release from the UWI said the cause of Nettleford's illness was not yet known and the university public relations team promised a progress update as soon as one became available. However, word out of Washington yesterday was that Nettleford had suffered a heart attack.

Nettleford was on a visit to the United States where he was to participate in a fund-raising gala for the university.

Last night, Prime Minister Bruce Golding wished Nettleford a speedy recovery. "Our prayers and best wishes are with him at this time," a Jamaica House release quoted Golding.

Deputy Prime Minister Dr Kenneth Baugh also wished Nettleford a speedy recovery. "Professor Nettleford will be foremost in our prayers at this time," Baugh said in a release.

Jamaica's ambassador to the US, Anthony Johnson, was also said to have paid Nettleford a brief visit while Baugh spoke with a member of the medical team assigned to him.

Opposition spokesperson on youth, culture and information Lisa Hanna also expressed deep sadness on hearing of Nettleford's illness.

"I ask all Jamaicans to join me at this crucial moment in praying for his full and speedy recovery," said Hanna. "This is a moment when we can all show the love in our hearts for one who has dedicated all of his time and talent to the advancement of all Jamaicans."

Jamaicans using social networking websites have also been sending their best wishes and expressing their appreciation for the cultural icon.

"His ratings are indisputable. What Bob did for us with the masses globally, he did for us with the intellectual elite worldwide," wrote Twitter user 'bigblackbarry'.

"Through dance, literature and social analysis Prof Nettleford legitimised the culture and gave academics the vocab to discuss Jamaica."

Nettleford, who has written extensively on Caribbean folklore and politics, is the recipient of the nation's third highest honour, the Order of Merit, and is also a cultural advisor to the prime minister.

A graduate of Cornwall College and Oxford University, Nettleford founded the National Dance Theatre Company in 1962.

He is a professor of the UWI's Extra-Mural Studies and heads the Trade Union Education Institution.

He also served as vice-chancellor of the university from 1996 to 2004 and is chairman of the Diaspora Committee.

Yesterday, during a meeting of the committee in Parliament, junior minister of foreign affairs Dr Ronald Robinson asked members to pray for Nettleford.

"As you all know, Professor Nettleford has worked tirelessly on behalf of the Diaspora movement and Jamaica," said Robinson. "He has been a true servant and continues to be a true servant of Jamaica, even in retirement. May I just ask that we bear him in mind and in our prayers to come."