

Ex-diplomat remembers Iowa's help for refugees

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Kenneth Quinn was a U.S. State Department man then, working on loan to Iowa, when he and the rest of America saw the dramatic CBS news footage in 1979.

Ed Bradley stood in the water off the coast of Malaysia, reporting as boats overflowing with Vietnamese refugees were being pushed back to sea.

"As the boats were being pushed out, they began to physically break apart and they began to sink," said the retired U.S. ambassador, who is now head of Des Moines' World Food Prize Foundation. "Dozens of people were being carried out of the water. Some died on the beach."

The next morning, former Iowa Gov. Robert Ray urged the president to do more to ease the plight of the so-called boat people. To prove Iowa was willing to take on its share, the governor said, the state would again double the number of Southeast Asian refugees it accepted.

More than two decades have passed, Quinn said. It's time Iowa looked back to its role in easing the plight of Tai Dam, Vietnamese, Lao and Cambodian refugees.

At a news conference Monday, Quinn and others announced plans to revisit Iowa's significant, yet controversial, humanitarian effort on April 25 at a town meeting co-sponsored by the U.S. State

GATHERING: "Refugees and Immigration: Humanitarian Response and Workforce Implications" will be held April 25 at the Downtown Marriott Hotel in Des Moines. Lunch is \$25 with advance registration, but the talks are open to the public. To register, call 282-8269, ext. 15.

Department and the World Food Prize.

The meeting, he said, should be interesting, stimulating and provocative. "I see the first task as looking back and remembering what we did," said Quinn, former ambassador to Cambodia.