

BREAKFAST KEYNOTE

Speaker: Ambassador Kenneth M. Quinn

October 18, 2019 - 7:30 a.m.

Introduction

Meghna Ravishankar

Director of Planning, World Food Prize Foundation

Hi, everyone. We hope you've been enjoying your breakfast. I will get our program started now. So it is my honor to welcome Ambassador Ertharin Cousin, distinguished fellow of the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, who will be providing some introductory remarks to introduce our keynote speaker this morning.

Ambassador Ertharin Cousin

Distinguished Fellow, Chicago Council on Global Affairs

Good morning. Okay, we can do better than that. We had a great laureate ceremony last night. Good morning. There we go.

You know, you look at Ken Quinn, and you say – What is success? To laugh often and much, to win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children, to earn appreciation of honest critics, and endure a betrayal of false friends, to appreciate beauty – look at his lovely wife – to find the best in others, to leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch, or a redeemed social condition, to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived. This is to have succeeded. This is to have lived a successful life.

When Ralph Waldo Emerson penned those words, he didn't know our Ambassador Kenneth M. Quinn. But, yes, his words capture the Ken Quinn story and the Ken Quinn legacy. We know him today as ambassador and the celebrated World Food Prize leader, Kenneth M. Quinn. But in the 1960s, long before he was called “Your Excellency,” as a junior Foreign Service officer, Ken Quinn served as a rural development advisor in San Duc Province in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam.

That Ken Quinn is the only civilian ever to receive the U.S. Army Air Medal for commanding U.S. Army helicopter combat operations during the Vietnam war. That Ken Quinn was and is recognized as the first person anywhere in the world to discover and report on genocidal practices of the radical Khmer Rouge terrorists. Ken Quinn, this is to have lived a life of success. Ken Quinn is the only Foreign Service officer to ever receive on three separate occasions – that's three, three – three separate occasions the American Foreign Service Association Awards for intellectual courage and dissent on policy. To win the respect of intelligent people – this is to have succeeded.

As a refugee advisor to Governor Robert Ray of Iowa, on loan from the State Department, from 1978 to 1982 when the Vietnamese boat people, fleeing Communism were perishing at sea because no country, including the U.S., would accept any more refugees, a young Ken Quinn formulated the governor of Iowa's first in the world public pledge to double the size of Iowa's refugee resettlement program – if President Carter would reopen America's doors to accept more refugees. Governor Ray's action provided the moral leadership which convinced the President to change America policy and admit 168,000 refugees a year and inspired the U.N. global effort that eventually saved millions of refugees. To know even one life has breathed easier because you lived – this is to live a life of success.

And in the 1990s, as U.S. ambassador to Cambodia, he drove... Ken Quinn drove without any security into an active combat zone with only the American ambassadorial flags on his car, to rescue U.S. citizens, Mormon missionaries, caught in civil war crossfire in Cambodia. Yes, Ambassador Quinn did that.

After retiring from the Foreign Service after 32 years, in 2000 Ambassador Quinn joined the World Food Prize, fulfilling the vision of the late Dr. Norman E. Borlaug, by building the World Food Prize and the Borlaug Dialogue Symposium as aptly noted by our friend, Sir Gordon Conway, into a premier conference in the world on global food security. Or as recognized by many of you in this room even as the Nobel Peace Prize for food and agriculture, honoring laureates from around the world.

But the life of success is not a life without conflict or controversy. So in 2013 over the protests of many and the objections of even more, the World Food Prize honored three leaders in the seed biotechnology industry, recognizing achieving nutritious sustainable food for all people requires celebrating science and allowing the science to lead, even when it's not popular. To leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch, or redeemed social condition.

In October of 2014, the World Food Prize Symposium was the first public symposia in the world to address the devastating impact of Ebola on agriculture and as a result on food security and hunger in West Africa. To know one has breathed easier because you have lived. Yes, Ambassador Kenneth Quinn, you did that.

Ladies and gentlemen, please stand and join me in thanking Ambassador Kenneth M. Quinn, because he has succeeded and because we all know whatever comes next, he won't stop until the world a little bit better.

