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Message from the New Chairman: A Vision of Leadership, Partnership and Consensus

The West Indies Rum & Spirits Producers' Association (WIRSPA) marked a significant milestone at its Annual General Meeting in June 2025 with the election of **Mr. Clement "Jimmy" Lawrence** as the new Chairman. A veteran of the Jamaican spirits industry and a committed advocate for the Caribbean rum sector, Mr. Lawrence takes the helm from **Mrs. Margaret Monplaisir**, CEO of The St. Lucia Distillers Group of Companies. The newly appointed Executive Committee also includes **Mr. Anthony Bento** (Antigua Distillery), **Mr. Antoine Couvreur** (Barbados - Mount Gay Distilleries), **Mr. Alberto Nogueira** (Dominican Republic - Ron Barceló), **Mr. Ian Forbes** (Trinidad & Tobago – Angostura Limited), and **Mrs. Monplaisir** (St. Lucia) as past Chair.



In his inaugural remarks, Lawrence pledged to lead with strategic vision, integrity and collaboration: *"As WIRSPA approaches its 55th year, I am committed to upholding the spirit of leadership, partnership and consensus that has been the foundation of our association. We must also ensure that our voices are heard in the trade arena, where unequal barriers threaten the livelihoods of thousands across the Caribbean"*.

The AGM also featured two high-level panels on trade and alcohol harm reduction, showcasing WIRSPA's commitment to a balanced industry agenda. Representatives from the World Spirits Alliance, DISCUS, Spirits Europe and the International Alliance for Responsible Drinking (IARD) joined regional trade officials to explore challenges and strategies, reaffirming the importance of WIRSPA's leadership role in both international trade and public health policy dialogue.

Chairman Lawrence further emphasised his intention to promote open communication, strengthen relationships with external stakeholders, and empower committees and staff to take WIRSPA's work forward: *"We may not always agree, but we're committed to navigating differences with respect and professionalism"*.

Navigating Trade Headwinds: U.S. Tariffs and Global Uncertainty

The Caribbean rum sector continues to grapple with the evolving U.S. tariff regime, as recent adjustments by the White House confirmed a 15% tariff on rum imports from Guyana and Trinidad & Tobago, and a 10% rate on other CARICOM and Dominican Republic producers. A new rule now imposes an additional 40% tariff on any products judged to be transhipped in order to evade tariffs, creating fresh complexity in supply chain planning and distribution.



This follows months of trade advocacy as WIRSPA, and regional stakeholders seek greater clarity and fairness in treatment. Caribbean exporters are evaluating how these developments affect cost structures and routing of goods, particularly for those whose supply chains depend on transiting the U.S.

At WIRSPA's AGM, the trade panel provided an opportunity for producers and policy voices to align on responses to this shifting terrain. The growing proliferation of bilateral trade deals by larger markets underscores the urgency for diversifying export markets and leveraging regional collaboration to advocate for better terms on the global stage.

Despite the challenges, WIRSPA remains proactive. Advocacy continues both bilaterally and through broader coalitions, and producers are sharing information on the short- and long-term impact of the tariffs. As the situation develops, the association is maintaining open communication channels with members and governments alike, reaffirming the importance of trade equity for small economies.

Eyes on the UN: Industry Perspective on NCDs Political Declaration



With the **4th High-Level Meeting (HLM) on Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs)** set for 25 September 2025, WIRSPA and its members have welcomed the fourth revision of the Political Declaration circulated by the President of the UN General Assembly. The declaration includes strong support for the **Global Alcohol Action Plan 2022–2030**, which industry stakeholders, including WIRSPA, have consistently endorsed.

Importantly, the draft retains previously agreed language on the role of the private sector, reflecting continued acknowledgment of voluntary actions taken by beverage alcohol producers. These include industry-led marketing codes, youth protection efforts, and public-private cooperation to reduce harmful use of alcohol. WIRSPA producers reiterated these themes during the June AGM, calling for balanced, evidence-based policy that protects health without undermining livelihoods.

The Political Declaration is expected to be adopted by the UN General Assembly in November. For Caribbean rum producers, the focus remains on ensuring recognition of responsible industry actors, particularly given the outsized role of rum in regional employment, exports, and cultural identity.

Looking ahead, WIRSPA will continue to support initiatives aligned with the Global Alcohol Action Plan and work with regional authorities to strengthen and direct action to promote responsible drinking and reduce alcohol harm.

A Resounding Success in Jamaica: 2025 Technical Conference Recap



In May 2025, over 130 participants from more than 25 distilleries, across 18 countries, gathered in Kingston, Jamaica, for WIRSPA's flagship **Technical Conference**. With strong engagement from regional and international technical experts, the event was praised for its rich agenda, hands-on sessions, and opportunities for peer learning.

