

LAUNCHING THE WORLD HUNGER FIGHTERS FOUNDATION

Speaker: Grace Adesina

October 17, 2019

Introduction

Ada Osakwe

Chief Operating Officer, World Hunger Fighters Foundation

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Good afternoon. We are running slightly over, and we're really glad that we could have you this afternoon. My name is Ada Osakwe. I'm the Chief Operating Officer of the World Hunger Fighters Foundation. Two years ago right here at the Borlaug Dialogue, a commitment was made that I strongly believe has set us on the course to transform the face of global agriculture – a commitment that will see Africa and its young people rise to the forefront of the global fight against hunger, malnutrition and poverty.

Ladies and gentlemen, today I'm incredibly pleased to say that we've come full circle and transformed the commitment into action. I would now like to introduce you to the person leading this charge. For many years I have seen firsthand her dedication towards supporting the emergence of the new generation of young food innovators in Africa. I have been deeply inspired by her selflessness, intelligence, and above all her caring spirit. Please join me in welcoming the President and Chief Executive of the World Hunger Fighters Foundation, Mrs. Grace Adesina.

Mrs. Grace Adesina

President and Chief Executive of the World Hunger Fighters Foundation.

Thank you very much, Ada. Excellencies, President Tshisekedi, the President of the Democratic Republic of Congo, President Olusegun Obasanjo, the former President of Nigeria, Ambassador Kenneth Quinn, President of the World Food Prize Foundation, distinguished guests, friends from all over, ladies and gentlemen, a very good afternoon to you all. And on behalf of the board and the management of the World Hunger Fighters Foundation, I welcome you to the official launch of our foundation.

Nothing could have made me prouder than to watch my husband, Dr. Akinwumi Adesina, win the World Food Prize in 2017. As we both danced that wonderful evening at the Awards Ceremony, joined by our beloved father, President Obasanjo, my mind went back in time to how it all began.

In 1988 my husband and I became beneficiaries of the Rockefeller Foundation when he won the prestigious Rockefeller Post-Doctoral Fellowship. This was what launched his career as a world hunger fighter. As he went on to work in three International Agricultural Research Centers, ICRISAT, WARDA, and IAT, and later went on to work for AGRA. As a fresh PhD graduate at

Purdue University, he was full of potential, and the fellowship he received helped to unleash the potential within. And he impacted the world of agriculture.

In the same way, we would like to help build up the next generation of world hunger fighters by identifying young Africans who are already in the agricultural space and possess that potential and have that passion and commitment to impact the world.

Through the World Hunger Fighters Foundation, we want to empower them, we want to inspire them, we want to equip them to be better at what they are doing. And hopefully many of them will excel and go on to impact the world of agriculture at scale, just like Dr. Norman Borlaug and Dr. Akin Adesina.

So I would like to thank all of you for honoring our invitation, not just to this official launch of the World Hunger Fighter's Foundation, but as partners in our quest to raise up the next generation of world hunger fighters. We hope we can count on your support as we contribute our modest efforts to ensure that our world is free from hunger, poverty, and malnutrition. Again, welcome, and thank you for coming.

**KENNETH M. QUINN - ADDRESS DURING WORLD HUNGER FIGHTERS FOUNDATION
LAUNCH**
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Introduction by Ada Osakwe

Ambassador Kenneth M. Quinn

President - World Food Prize Foundation

Thank you, Ada. Ada's a lot like the individuals who work for me, almost all of them young women. You have a dream and they make it a reality. So I want to share with you just two things so you understand what this session is all about.

Number one is there was this moment in 2017 when Laureate, Dr. President Akin Adesina stood before the audience to say a few words, and he committed the entire \$250,000 Prize to starting a Hunger Fighter Foundation. It was very dramatic. I was with him earlier this year in Seoul, South Korea where he received the Sunhak Prize, half a million dollars, and he did the same thing – he stood up and said, "I'm committing all of this money to the Hunger Fighter Foundation." You know, Grace Adesina, if I did that, I'd be in big trouble with my wife. So God bless you, because I know you were so supportive of this incredible generosity.

Second is that in the 20 years of the World Food Prize, there are certain moments that stand out. Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping speaking at our Hall of Laureates. Kofi Annan leading the African Green Revolution, which President Adesina was then a member, a vice president in their staff. The Secretary General Ban Ki-moon being here. Princess Haya Bint al-Hussein. Big moments, big ideas come together, the lasting memories because they have such impact. Today this session is exactly that as we welcome the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and also our dear friend, President Olusegun Obasanjo to be here as part of this program. So all of you, you students, you next Norm's, that are here, teachers – this is one of those moments that five years, ten years, twenty years from now, people will still be talking about. So a very warm welcome. I'm so glad all of you are here with us for what will be a marvelous session and the launching, the fulfillment of Dr. and Mrs. Adesina's vision, Ada, that you have put together.