Thank you.

Ambassador Kenneth M. Quinn

President - World Food Prize Foundation

So, wow. Ambassador Cousin, thank you, thank you from the bottom of my heart for that introduction.

So I have to explain to you why I invited and asked Ambassador Cousin to come and do this. We always end up at conferences wherever the two of us go, somehow on the schedule they have me right after her. So can you imagine any harder act to follow than Ambassador Cousin?

Please, please join me in expressing appreciation. So I said – It's inevitable that it will happen here. I have to follow her – which, I should just sit down and say, you know, you heard all this. This is my moment, my last speaking engagement for the World Food Prize. So glad the Attorney General Tom Miller is here. Thank you, Tom. Tom and I grew up in Dubuque together. We used to shoot hoops under the streetlight there, and he went on to become Attorney General of Iowa. John Ruan, John. Simon Groot, our laureate. Wonderful to celebrate you last night. And one more round of applause here for Simon. And of course I'm so pleased my family is here.

So I want to tell you about my journey. You know, it was 50 years of finding *Peace through Agriculture*. But there's some other titles that should have been on this. And I want to begin by telling you about a young woman who served on my staff named Crystal Harris. She's at Columbia getting a Master's Degree now. And her job was to help me and schedule everything and drive me around. So we went down to the University of Missouri. We have some students from Missouri Youth Institute – where are you? Show me your hands from the Show Me state there. And we're driving back at night, and, you know, there's no interstate directly between Missouri and Des Moines, so you have to go on these back highways. And she's driving along. We're on this road, and then she puts on the left turn signal and said... I said, "What are you doing? We're on the right road." Said, "No, no. The GPS said go this way." I said, "Don't be crazy," and I'm about to grab the steering wheel – we're gonna fight for the steering wheel. And she says, "No, no. We have to go this way." And of course like most times when I had something with my people on my staff, she won. She made the turn, and we're going up this dark road, and there are no lights, there are no houses. I said, "Where, Crystal? Where have you taken us?" And, though, it turns out what I thought was the wrong turn, we found the road that got us over to the interstate, back to Des Moines, 20 or 30 minutes earlier. We found the right road.

So my life has been filled with wrong turns which end up as the right one. And it started when I graduated, as Tom did, from Loras College in Dubuque, Iowa, a little Catholic college. And I wanted to go to law school but didn't have money to take the law boards. And instead, I drove across the north bridge up to Madison to take the Foreign Service exam. You know, come on, it was a long shot – 18,000 people take the test. They pick 200. What chance do I have? But it's free, you know, and you can dream.

So I take the test, and then a few months later I get back the results. So those of you here from the U.S. Government, you know, you get criticized for governmental inefficiency and mistakes and things. So I think they probably made a mistake and got my scores mixed up with some guy from Harvard or Princeton or Yale. But I passed. I thought, oh, my God – I'm gonna become a Foreign Service officer. John Kennedy talked about if he didn't get in politics, he wanted to be a Foreign Service officer, be a diplomat. Oh, my heaven!

And so I show up over at "foggy bottom" that they call the State Department sort of because of the foggy way of thinking sometimes. No, I didn't mean that. And, you know, you have this counseling session – Where do you want to go and serve? Oh, I'm from Dubuque. I want to go to London, I want to go to Paris, I want to go to Vienna – and they send me to Vietnam, as you heard. And it was a single-engine plane and lands on a road. They didn't stop the engine. They open the door to get out. They throw your bag at you. And I'm standing there saying this isn't the right road. Talk about a wrong turn. And they sort of said, "Well, you know, if you're still alive in 18 months, we'll come back and get you and you can go on to your career." They didn't

even train me about how to stamp a visa. Instead, they gave us training on walking the mine field training at Fort Bragg.

So I'm, you know, keeping my head down and flying around in helicopters and that. And I've got eight villages where we're working and bringing in the miracle rice developed at the International Rice Research Institute where Dr. Gurdev Khush, our 1996 laureate, was working, developing this amazing rice that could grow in half the time as traditional rice, produce twice as much crop, twice as much yield. And it was revolutionary, because then farmers still had time to grow vegetables like Simon Groot, you know. They weren't as good as if they had East-West seed.

