

Ceremony for the Award of Congressional Gold Medal to

Dr.Norman E.Borlaug on July 17th 2007

Address by Professor M.S.Swaminathan, President, National Academy of Agricultural Sciences of India.

Mr. President, Madam Speaker, Mr. Majority Leader of the Senate,
My Dear Friend of 50 years Dr.Borlaug, Distinguished Guests, Ladies
and Gentle men:

Today is one of the most significant days in the over 10,000 year old history of agriculture. I feel fortunate to be here on a day when one of the greatest Americans and humanists of all times is being honored. Norman Borlaug helped humankind to take a giant step towards making hunger history in the nineteen sixties by fostering the growth of a Green Revolution Symphony, which brought together farmers, scientists, administrators, political leaders and mass media into a symbiotic partnership, with Borlaug serving as the superb conductor of this most magnificent Symphony of the world. The impact of the Borlaug-led Green Revolution symphony will be clear from the fact that during 1964-68, Indian farmers increased wheat production in four years by an order greater than that achieved during the preceding 4000 years. Borlaug helped at a critical time in human history to prove the prophets of doom wrong and enabled developing countries to purchase time in achieving a balance between population growth

and food production. In addition, as a teacher wedded to the pedagogic methodology of learning by doing, he helped to breed thousands of hunger fighters like him around the world. I am glad this legacy will be continued through the Norman Borlaug Fellows of USA.

As we celebrate today the scientific contributions and practical achievements of this unique person, I am reminded of a poem of Maria Rilke Ranier:

“Again and again in history
Some special people wake up
They have no ground in the crowd
They move to broader laws
They carry strange customs with them
And demand room for bold and
Audacious actions
The future speaks ruthlessly through them
They change the world”

Borlaug has certainly helped to shape in a positive manner the destiny of the developing world in the areas of agriculture and food security.

Immediately after receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in 1970, Borlaug gave a lecture titled, “No time to Relax.” Warning against

complacency, he urged that we should not relax until the mission of a hunger free world becomes a reality. During the last 3 decades he has spread a message of hope in Africa and demonstrated that green revolution in Africa is an idea whose time has come. With support from far-sighted agencies like the Nippon Foundation, he showed that seemingly impossible tasks can be achieved by mobilizing the power of partnership. By drawing the attention of scientists and policy makers to the threat posed to wheat production by the stem rust race Ug99, he brought home the point that eternal vigilance is the price of sustainable food security.

July 9th marked the mid-way point in the time frame agreed at the UN Millennium Summit held in New York in the year 2000 for achieving the goal of reducing hunger and poverty by half by the year 2015. Dr. Borlaug has been pained that even this very modest target is not being achieved by many countries in spite of the existence of the necessary technological, economic and political capability to ensure that every child, woman and man has the nutritional opportunity for leading a healthy and productive life.

The United States is the major agricultural producer on our planet as well as the birth place of both Borlaug and the green revolution which had its initial origin in the state of Iowa with hybrid corn. It will therefore be appropriate if the United States leads other industrialized nations in giving over-riding priority to achieving the goal of food for

all and for ever. This will call for providing greater social prestige, recognition and support to farmers and scientists. By helping to create the World Food Prize, Dr. Borlaug has provided a platform for recognizing and stimulating scientific innovations in agriculture, animal sciences, fisheries and forestry.

On this day of both happiness relating to past achievements, and rededication to the unfinished agenda of ending hunger and poverty, we miss the presence of Margaret Gibson Borlaug, who passed away earlier this year. It was Margaret's services to the family that permitted Norman to pursue his life's mission with single minded devotion. We salute her on this day for her silent and unselfish role in shaping our agricultural destiny. She is truly the unsung hero of the green revolution.

"No time to relax" is a statement which is even more relevant today than when Borlaug made it 37 years ago. In green revolution areas, we must defend the gains already made. We should extend the productivity gains to dryland areas and to coastal and hill areas. We should also make new gains by helping to enhance the productivity, profitability and sustainability of major farming systems through concurrent attention to the principles of ecology, economics, gender equity, employment and energy. Attending to these tasks will help to foster harmony both within humankind and between humankind and nature. We can then look forward to enhancing agricultural

productivity in perpetuity without associated environmental harm resulting in an ever-green revolution and thereby to an era of biohappiness for generations to come. This is how we can truly honor Borlaug and carry forward his legacy.