ADDRESS BY H.E. FELIX TSHISEKEDI - LAUNCHING THE WHFF

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Introduction

Ada Osakwe

His Excellency, President Felix Tshisekedi, the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is here with us today. He assumed office earlier this year and has been a strong advocate for deliberate government policies and investments in the food and agriculture sector. The DRC, Democratic Republic of Congo, is one with vast arable land that has the potential to feed most of Africa, and in fact, maybe most of the world, and to ensure food security.

We love the way he has championed the industrialization agenda for agriculture, which is necessary to promote value chain linkages. Monsiuer le President, Your Excellency bienvenu.

(Via translator)

H.E. Felix Tshisekedi

President, The Democratic Republic of the Congo

Ambassador Quinn, President of the World Food Prize. Your Excellency, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, heads of diplomatic missions, distinguished guests.

I would like to begin by expressing my thanks to Ambassador Kenneth Quinn, President of the World Food Prize, for his invitation to this important event, which brings together key stakeholders and partners in the agriculture and food sector from all over the world.

Secondly, I extend my warm congratulations to Mr. Simon Groot, winner of this year's World Food Prize. For me, this prestigious award is well-merited in recognition of his contribution to ensuring access to adequate quantities of nutritious food to thousands of people in more than 60 countries worldwide through fast-growing, high-yield, and disease-resistant vegetable seeds. This is even more so impressive when we consider that up to a million people on earth suffer from food deficiency. Moreover, Mr. Groot has been able to greatly increase the income and quality of life for thousands of farmers.

It is also a great pleasure for me to be here. Only after a few days with our senior and eminent personality in the field of agriculture, former President of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo, and my friend and brother, Dr. Adesina Akinwumi, president of the African Development Bank. After having the honor last week in Bukavu in my country, of inaugurating the Agricultural Research Station of the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture, IITA, Kalambo, the second of its kind in Africa, after the one in Ibadan, Nigeria.

This pleasure is even greater today because we are witnessing the launch by Dr. Akinwumi Adesina, winner of the 2017 World Food Prize, of the World Hunger Fighters Foundation, which he endowed with his World Food Prize.

As you know, eradicating hunger in the world is one of the main Sustainable Development Goals. These goals constitute a global call to action to eradicate poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that all human beings live in peace and prosperity.

And of these 17 objectives which were adopted by the 193-member countries of the U.N., the fight against hunger, which is Goal #2, aims to guarantee food security, improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture. This objective is also known as “Zero Hunger.”

However, in view of the global hunger figures which have started to increase again since 2017, much effort remains to be done to achieve this goal in a context where projections for population growth pose a real need to increase food production.

Indeed, by 2060 there will be 10 billion mouths to feed on the earth, and it is estimated that world food production would need to double in order to meet food needs. The same needs are projected for water resources, which today are threatened by climate change. At the same time, arable land continues to deteriorate.

On the other hand, the decline in fossil fuels on which agricultural production depends will undoubtedly cause food prices to soar in the years ahead.

In sub-Saharan Africa, much more so than elsewhere, this challenge is being felt because of the persistence of conflict and insecurity in several countries, coupled with low productivity rates in the agricultural sector, making this part of the Continent a net food importer. It is estimated that sub-Saharan Africa imports 35 billion worth of food each year, despite the fact that it accounts for 25% of the world's arable land.

This deepening extraversion of African economies must be halted, because the African Continent has all the assets to do so. That is why a concerted effort needs to be made to produce a Marshall Plan to deliver food security for our populations.

The theme of this year's summit is Pax Agricultura. It is all the more important to me, because my country has been both the victim and the scene of several armed conflicts for more than two decades, the consequences of which continue to affect a certain part of our territory in the East, which is the breadbasket of our country. This situation has for a long period directly affected income and food security as a result of the forced displacement of the rural population and the destruction of agricultural resources.

The correlation between agriculture and peace no longer needs to be demonstrated. In a 2017 report by the United Nation University, titled “Agriculture for Peace,” it is established that there are correlations between armed conflict and agriculture. The report shows that no agricultural development which generates poverty can increase the motivation of individuals to joined armed groups to improve their living condition.

The same report goes on to say that developing the agricultural sector can increase the opportunity costs for rural populations and make the use of violence less attractive. In other

words, depending on the context, agriculture can be a source of peace or conflict, crisis or recovery.

While agriculture is the largest economic sector in most African countries currently affected by conflict, it is important beyond ensuring food security for each to act as a stabilizing and stimulating force behind helping to strengthen the social fabric through the creation of job opportunities.

For example, in the eastern part of my country, the Democratic Republic of Congo, agricultural projects are helping to reintegrate combatants in society through disarmament, demobilization and integration programs. Hence, the government has decided to create agricultural brigades providing accelerated training in order to increase the qualified level for agricultural development.