But the lesson I learned... I learned the lesson of my life, driving around 12,000 miles from Iowa, because there was an old road that went through those eight villages. And just by chance we were fixing their road, and we had fixed it through four villages. Wherever we fixed the road, farmers used the seeds. And it changed lives dramatically. Now, farmers had more money, surplus income. They could buy nutritious food. Their children looked better nourished. They were better dressed. Their houses were improved. Child mortality went down. And, and the Vietcong underground insurgents, who were causing so much conflict, evaporated. The one thing they couldn't resist, defend against, was the prosperity brought by the roads and the seeds.

And so standing there, so far from home, I realized that I was seeing the lesson of America— That's what transformed Iowa, Missouri, Illinois, Wisconsin, all of America. That's why at the wonderful land grant institutions like Iowa State that President Wintersteen leads, that's why the engineering school and the agricultural college are there at the same place—because Justin Morrill and the founders of the land grant system knew that lesson.

And so I took this lesson away. My 18 months were about up. The State Department said, "Well, what do you want to do?" They had asked me, and I said, "Oh, you know what I want to do. I want to go to Western Europe. I want to serve in Amsterdam or the Hague— Amsterdam's not the capital. The embassy's in the Hague in the Netherlands." And they said, "Good news. We're sending you to Harvard." You know, Tom Miller went to Harvard. But they were going to send me. I thought, ah, incredible.

"And then we're gonna assign you to be a laborer, a European Labor Movement reporter, and you're gonna report on the European Labor Movement." I was thrilled. My dream was at last gonna come through. And then... And then this guy shows up. He was a reporter from *Time Life*, and my job is to take him out, show him what we're doing, winning the hearts and minds, uplifting villages. And we get in the car and drive down. We get in a boat and we're riding down the Mekong River... When I'd started driving across the Mississippi to go take that Foreign Service exam, now I'm on the Mekong. And he says, "What are you gonna do?" And I said, "Well, hey, I'm going to Harvard. I'm gonna serve in Western Europe. I'm going to report on labor movements."

And he asked me the question that I had never been smart enough to ask myself: "Well, why would you want to do that?" And I'm sitting there. It's like somebody pushed the pause button. There were no pause buttons back then. And I'm sitting there. It's November. It's this gray, overcast day. I can tell you right where I was sitting in the boat, feeling a little spray of the Mekong coming up, hitting me on my cheek. And finally I said to him, "I don't know why I'd want to do that." And he had said, "Here you're in the middle of the epic adventure of your

generation, you speak the language, you're stepping through the cultural veil. You're making a difference in people's lives.

So I went back that night, and the Assistant Secretary of State, Manisha Singh, here, she'll know this. I went back. I wrote the State Department and said, "I don't want to go to Harvard. I don't want to be assigned to Western Europe. I want to stay in Vietnam." So she knows, usually when you show such signs of mental instability, the State Department brings you right home. They were desperate for people to stay in Vietnam.

They approved right away, and I stayed there six years. I met my wife there. Let's see. We met at a Canadian diplomatic event, and I was charming her with my command of Vietnamese and telling her about my work in the Delta with rice and roads and all this. And so after I excused myself to go get something to drink, another American who spoke Vietnamese came up to her and said, "Oh, you're talking to Ken Quinn. He speaks really good Vietnamese, doesn't he?" She said, "Him? He speaks like a country bumpkin from the Delta." So now you see how charming I had to be that she's here. But I stayed. I worked up on the Cambodia border, riding in those helicopters, saw the Khmer Rouge. They started. Filed the first report, and in April of 1974 the plane lands, hands me an envelope, and it says, "You've been assigned to the National Security Council at the White House." So we gotta get married and so she can go with me, fly back to Washington.

And I have to tell you my first job in May of '64 right after I graduated from college was working in the hide house of the Dubuque Pack where the skins of the freshly slaughtered animals were all delivered to you and you picked them and you'd be covered with blood. I'm sorry. It is breakfast. I shouldn't describe this. And entrails, and we spread them all out. So ten years later to the month, May of 1974, I walked into the White House complex to begin work on the National Security Council staff. I had gone from the hide house to the White House. It'll be a chapter in my book if I ever write it. All because, all because I'd made what I thought was the wrong turn but had found the right road.

