

**LAUNCHING THE WORLD HUNGER FIGHTERS FOUNDATION**

**Panel Moderator: Ambassador Kenneth Quinn**

October 17, 2019

*Moderator*

**Ambassador Kenneth M. Quinn**

President - World Food Prize Foundation

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So let me invite President Adesina, President Obasanjo to come and join us on the stage. I don't know that I've been in a more illustrious panel in my 20 years as president. So you've just heard President Tshisekedi talk about you and your Hunger Fighters Foundation. We heard from your wonderful wife Grace who is leading this effort. So tell us. Tell everybody – what was your vision? Why'd you do this? Why did you make these incredible gestures?

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*Panel Members*

**Dr. Akinwumi Adesina** - 2017 World Food Prize Laureate - President, African Development Bank  
**H.E. Olusegun Obasanjo** - Former President, The Federal Republic of Nigeria

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Adesina      Well, first let me express my deepest appreciation to you, President Tshisekedi, for coming all the way just for this event, and thank you very much for a wonderful speech that you gave here this evening. And Baba, who is actually my father, President Obasanjo, for also coming all the way to honor us at this great event. You know, as an African, when elders show up at your event, that means that God is happy with the event. And of course I've got on my right side a real elder, a great man, Ambassador Quinn, who has been a great inspiration for all of us, you should've joined us yesterday at the dinner we had in his honor. He was really cool. He was really dancing. And please put your hands together for this man.

As I was saying, when God made the heavens and the earth, He decided to make Kenneth Quinn separate, and when He finished, He said, "It is finished." There's not going to be another Kenneth Quinn. So thank you very much.

But now back to the Foundation. You know, as my wife actually said, I'm a product of so much kindness of people. When I started my career at Purdue University, I mean, as a student, I was actually a pretty hungry student. There was a time that I had only 25 cents left, not just as a student but in the world. And I remember going to one of my professors who wrote me a check for a hundred dollars, Professor John Connors, and from there he sent me to Professor

Phil Abbott who gave me a scholarship to do my master's and PhD training at Purdue University. Gebisa Ejeta... He's a very tall man. He's here. He was on my PhD committee. Where is Gebisa, somewhere here. Yeah, right.

And all I'm trying to say is I know hunger, even right here in the United States. I used to wait for when things were expired to go buy food, because that was the only one that I could buy. But I was so sure that an African who had actually grown up where there was no electricity in places and stuff like that, there was no way I was going to die in the United States by eating expired American food. Right? There's just no way. So I want to say that I know hunger, and hunger is not pretty. And so I have a little relation, by the grace of God to do all I can to make sure that we end global hunger and global malnutrition, because God did not create stomachs to be empty. So this is what it is all about.

The second thing I want to say... I don't know if Bob Hardy is here. Is he here? No. But I saw Bob here. You know, the Rockefeller Foundation, Grace mentioned, was the one that actually made me who I am today. If I didn't have a fellowship, I wouldn't be here today. My life would have taken probably a very, very different direction. And so we know that, when I won the World Food Prize, I say, well, look, it's not about me. I'm not a hero. I'm just an instrument for change. And that all we have to do is create a new generation of young hunger fighters like the ones I spoke in today. Are you guys there? You can arms your arms when I spoke to you today. One apple – right? These are the new ones that are going to help us to have world that is hunger free.

So just to close, Ambassador Quinn, I have so much faith in young people, and that's why we've created this, and this is all about them. And I'm very confident that by a special grace of God, a lot more investment in them, to open them all to the work of global agriculture. They are going to do amazing, amazing things, and they're going to be much better than us. Thank you very much.

Quinn                    So this is just the words Norman Borlaug would have said. He saw hunger on the streets of Minneapolis at the University of Minnesota. And I think as Pedro Sanchez, our laureate said, that spirit of Norman Borlaug has found its new place in you. You are the Norman Borlaug of Africa and of the world and with spreading that Borlaug spirit. Thank you.

So, but President Obasanjo, Norman Borlaug's last trip to Africa to the fertilizer summit he was so thrilled about in Abuja and that you convened. And you were his appointee to the World Food Prize Council of Advisors when you left office. Tell us, tell us what's happened since then. What have you seen? And tell Dr. Borlaug who I know is listening to this panel.