Ladies and gentlemen, a Democratic Republic of Congo fully pacified with policy that we intend to implement in the agricultural sector can be an important part of the solution to this global challenge, which dangerously threatens humanity.

With about 120 million hectares of arable land, fertile and suitable for agroindustry, my country has been well-endowed by nature. In addition, weather conditions encourage the large-scale deployment of agricultural activities everywhere in the country throughout the year.

This enormous agricultural potential, combined with the latest improved production technologies, can feed up to more than one third of the world's population but also transform the DRC's national economy by generating a double-digit growth.

Indeed, the agricultural sector, which currently employs 60% of the Congolese population, should be the main component of the economy through the supply of internal markets, the continuous improvement of food security, the reduction of imports, and the increase of exports.

In fact, it should be the main pillar of the national economy with poverty reduction as a corollary. Unfortunately, this is not the case, and the DRC remains a net importer of food with well over 70% of the essential agricultural products sourced overseas.

This contradiction has always been of great concern to me, and that is why, from the moment I took office, I decided to make the development of agriculture my key issue during my tenor. I have since made a national call for a return to land so that agriculture can take its revenge on mining, which has proven its limits.

This is the place to recognize once again the encouragement and unwavering support that my brother and friend, Dr. Adesina, President of the African Development Bank and winner of the 2017 World Food Prize, has been giving me as I endeavor to develop agriculture and agribusiness in my country.

As you know, feeding Africa is one of the African Development Bank's five priorities, and my country's enormous agricultural potential gives it a great responsibility in the search for solutions to the African food crisis.

It is with this in mind that we are working with Dr. Adesina of the African Development Bank on the creation of several special agricultural zones in the DRC to unleash this great agricultural

potential and transform our national economy through investment, the creation of thousands of jobs for young people, the construction of transport and energy infrastructures, training of the workforce, transfer of technology and know-how, increased income, which will all contribute to poverty reduction.

In order to realize this vision, it is important to improve the business environment in my country, a task that I have dedicated myself, to since inauguration.

I am committed to improving the business environment by fiercely fighting corruption, tax evasion, smuggling, and embezzlement of public funds. This requires major reforms, especially of the judicial system to further secure domestic and foreign investments. In the same vein, I initiated the amendment of the Agricultural Accord, to make it more flexible and in line with the needs of investors in order to facilitate win-win partnerships.

I would therefore like to assure all those who want to invest in agriculture and agribusiness that they are welcome to be part of the agricultural and agribusiness revolution we are embarking on in the DRC. My country is ready for you, and be assured of my personal involvement, because this matter is close to my heart.

Ladies and gentlemen, defeating hunger in the world is our common struggle. Indeed, in order to meet the challenge of ending hunger, to counter the risk of large-scale funding and to ensure lasting peace among people, humanity needs to act together.

These collaborations should lead to a global consensus on the major issues related to the agricultural sector and food security, namely, seeds, new technologies, access to markets, and legislation.

It is only in the spirit of solidarity that we can together reinvent agriculture and food systems around the world in order to meet this great challenge of eradicating famine. These agricultural systems must be more environmentally sustainable and less dependent on fossil fuels. To achieve this will require massive investments in research and development and the sharing of the resulting knowledge on a global scale.

For Africa, it is also a question of capitalizing on new technologies, such as access mobile telephones and internet connections and intelligent use, and efficiency in productivity of smallholders through easy access to information and markets for the input and products.

African governments should also constantly adapt their legislation to accommodate technological advances. But above all, their leaders must demonstrate a lot of political will.

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests, in conclusion I would like to say that it is with great pleasure that I am participating in the launch of the World Hunger Fighters Foundation, a very laudable initiative, by my dear friend and brother, Dr. Adesina Akinwumi, which will enable young Africans from all walks of life to benefit from a scholarship at the International Agricultural Research Institution.

Dr. Adesina is not... (This is actually not in the text.) ... is not at his first trial. When he was minister of agriculture in Nigeria, he was able, only in four years, to demonstrate that green gold, that is agriculture, could also be an alternative to develop Nigerian economies, which was dependent on oil.

This endeavor is in line with Dr. Adesina's vision of creating a vibrant generation of young African agripreneurs who are well equipped to be at the frontline to lead the fight against hunger, a fight that must awaken our conscience to the highest degree.

As Africa is a young continent, it is, above all, young people who must be at the forefront of these fights against hunger. They will also be the main beneficiaries; because, as statistics from the international labor organizations, between 10 and 12 million young people are dumped every year on the labor market in sub-Saharan Africa. Left to themselves, these young people may become radicalized and thus constitute a time bomb for peace and security on the continent. Dr. Adesina is therefore right, because the agricultural sector offers better opportunities for the employment of this youth.

Be blessed, my brother. Africa is proud of you.