Next I worked there for several years, and then I came to Des Moines to read a message from the President at a refugee event with Governor Robert Ray. And afterwards he said to me, "You know, we sure could use a guy like you here in Iowa." So the State Department had a program where they would loan officers to mayors and state governments. So I signed up. And I got here, and I was in this little office without windows. Nicki Schissel and Ed Redfern know exactly where I was. They were on the staff. And I'm sitting there – no assignment, nothing to do. And I think it's another wrong turn.

But as you heard Ambassador Cousin say, the boat people refugees – Governor Ray stepped forward, made this incredible gesture – the first governing official in the world to say he would take the boat people refugees. And we went to Geneva to the U.N. And with Vice President Walter Mondale, he announced to the world how many refugees we would take, and America got a standing ovation for our humanitarian leadership, a Republican, a Democrat working together. I was so incredibly thrilled to be part of that.

We came back. We had the visit of Pope John Paul II. Then we went to China, the establishment of diplomatic relations. I was, you know, being in Iowa, having more impact on foreign policy than I ever could working in the Department. And then we made a side trip to Thailand, rushed out to the border, and we saw these 30,000 victims of the Cambodia genocide literally dying before our eyes, 50 to a hundred a day. We came back and the governor had taken photos – they

ran in *The Des Moines Register*, and it sent an electric current across the state. We formed Iowa SHARES, Iowa Sends Help, Aid Refugees, End Starvation. We raised in today's money close to \$2 million, all from Iowans just sending in money. And the food and medicine we sent to the border. I was the director of Iowa SHARES, and it arrived on Christmas, those gifts, lifesaving gifts to refugees.

So it turned out wrong turn, right road.

In the 1990s I'm back working on Indo-China, Vietnam, Cambodia. And I'm up for a big embassy, going to be put forward, big moment. And that assignment fell through. They said there's one ambassador post left – Cambodia is the new post, just opened. The embassy there is a couple of houses that we built a wall around. And so an incredible honor – right? – to represent our country as ambassador anywhere. You know, it's not the road I had thought, was it, you know, the wrong turn? But I got there, and of course it was the right road, in spite all of the dangers that we faced there.

And there I put that lesson I learned in Sedek Province of roads and rice to work. There was still 25,000 Khmer Rouge. I had \$13 million, used it all to build roads, bring in new rice. And on March the 6th, 1999, the last Khmer Rouge surrendered. We had eradicated the worst genocidal mass-murdering organization of the second half of the 20th century, using Norman Borlaug's formula – roads and rice.

So then I went from the killing fields back home to the field of dreams, thanks to John Ruan III, who convinced me to come back home, take on the World Food Prize. Dr. Ronnie Coffman, Norman Borlaug's only graduate student, worked with him, knew that as I was coming, that Dr. Borlaug thought the Ruans had made a wrong turn in hiring me. When I got here, I had just one employee, and the World Food Prize is a small, one-day event; maybe 30 or 40 people came from outside Iowa to attend. And I thought, gosh, again I've made the wrong turn. But of course it turned out to be the right road.

I met Dr. Borlaug for the first time. Oh, man, he was looking at me suspiciously – Oh, what have they done hiring this diplomat, this ambassador who doesn't know anything about agriculture, which was true. And I'm meeting with him and I'm giving him my spiel about – oh, I was in, you know, roads and rice and building Sedek Province, and I said roads. And he said roads! Well, I thought I was about to be fired before I even started. And he said, "You're absolutely right. This was the bond. If you don't have the roads, you might as well not develop the seeds." And so I had this incredible opportunity for the last 20 years, continue building the World Food Prize, fulfilling his legacy.