Obasanjo                Thank you very much. Let me tell you what actually happened before that last visit to Africa and then what has happened since then. I was invited by Norman Borlaug and President Carter to join what then were called Sasakawa Global 2,000. And it was the initiative of Sasakawa, President Carter, and they were recruited, so to say, Norman Borlaug, and I was also recruited, believing that I know a little bit about Africa, and we worked together. The idea then was – what can we do before the year 2000. We started this about the middle of the 1980s,

and we worked together. We went to a number of African villages, African countries. But the aim was really to give the private farmer, the small-scale farmer all that he needs in a package to be able to succeed – the seeds, the fertilizer, the other inputs – and to be able to get whatever it produces to the market and without any wastage.

Now, that was my..., well, initiation, if you like, into what then became my obsession when I was in government. And having had that exposure, then in government of course my own background... I was born in a village by illiterate father and mother, and what they knew was nothing other than agriculture. And that was what I had. And from that and the interaction with Global 2000, I got bitten by the goat if you like.

But what happened was this young man, he came to me. I didn't know him when he was in the University, but he said when I was military head of state and I started telling them to go to farm. And I put the hoe on my shoulder with the machete and some of them were inspired. The idea there was to really give agriculture a new face, dignify it. And if you are a president, you are also a farmer. Then, well, there's a bit of dignifying of agriculture. And often now I do that, because if you look at my passport, what is my occupation? I'm a farmer. That has caused me some problems. That's for another day.

But Akin came to me and said, "Look, can we have a fertilizer summit." Oh, good idea, and I took it up, and I ran with it, literally. And we had a very successful, very successful fertilizer summit. And we had to follow up. Dr. Borlaug was there.

Adesina Remember, you ran into him and you had no shoes on.

Obasanjo Yeah, well. Now, you know, those of you who know Dr. Borlaug, he is passionate about agriculture. When he talks agriculture, you can see him, all his body shaking. And then he was there, and he was really making a point. And I was torched. I was inspired. And I ran to him. I said, "Look, what do you want. Now that you say this is what will be done, it will be done." And I think I make a pledge on that occasion. And that what we ought to give back to AGRA, Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa, which Akin went to run. And we had a meeting in Ghana from there, and that meeting of course I was saying, "Look, we have to give agriculture a new face, a mortalized face, a face that will attract young men and young women." And that of course is what we have done, and that is the work I have been doing. Now I do a lot more, Ambassador Quinn. After the Sustainable Goals had been established, I set up Zero Hunger Forum in Nigeria. And of course I'm also the chairman of the Africa Food Prize, which is trying to do something on the continental level, similar to the World Food Prize here. Of course, I remain a farmer, not just at heart but physically, but also originally.

Quinn So when a person says, "I'm as proud to be a farmer as I am to be the former president of my country," that message that sends to young people not only in Nigeria, not only in Africa, but to everywhere about the vital attention that agriculture receives. So, Mr. President, you have made this long trip to be here with us. You've heard President Adesina, President Obasanjo. Do you have a

final word, a final comment in our last two minutes about them and their example and how it personally inspires you?

*(via translator)*

Tshisekedi I feel very inspired by the two speakers. This is the least I can say after listening to them. When I was running my company, my program focused on the wellbeing of the Congolese people. And when I was lucky to be elected, I was able to meet... I got in touch with President Adesina of the African Development Bank, and by the way, I bumped into him by accident in an airport somewhere before the meeting. And during our first exchange after I had been elected president, the subject that we discussed immediately was agriculture. And the debate was around genetically modified crops. His argument – he was so convincing that he inspired me to also follow that route. President Obasanjo inspired him with regard to the diversification of our economy. I believe that it is possible for our country to divert from the mining sector, which has created, by the way, a lot of problems to our country, for us and move into agriculture. I also believe that we can rely on our youth. I know we can create jobs for them but also create work for all by using the youth in the agricultural sector.

Quinn Thank you, thank you, Mr. President.

