

# WallacesFarmer

## Congrats to Iowa's Ken Quinn

President of World Food Prize Foundation wins prestigious humanitarian award.

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By Rod Swoboda

Kenneth Quinn, former U.S. ambassador to Cambodia and current president of the World Food Prize Foundation headquartered in Des Moines, is being honored with a prestigious award. He will be only the second person ever honored by a British humanitarian organization that works to prevent genocide.

I've heard Ken talk about his experiences several times over the years I've known him. I've listened while sitting across the table from him, as well as sitting in a large audience. One of his comments I'll always remember is this: "My Iowa values didn't allow me to turn my back when people are suffering." He was describing the dangerous situations he often found himself in years ago when he worked in war-torn Vietnam and Cambodia.

Ken Quinn, now 76 years old, has been president of the World Food Prize Foundation since Jan. 1, 2000.

### **First to report atrocities of Khmer Rouge**

Before becoming president of the World Food Prize, Quinn spent 32 years as a diplomat with the U.S. State Department. He was the first person to report and write about the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge, a violent extremist regime in Cambodia. He wrote that report while serving as a rural development adviser in Vietnam. He crossed the border into Cambodia and witnessed what was going on.

The award Quinn will receive next week is “The Steven Krulis Champion of Humanity Distinguished Service Award.” It recognizes people who’ve contributed significantly to confronting and preventing genocide, with an emphasis on promoting the values of humanity. Quinn attended high school in Dubuque and says he learned compassion while growing up in Iowa.

### **Award last presented in 2002**

Named after a Holocaust survivor, the Steven Krulis award was last presented in 2002. The award was established by the Aegis Trust in 2000.

“I’m truly humbled to be recognized with this award named in memory of Steven Krulis,” Quinn said last week. “The incomparable suffering of the millions of victims of genocide in the 20th century is an indelible stain on human history.

“I want to express my most profound gratitude to Dr. James Smith and the Aegis Trust for this extraordinary honor they are bestowing upon me, and my unending admiration for all that the Aegis Trust is doing to ensure that future genocides do not occur again in the 21st century or beyond. In that same regard, I want to acknowledge the special role being played here in Iowa by Steve Noah to highlight the devastating impact of the Rwandan genocide.”

Smith, president and co-founder of the Aegis Trust, said, “It’s remarkable to have someone who played such a leading role in responding to the humanitarian fallout of a genocide – in this case, the genocide in Cambodia – win this award.

“Ambassador Quinn raised the alarm two years prior to the genocide starting, although his warning fell on deaf ears. Imagine if we had listened; imagine a world where we had used our ethical intelligence to invest in early prevention. Then, years later, Ambassador Quinn developed an ingenious way to eradicate the remnants of the perpetrators of this mass murder. That is exceptional.”

### **Rural development adviser in Vietnam**

Quinn will receive the Krulis award in a ceremony hosted by Lord Alton of Liverpool in the House of Lords in London on March 5. Two additional events highlighting Quinn's achievements will take place at the Genocide Memorial in Rwanda on March 1 and at the U.K. National Holocaust Centre and Museum in England on March 3.

The award honors Quinn's service over several decades in confronting and countering genocide in relation to the people of Cambodia. While assigned as an American foreign service officer on the remote Cambodian border in Vietnam, he is widely acknowledged as the first person anywhere to report (in 1974) on the genocidal policies of Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge, the worst mass-murdering, terrorist organization of the second half of the 20th century. Quinn's 40-page report likened the Khmer Rouge policies and practices to those of Nazi Germany and Joseph Stalin's Russia.

In 1979, while serving on the staff of then Iowa Gov. Robert Ray, Quinn led the Iowa SHARES Campaign, which rushed food, medicine, and volunteer Iowa doctors and nurses to the Cambodian border of Thailand to aid the more than 30,000 victims of the Khmer Rouge genocide, who were dying at the rate of 50 to 100 a day, with their bodies bulldozed into mass graves.

### **Improving country's ag helps**

A decade later, while serving as U.S. deputy assistant secretary of state and as U.S. ambassador to Cambodia in the 1990s, Quinn's plan to improve agriculture and rural roads in that war-torn country led to the final eradication of the remaining 25,000 Khmer Rouge, who had still controlled much of the Cambodian countryside.

On March 6, 1999, Quinn reported to the U.S. State Department that the last Khmer Rouge had just surrendered. Thus, the radical regime was completely eliminated. It had caused the death of roughly 1.7 million Cambodians out of the total estimated population of 7 million people in that country.

Thanks to his Midwest roots, Quinn says he realized that improving a nation's agriculture, along with improving its roads, can greatly improve its political stability. And that strategy worked.

Quinn rose to become one of the most decorated foreign service officers of his generation, recognized for the important role he played in humanitarian endeavors, as well as for his actions in dangerous and violent situations.

He received the State Department's medal for heroism and valor. He was the only civilian to receive the U.S. Army Air Medal for participating in over 100 hours of helicopter combat operations in Vietnam during the war. In 2014, he became only the 23rd person to receive the Iowa Medal, Iowa's highest civilian honor.

### **Congratulations to Ambassador Quinn**

Ken Quinn has done many good things, not only for the state of Iowa, but also for the world. Today, he continues to head the World Food Prize Foundation. The Des Moines-based organization was founded in 1986 by Dr. Norman Borlaug, recipient of the 1970 Nobel Peace Prize.

Borlaug, who grew up on a farm in northeast Iowa, became a crop scientist who developed wheat varieties that overcame diseases and helped boost food production in Third World countries. Borlaug is known as "The Father of the Green Revolution," saving millions of people from starvation.

Since 1986, the World Food Prize has honored 48 outstanding individuals who've made vital contributions to food production and availability throughout the world. The annual WFP awards presentation each October in Des Moines is accompanied by the Borlaug Dialogue International Symposium. The World Food Prize also offers a variety of youth programs to help further the discussion on cutting-edge global food security issues and to inspire the next generation to work to end world hunger.