In 2001, one month after 9/11, we had six or seven hundred people here, because on our theme that I had organized well ahead of time was the threat of bioterrorism and agroterrorism. And the head of the Food and Drug Administration, who is here speaking right here, this podium, this lectern, this room, giving a talk on food terrorism, wrote to me later and said, "The ideas that circulated at the World Food Prize in Des Moines kept America safe during those months, initial months after 9/11." I was so pleased. I was so thrilled that what we could do here could lend itself to security through *peace through agriculture*, keeping our country safe and have these opportunities all through the World Food Prize.

You heard Ambassador Cousin talk about some of them. I had the incredible honor to be chosen to lead the Norman Borlaug Statue Committee to raise the money, choose the artist to be there

in the U.S. Capitol in Statuary Hall. One of my young students from our Global Youth Institute who had gone on to be a Borlaug-Ruan intern, gone on to become an ophthalmological surgeon, and she brought her violin and played in Statuary Hall *The Iowa Corn Song*, Norman Borlaug's favorite song in the world – because when he went to that one-room schoolhouse for eight years in Southie New Oregon Township #8, half the students were Lutheran Norwegians like him, and the other half were Czech Bohemian Catholics from down the road towards Spillville, where Dvorak wrote the New World Symphony. And they came together, and in those days those were big differences, but they found and sang about the one thing they had in common, being from Iowa.

Food, agriculture; it's what brings people together across the broadest differences. It's what I never knew growing up, because I wasn't in 4-H, I wasn't in FFA. But I discovered the transformative power of food and agriculture and confronting hunger to reach across the divides between Israelis and Palestinians. I believe it can reach across between North Koreans and South Koreans, between Indians and Pakistanis. This is the way to ensure that we have peace, because conflict, even if we develop the most incredible new seeds, the most incredible sustainability practices, if this world is disrupted by all of the conflict that can occur, that terrorism can incur.

When I addressed the U.N. in New York in 2013, I said, "Here's what you do. You get the United Nations FAO World Hunger Map, and you lay it out, and it's got all these shaded areas where Ambassador Cousin and Catherine Bertini and Josette Sheeran, and they're running the World Food Program, were always bringing food to save lives. It's all these shaded areas. And you get the World Conflict Map and you put it on top, and they're coterminous – it's where the hunger and the malnutrition and poverty is where you have the insurgency and the conflict and the terrorism. But you lay on top of it the World Rural Road Highway Map, and you'll see that where the road ends is where hunger, poverty, malnutrition, conflict, insurgency and terrorism all begin. The roads, the seeds are this critical element – they have to go together and help ensure, uplift Africa as they've uplifted China and uplifted America."

So as I conclude my time and look back at my 50 years, 52 years really from back to '67, I think what are the lessons I learned? You know, in combat in Vietnam in the middle of that terrible, divisive war that tore our country apart, I saw that one of those times when you could truly say that the racial divisions had so beset our country, there was still this terrible scourge to deal with, could disappear – because in combat when you heard on the radio that a uniformed Sierra, which was radio talk for American, United States, a uniformed Sierra was in trouble, was under fire, was in danger, you didn't ask – Oh, what's their ethnicity? What religion are they? What's the color of their skin? All you need to know was they were an American, and you went, and you went and you put your life at risk for them – because you knew they would do that for you.

As I then was ambassador and saw that the same – what does it mean to be an American? – during that fighting, that Ambassador Cousin related to, I got a phone call from a Cambodian-American named Lulay Srang. He was an American citizen, Cambodia citizen, Minister of Information caught up in the fighting. And he called me and said, "They're closing in on me. They're gonna kill me. Would you call my wife and say goodbye to her?" I said, "Where are you? Where are you? Tell me. I'll come. I'll get you." He said, "I can't. They're listening to the phone calls. They'll find out." So I'm out driving with that flag on my car, looking for him, in fact dialing his number. He won't answer. I thought – Oh, my God. He's gone.

So I get back to Phnom Penh. I go over to the hotel where we had rented the ballroom and all Americans could come, where my wife Le Son and my daughter Kelly were serving meals to American citizens because the hotel staff was all gone. And I'm walking down the hall, and there he is! Here's Lulay Srang. He's this big, strapping, 6-foot 2 Cambodian, and I said, "Oh, my gosh. You're here! You're alive!" And I said, "I went driving out there, looking for you." He says, "I know you did. I saw you, but I couldn't... I didn't dare come out. But finally I got out." And then in a very, very un-Cambodia way, he just came up, and he threw his arms around me, and he gave me this incredible hug. And he said, "Now I know what it means to be an American."