Obasanjo Let me quickly apologize because I have a plane to catch, and I have to go to... I must be in Lagos by tomorrow evening because I have a program tomorrow in Lagos. Now, I have two jobs to do. I have to launch the World Hunger Fighter Foundation and then again present this book to you. Now, the World Hunger Fighter Foundation is the initiative of Akin Adesina, and you have heard from Ambassador Quinn when he got the Prize what he would do with it. And he actually lived up to his word.

But like it happened in Akin's life, he initiates things, and Yemisi executes things. Yemisi, please stand up. I know you are seeing her. Now I will tell this story. Just to complement what I just said, Akin has given me a copy autographed, and I will read part of what you wrote. "You are a great inspiration for me. If you had not nominated me to be minister of agriculture in Nigeria, my trajectory would not have been what it is today. For this and many more, we are so grateful. With lots of love, Akin 46." Now, I would come to 46. Now, when Akin was picked as the minister, it was recommended. You came to Nigeria from AGRA. And when he came, the president who asked me to look for a good minister for him changed his mind. He said he will be minister of state, because he assumed the ministry to the North. So I called Akin, "You will not be able to achieve anything. Go back to where you are coming from." And he went back. Then about two or three days later, the same president called me and said, "Look, where is that man?" I said, "No, he's gone to where he came from." "Oh," he said, "I want him back." I said, "Well, I don't know whether you will have him back." So I called Akin at about one...

Adesina Two AM.

Obasanjo No, one AM. So, and Akin said, "Well, it's no longer in my hand. It's now in the hand of my wife." Oh, that got me a bit worried. "The hand of your wife?" I said,

“Do I know your wife?” He said, “Yes, she’s the daughter of your permanent secretary.” “Oh,” I said, “well, let me talk to her.” Let me see. I think we talked for about five minutes, because if I ask Akin to confirm that, he would say we talked for thirty minutes. And Yemisi gave in. And then I say, “Akin, come back.”

And Akin came back. So when Akin became the president of the Africa Development Bank, I say, “Akin, the work for you becoming the president of Africa Development Bank, was 45% done by you and 55% done by Yemisi.” And that is... So then Akin had been begging that he wants his percentage to be increase. So we agreed to give him one more. That’s why he’s now 46 to 54.

Now let me end on the note – this book is very well written by Leon Hesser himself. It puts on page 2 a quotation from Akin’s father. “If you ever become someone important,” his father urged, “use the opportunity to help people.” Well, Akin has lived up to that. Akin has got, as you have heard from him, he has received, and now he has given. But he’s not only giving, he’s also investing. And he has become important, but there’s still something ahead. He will become great. And the more he invests, the more or the greater he will be. Akin, thank you for the investment on this, from your own funds. And as you have received, you are even giving, and God will bless you tremendously. Thank you so much.

So I have the honor. I have the honor to formally launch the World Hunger Fighters Foundation and also to present this book, *Against All Odds*, and that had too, as I always say, was given by Yemisi. Yemisi is known as Grace. Actually, I know her as Yemisi because you would think that it would be difficult to pronounce Yemisi by those who do not understand it. So it’s Grace Yemisi Adesina. Thank you very much.

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## VIDEO –

*In our world more than enough food is produced to feed the over seven billion global population, yet after steadily declining for a decade, world hunger is on the rise again, in fact to nearly a billion people. Globally, 10,000 children die every day due to food deprivation and malnutrition – that’s one child every three seconds.*

*A third of the food that’s produced is either lost or wasted at a time when soil degradation continues to reduce the amount of land available to grow more food, nearly 60 million people are food-insecure due to violent conflict and the detrimental effect of climate change threatens to disrupt our entire food system. With a global population expected to reach 9.8 billion people by 2050, food demand will far exceed global food supplies by at least 60%. We are facing a global food crisis.*

*Together we must combine efforts to find innovative and sustainable solutions to eradicate hunger for good. If we fail to act now, humanity we will be faced with a dark and uncertain future.*

*Please welcome the 2017 World Food Prize Laureate, Dr. Akinwumi Adesina.*

*Dr. Akinwumi Adesina, the 2017 World Food Prize Laureate and 2019 Sunhak Peace Prize winner has over the last 30 years emerged as a globally acclaimed leader in development, devoting his life to transforming agriculture and assuring global food security. Dr. Adesina selflessly committed the entirety of his prize monies towards the creation of World Hunger Fighters Foundation to fulfill his lifelong dream of ending global hunger and lifting millions of people out of poverty – a dream that he shares with his mentor, the late Dr. Norman Borlaug.*