Key moments included a **Supplier Showcase** featuring 30 companies offering innovative solutions in areas ranging from filtration to sustainability, a **Master Blenders Forum**, and a site visit to **Clarendon Distillery**, where attendees were hosted by personnel from the National Rums of Jamaica Limited and were able to explore both traditional and modern rum-making techniques in action. Technical panels tackled critical issues including molasses supply, warehouse safety and the climate impacts on production.

The conference also set a clear roadmap for future collaboration. There was strong interest in certification courses for rum production, hands-on training like cooperage workshops, and the development of shared R&D capacity. Participants proposed forming working groups to address shared challenges and deepen knowledge exchange across the region.

Plans are underway for the [next edition of the Technical Conference](#) to be held in **Trinidad and Tobago from 18-22 May 2026**. Expectations are high, and the momentum from Jamaica ensures that this annual gathering will continue to shape the future of the Caribbean rum industry.

On the World Stage: Caribbean Rum Heads to Bar Convent Berlin



WIRSPA is proud to support the participation of three Caribbean rum producers in the prestigious **Bar Convent Berlin (BCB)** in October 2025. These companies, alongside three from Mauritius, will showcase their products as part of a pilot project led by the International Trade Centre (ITC) under the EU-OACPS Business Friendly Programme.

The initiative offers selected companies access to coaching, exhibition space, and a platform at BCB's Brand Stage, one of the spirits sector's leading global events. While the project provides logistical support, participating companies are investing heavily in their own travel, samples, and marketing materials. The collaboration is seen as a model for future regional-private sector partnerships.

WIRSPA has supported the effort not only by mobilizing interest among members but also by advocating for this initiative to become a template for broader engagement between Caribbean rum and global trade development agencies.

With a strong Caribbean presence in Berlin, WIRSPA aims to further elevate the global profile of **Authentic Caribbean Rum** and continue building international opportunities for small producers.

Spotlight on People: New Icon Series Interview and Rum Makers Playlist



WIRSPA
West Indies Rum & Spirits
Producers' Association Inc.

Clement Lawrence
Chairman, Spirits Pool Association (Jamaica)
Chairman, West Indies Rum and Spirits
Producers' Association Inc. (WIRSPA)

**WIRSPA Icon Series:
CLEMMENT 'Jimmy' LAWRENCE**



HOSTED BY
MATT PIETREK
WIRSPA COMMUNITY ENVOY

WIRSPA's storytelling efforts continue with the [→latest episode](#) in the **Icon Series**, which features **Clement "Jimmy" Lawrence**, incoming Chair and a titan of the Jamaican spirits landscape. In a wide-ranging conversation, Lawrence shares insights from his journey in the industry, his vision for WIRSPA, and what leadership means in a time of global transformation.

Meanwhile, the popular **Rum Makers** playlist remains active and engaging. Recent additions include **Lennox Wilson** (St. Lucia Distillers), **Don Benn** (West Indies Rum Distillery), **Thomas Roulston** (Hampden Estate) and **Marc Paul** (Angostura Limited), each offering personal reflections on craftsmanship, sustainability and Caribbean pride in rum-making. These interviews provide a behind-the-scenes look at the human stories shaping our industry.

Stay tuned for more episodes, and in the meantime, you can catch the [→full playlist here](#).

WIRSPA Tech-Conference 2026: Port of Spain, Trinidad & Tobago



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We are delighted to announce that the **WIRSPA Tech-Conference 2026** will be held in **Port of Spain, Trinidad & Tobago, from 18–22 May 2026**. This event will bring together rum producers, industry leaders and suppliers for a week of knowledge-sharing, collaboration and innovation. The programme will feature a **supplier showcase, distillery visit to the House of Angostura, rum tastings**, and more!

This is another special opportunity for rum producers to engage directly with suppliers to explore the latest technological solutions that are moving the industry forward.

Registration from 5 JAN – 10 APR 2026
Want to get ahead? Expressions of interest are welcome before registration officially starts.

[→Save the date](#), spread the word to your colleagues and preferred suppliers, and join us in **Trinidad & Tobago** for what promises to be another highly valuable and memorable event for the industry.

Articles of Interest: Insights and Highlights for Your Attention

IARD releases its **Progress Report on Alcohol Consumption and Alcohol-related Harm**, based on the latest comprehensive **World Health Organization (WHO) data**. The findings confirm significant progress worldwide in reducing alcohol-related harm. →[Progress Report](#)

How risky is it to drink alcohol? The claim of “No Safe Level” is increasingly echoed by some health advocates. →[In this article](#), Dr Erik Skovenborg explains that **this all-or-nothing concept is misleading and damaging to the public understanding** of the risks of drinking alcohol.

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