So that's been the theme in my life as I kept taking these wrong turns but finding the right roads, and that brought me here today. So you saw Meghna. Where's Meghna? Over here. She's from Grinnell College—it's an incredible, wonderful school here in Iowa, graduate of that. And I was down at Grinnell while she was still in third grade, I think, giving a talk. And one of the students said, "Well, what's your big moment? What do you really remember from your diplomatic career?" You know, I think she was saying—Oh, was it there being on Henry Kissinger's staff or being in Paris with Secretary Baker or with Secretary Shultz?

Nobody had asked me that, and I thought, and I said, "You know, what I remember are the hugs. I remember the hug of the father of a ten-year-old Vietnamese boy that had been shot in the stomach. Threw him in my... I didn't throw him, but in my car. Raced to the hospital, saved his life, and the father came out to hug me afterwards. Remember the hugs of a Vietnamese refugee we had extracted out of a camp in Thailand and brought to Iowa, and I'm standing in the governor's office—he comes up and he hugs me. Remember the hug of a Cambodian labor leader organizer, trembling with fear that he was going to be killed. I gave him a hug, and I said, "I'll protect you - in a place at my residence, my embassy." Or a hug from another activist that we hid in my embassy to keep him safe.

I remember the hugs of my family as we laid on the floor, my wife and I covering our children with our bodies when our house was hit with a rocket, ringed in automatic weapons fire. And that's when as everybody who's a parent here knows, that's when you know how very much you love your children, that you pray that you'll be the one to be killed so that they will live.

And I remember sitting at Norman Borlaug's side a few days before he passed away. I was holding his hand as he lapsed in and out of consciousness, and he looked up at me, and he said, "Ken, squeeze my hand" – not a hug, but "Squeeze my hand," and said, "I'm so grateful...", and his voice trailed off, and I never heard..., he never spoke another word to me.

So I'm so grateful that I had this opportunity in my life, so very, very grateful to have had a chance even to make those wrong turns but somehow find the right road every time. So grateful to have had 20 years carrying forward Norman Borlaug's legacy. So very, very grateful to have been able to represent my country. And so very, very grateful to be an Iowan, the state that I love, and to have built the World Food Prize to fulfill John Ruan's father, John Ruan Senior, Norman Borlaug's vision for it.

I planned to have a microphone here, and I was gonna drop it and say, "Quinn out." But when I told them my plan, my incredible partner and collaborator in all of this, Mashal Husain reminded me how much it would cost to replace it if we broke it, so no dramatic ending other than to say thank you from the bottom of my heart for all we've done together. Thank you for being here today, and thank you for what you're going to do, what you're all going to do

whether you're a student, or whether you're actively working in some area, for what you're going to do to carry forward Norman Borlaug's legacy, and to that great day when we'll say we don't need the World Food Prize anymore, because we have truly eliminated hunger from the face of the earth. Thank you, thank you so much.

Meghna Ravishankar

I would now like to welcome Assistant Secretary Manisha Singh to say a few words,

Manisha Singh

Assistant Secretary, Bureau Economic and Business Affairs, U.S. Department of State

I don't know about you all, but between last night and this morning there have been several times when I've had to just dry the tears from my eyes. This has just been such an amazing, moving experience, and it has been my honor and my privilege to get to know Ambassador Quinn. I am the Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs at the United States Department of State, and we are a partner with the World Food Prize.

We were real privileged to host this ceremony where the World Food Prize winner this year was announced by Secretary Pompeo to Simon Groot. I want to congratulate you for all the great work you've done all over the world. What an amazing and moving life that you have lived.

