



# THE WORLD FOOD PRIZE

## World Food Prize President's Unprecedented Invitation to Iran Creates Unique Opportunity for Exchanges Through Agriculture and Biotechnology During Period of Tension and Volatility in the Middle East

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Search News

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**The World Food Prize, Amb. Kenneth Quinn**

First ever address by a former U.S. Ambassador to an Iranian conference receives extraordinary reception.

Press Briefing: Amb. Quinn Retu...



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Des Moines, Iowa) September 17, 2014 -- World Food Prize President Amb. Kenneth M. Quinn has returned from an unprecedented trip to Iran, the only former U.S. Ambassador ever invited to deliver an address there in recent decades.

On August 26, in his capacity as President of the World Food Prize Foundation, Quinn had the unexpected opportunity to deliver a speech at a special centennial ceremony in Karaj, Iran, honoring World Food Prize Founder and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Dr. Norman Borlaug, who is revered in America, the Middle East and around the globe as the Father of the Green Revolution.

In his remarks, Quinn outlined opportunities for collaboration with the U.S. in biotechnology, and received an unprecedented standing ovation from the audience, which included the Iranian Minister of Agriculture and a representative of the Supreme Leader of Iran. Sir Gordon Conway, one of the foremost leaders in global agriculture, called it an "epochal event."



Amb. Quinn at the press briefing

on his Iran visit

[\(More photos here\)](#)

Continuing Dr. Borlaug's philosophy of building bridges among adversaries, Quinn invited Iran to send an agricultural scientist and students to the World Food Prize Borlaug Dialogue international symposium on food security in Des Moines, October 15-18.

Just today, Quinn received a letter from Iran nominating Dr. Gudarz Najafian, the Director General of the Seed and Plant Improvement Institute of Iran, to attend. Quinn will immediately forward this to the U.S. State Department in hopes that his travel visa will be approved.

"Scientific cooperation and collaboration across national borders is essential to controlling and eliminating threats to global food security such as Ug99 wheat rust disease," Quinn said. "Confronting hunger and alleviating human suffering can bring people together across even the broadest cultural, ethnic, religious or diplomatic differences.

“There could be no greater tribute to Dr. Borlaug than if we all worked together and succeeded in eliminating rust disease from the face of the earth. It is also remarkable to consider that, as divisive as the issue of biotechnology has become in some circles, it may in this case provide a breakthrough source of cooperation.”

In his address, Quinn recalled being with Dr. Borlaug at the 100th anniversary of the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo in 2001, where one former Nobel laureate said that “people who can stand together to cheer or applaud for the same achievement, can find a way to live in peace together.” He further noted that it was remarkable to stand together in Karaj to honor Dr. Borlaug for his past efforts, and that now the time has come to find other ways to work together in order to have future reasons to stand together and celebrate.

Earlier this year on March 25, Borlaug’s legacy brought together the joint leadership of the U.S. Congress, who presided at the ceremony in the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C., during which Borlaug’s statue was installed by the State of Iowa. Quinn served as chair of the Iowa Borlaug Statue Committee. The Agricultural Biotechnology Research Institute of Iran, which organized the ceremony to honor Dr. Borlaug, contacted the artist who created that Iowa statue, hoping to potentially acquire a copy of it for their campus in Iran.

“Imagine the powerful symbolism of the same statue of Norman Borlaug standing in both Washington, D.C., and near Tehran: A man whose work on critical scientific and humanitarian issues knew no boundaries,” Quinn said. “It is amazing to think that even five years after he passed away, Dr. Borlaug is still uniting people, as their respect for him is one of the very few things that the Iranian and U.S. political leaders might agree on.

“I hope that, like Khrushchev’s visit to that Iowa farm in 1959 that led to a series of exchanges on agriculture and helped lessen tensions between the Soviet Union and the U.S. at the height of the nuclear threats of the Cold War, perhaps the legacy of Norman Borlaug and a visit by an Iowan to address a conference on biotechnology in Iran in 2014, could likewise open a path to help ease Iranian-U.S. nuclear tensions at this time of extreme volatility in the Middle East,” Quinn said.

## **BACKGROUND:**

Quinn was invited to Iran by the Agricultural Biotechnology Research Institute of Iran and his keynote took place during the 13th Iran Crop Science Congress. To gain permission to speak, Quinn had to apply for a license from the U.S. Department of the Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control. He received a warm welcome in Iran, and he and his wife were housed in the Minister of Agriculture’s official guesthouse.

Norman Borlaug helped train Iranian scientists in the 1960s on how to grow the “miracle wheat” that he developed in Mexico and which saved hundreds of millions from starvation and death in India and Pakistan. His work on wheat, which is a critical crop in Iran, and his

advocacy of biotechnology, prompted the Iranian Agricultural Ministry to give Borlaug a special gold medal during his visit in 2000, and to organize last month's ceremony, which is one among several worldwide honoring Borlaug this year.

Borlaug was a native Iowan, and is part of Iowa's rich agricultural legacy, which also includes other historic endeavors to build relationships with adversaries, such as: Herbert Hoover leading the U.S. effort to take food to feed the children of the Soviet Union at the end of World War I; the Yamanashi Hog Lift which, not long after WWII, flew Iowa animals to Japan to assist them following a devastating typhoon; and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev's visit to the Garst farm in 1959 at the height of the Cold War, which led to several decades of tension-easing exchanges in agriculture, led by Iowan John Chrystal, who, according to some, also visited Iran.

The World Food Prize plays a unique role each year around October 16th, which is UN World Food Day, as a neutral forum where all involved in agriculture around the globe can gather to discuss cutting-edge issues in food security. This year, the focus of the symposium, which occurs Oct. 15-17, will be: "The Greatest Challenge in Human History: Can We Sustainably Feed 9 Billion People by 2050?" Over 1,200 scientific, policy and business leaders, as well as farmers, will come together to discuss these critical issues.

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**ABOUT THE WORLD FOOD PRIZE:** The World Food Prize is the foremost international award recognizing the achievements of individuals who have advanced human development by improving the quality, quantity or availability of food in the world. The Prize was founded in 1986 by Dr. Norman E. Borlaug, recipient of the 1970 Nobel Peace Prize. Since then, the World Food Prize has honored outstanding individuals who have made vital contributions throughout the world. Thirty-nine laureates have been recognized from Bangladesh, Belgium, Brazil, China, Denmark, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Israel, Mexico, Sierra Leone, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United Nations and the United States. The World Food Prize annually hosts the Borlaug Dialogue international symposium and a variety of youth education programs to help further the discussion on cutting-edge hunger and food security issues and inspire the next generation to end hunger. More at [www.worldfoodprize.org](http://www.worldfoodprize.org). Press credentials for covering the October World Food Prize Week of events can be requested at [www.worldfoodprize.org/credentials](http://www.worldfoodprize.org/credentials).

« [Back to News List](#)