Ambassador Quinn, one of my favorite qualities about him is his humility. He speaks of the Foreign Service as a wrong road that he took, a turn that he took. But in reality, I'm going to tell you, the Foreign Service are some of the most talented, amazing individuals that the United States have. The Foreign Service exam is extremely competitive. To be able to pass the exam to get to the interview, it's an amazing feat. To then go on and have as distinguished a career as Ambassador Quinn has had and become an ambassador, that is a difficult, difficult task. It requires not just intellect, it requires heart and soul and really caring about your fellow human beings. And as I've gotten to know Ambassador Quinn, I can tell you that is who he is. His primary quality is that he cares about the rest of the world – that's what he's devoted his life to, not just as a Foreign Service officer in the service of the United States but also at the World Food Prize.

So I just want to close by thanking Ambassador Ken Quinn on behalf of the United States Department of State on the behalf of the American people. You have our eternal respect, our admiration, our gratitude, and our best wishes to you and your beautiful family for whatever comes next. You will forever be remembered in the halls of "foggy bottom." Thank you Ambassador Quinn.

Meghna Ravishankar

I would now like to introduce Professor Louise Fresco, President of Wageningen University and Research, to say a few words.

Professor Louise Fresco

President of Wageningen University and Research

Ladies and gentlemen, I am not an American. And if there's one thing I've learned over these years, it's that we Europeans don't know how to do these things. We're not very good at emotions. We have a saying Dutch which is, "Please be normal. Keep it simple." So don't expect this speech on wrong turns or right turns. Don't expect a speech on hugs, because the Dutch in a way are not very good at hugs. I've learned how to hug Ambassador Quinn, of course, and quite a few other people, but they had to teach me.

So I can only say a few words perhaps on behalf of the Europeans and perhaps on behalf of the Dutch, because I think in your career, at least the last few years you've started to also love the Dutch. And on a personal note, I think the fact that you brought me onto the Council has changed a lot of things for me. Here I was. I think it was 13 years ago. I was trying to reconstruct this, together with Ronnie Coffman, but it was 12 or 13 years ago. I was invited to be on a panel, and I ran into Ken Quinn who was then of course the big man and who was I, you know, simple Dutch scientist. And he said, "I must have you." I must have you? "Yeah, you have to come. You have to come and be part of the council." I couldn't think of anything that would have predisposed me in his eyes to be on the Council – you know, I was not American. I didn't know a lot of things.

But I had one big advantage, and that was I knew Norman Borlaug. I had worked with him when I was at the FAO, I knew him also as a scientist. And I guess of all the things, that was probably my only quality, because I didn't know how to hug, I didn't know how to give all these beautiful speeches. So it must have been something else. It can only be that, my acquaintance with Norm and the thing that we share. Because this was one thing between Ken and me that I think goes beyond all the differences of nationality. It goes beyond backgrounds, cultures, religions – and that was the fact that we really truly were and are committed to saving the world, to food security, and to peace.

I was born in a country that, as you saw last night, was torn by the war. I was born quite a while after the war, but the war and poverty and hunger were very much part of my past. My father was a refugee, and I actually grew up in several places, not knowing exactly what I wanted to do. But there was one thing that was absolutely sure in my life, and that is that I knew that it was a sheer fact of coincidence that I was born at all and that I was born in a relatively easy country in a relatively easy childhood. I did not experience any hunger. I did not see people dying on the streets, but I knew it was possible.

And I thought this fact of my sheer coincidence of birth, that I wasn't born in Biafra, that I wasn't born in the outskirts of Calcutta but that I was born in this comfortable Netherlands – that gave me an obligation, a moral obligation to spend my life to do something that really matters. So, although my father was a philosopher and a great classical scholar, I went to agricultural school, which didn't go very well down in my family, of course. I was destined to go either into arts or into languages. It became neither, and I became an agricultural engineer. And right from the first beginnings I went to Africa where I lived for many years without water and electricity. And as I moved through my career, this commitment, based on the sheer coincidence of birth, has always stayed with me. And I think that is what Ken recognized.

So I came onto this council and slowly I understood that in order to be loved in the U.S., you have to hug, but you also have to say a few good things from time to time. And I think that probably saved me, and that's why I'm probably still on the council.

So what happened is that slowly and slowly I think we had a very good understanding of what was needed. And I'm eternally grateful, Ken, that you allowed us to take the Borlaug Youth Institute from the United States for the first time ever outside the United States to the Netherlands in the context of our centennial that we celebrated last year. And Ken came, so our students, and we committed ourselves to be the first country and the first group to really also have a youth institute outside the U.S. – because it's so important to work with younger generations, and that is too something we shared. So you came, and it was wonderful that you came.

And so what was it, last Wednesday, we planted this tree together. And of course a tree is a symbol of so much. The tree, as I said then, will be there when you and I will not be there. Hopefully... I'm still doubting some of the phytosanitary qualities here, but okay. Let's hopefully, just that this tree will actually carry the crabapples that it's designed to produce. And so in that context, I have a little present for you which I will hand to you later on – don't get up yet. I will tell you what it is. It's a designer fruit roll in the shape of an apple, and that is our signature gift for very, very special people who have a relationship with Wageningen University and Research. But most importantly, I hope that you take with you the commitment of this – I can't say really rather obscure university, because that wouldn't be true, because as you, Ronnie, and others know, we are very happy of course that we still top the world rankings as an agricultural university, so we're not obscure. But we are a committed university, and we're committed to the World Food Prize. I am committed to be on the council, with all my staff who are here, all our students are part of this group, this group of fantastic people led by Ken Quinn and led by the many, many, all the people around us.

And what is so important, I think, is that we share this idea that we have an obligation, that we have a commitment, a commitment to work for eliminating world hunger, a commitment which is wider than that, but it's also about creating a world which is better for next generations more equal, more sustainable, and also where food will be more affordable. And that is, I think, what we will continue to work on as long as we live, all of us. And I wish all of you the very best in doing so. And don't forget, you know, there are many things that you do so much better than we do as Dutch or as Europeans. We'll be sharing this commitment, and I've learned how to hug, and I'm going to hug Ken Quinn right now on behalf of all of you.

Ambassador Quinn

Louise, I'm so touched. I just to tell - Louise came to our symposium. We're sitting at the head table about where you are, Dr. Kusch. I was there. I heard her say some things, and I said, "That woman has to be on our Council of Advisors. She is so incredibly smart. And like other members of our council who are here who have joined with us and guided me and kept me going on the straight and narrow, it's such a privilege to have had Wageningen take the youth institute concept – Norman Borlaug's favorite part of the World Food Prize, the young students, and take it to Europe and plant it there, just like you planted the tree here in our garden. And it's going to grow and grow and bear Borlaug fruit – and I guess I should say, and Borlaug vegetables – that are going to be so nutritious for the decades ahead. Thank you, Louise, so much.

Louise Fresco

Thank you.

Ambassador Quinn

One more hug.

Louise Fresco

Now I know how to do it.

Meghna Ravishankar

Now I want to quickly invite Patrick Miller, the general manager of the Marriott, to say a few quick words.

Patrick Miller

General Manager, Des Moines Marriott

Good morning, everyone. For the past 29 years the Des Moines Marriott downtown has had the great honor of hosting this incredible event. For the past 20 years we've had the great pleasure of working with Ambassador Ken Quinn. So, Ambassador, as you head into retirement, I want to thank you for your partnership and for your friendship. So we have a couple of departing gifts for you – one we think represents your commitment to conquering world hunger, and the other will allow you to continue to enjoy your lifetime Marriott Bonvoy Titanium status. So on behalf of myself and Marriott International, thank you.

Ambassador Quinn

Oh, my gosh. Thank you, thank you, thank you. Oh, my gosh. Can I open later?

Patrick Miller

Absolutely.

Ambassador Quinn

Because we've got to get down to the symposium.

Patrick Miller

I understand. You're on a schedule—I get it. We are too.

Ambassador Quinn

Wherever I am in the world, I always stay at the Marriott. They treat me so incredibly well. But we have had this fantastic partnership. You and your team, everything we do together – it's just been magical. Thank you from the bottom of my heart to you, all the Marriott employees. Can we have a round of applause for the Marriott staff? Wow. Thank you, thank you so much.

Meghna Ravishankar

Okay, now we're done and we can go down to the symposium room. So please head down, and we'll get started with our program down there very quickly.