*The Foundation's interventions will begin in Africa where the size of the food agribusiness market is estimated to reach \$1 trillion by 2030. Africa also has 65% of the world's uncultivated arable land; therefore, what Africa does with agriculture will determine the future of food in the world. In less than 30 years Africa will also have the largest population of youth in the world. This is why the vision of the World Hunger Fighters Foundation is to develop a new generation of young food and agribusiness entrepreneurs to help end global hunger and promote agriculture as a business that unleashes the wealth of poor farmers.*

*Our flagship program, the Borlaug-Adesina Fellowship will inspire young Africans to build and advance their ideas in food science and agribusiness. Borlaug-Adesina Fellows will be provided with opportunities to gain experience at any of the International Agriculture Research Centers around the world, and select global food agribusiness companies. In July 2019 the Foundation received over 1,300 applicants from enthusiasts around 39 countries in Africa representing all five regions of the Continent.*

*After a vigorous evaluation process, 10 exceptional individuals emerged.*

*The 10 Borlaug-Adesina Fellows embodied the intelligence, ambition, determination and drive to fight hunger that Dr. Akin Adesina also had decades ago as a young agricultural scientist, who today has become Africa's leading advocate for a food-secure world.*

*I am a World Hunger Fighter. Join us in the fight against global hunger.*

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## **INTRODUCING THE BORLAUG-ADESINA FELLOWS**

**Ada**

Ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to like to welcome our inaugural class of Borlaug-Adesina Fellows. The ten of them are here with us at the World Food Prize. Please come up.

VIDEO –

*My name is Aliko Dangote. Chairman of the Aliko Dangote Foundation, I am also a hunger fighter. I want to congratulate my dearest brother, Dr. Akin Adesina for setting up this great foundation called World Hunger Fighters Foundation. Unfortunately, I'm unavailable to be with everybody today. I wish him all the very, very best in setting up this foundation. But I want to also assure him we are at Aliko Dangote Foundation will partner with him to continue to fight hunger. And I pray that very soon we'll see a hunger-free society in Nigeria and also the entire world.*

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**Ada**

To conclude I'd just like to welcome the patron, the chairman of the World Hunger Fighters Foundation, Dr. Akinwumi Adesina.

**Akin Adesina**

Thank you very much, Ada, you've done a terrific job. Thanks for everything. I have no other words to say, just to thank Ambassador Quinn for giving us this platform to be able to launch the World Hunger Fighters Foundation. As I was saying, we were so blessed when I won the World Food Prize and also the Sunhak Peace Prize. All the prize money sticking together and all the generous donations of our friends was about \$1.1 million, and that's what we used to endow this foundation for the young people.

And just to say that when it comes to the issue of young people, as we close here, as I walked to the Rockefeller Foundation in 2006, 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue to 7<sup>th</sup> Street, with the great Norman Borlaug, he walked right across the street and put his hand across my shoulder. And he asked, "Akin, do you play football?" And I said, "No, sir, I don't play football. You know, look at my frame. I'm kind of skinny. But I play soccer." "Oh," he said, "yes, yes, soccer, yes. In soccer if you don't score the first goal, you never can win the game – right?" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Therefore, go score the first goal for African agriculture." And I never forgot that experience with Dr. Borlaug.

So as we close here today, and I should look at all the young people here of the Global Youth Institute, and I look at the Borlaug-Adesina fellows, I simply would say the same back to you. Be selfless, be determined, be passionate. Ending hunger and poverty in our world and malnutrition is well within our reach. Just stretch a little bit farther, but never give up. Climb the steep mountainside of doing that, because the day is going to come soon we'll be at the top of that mountain. We'll look down, and you'll hear voices of people saying, "Better at last, better at last. Thank God that our lives are better at last."

What it's all about – we have so many World Food Prize laureates here. We have Ambassador Quinn here. You have been so generous to support us. Let's not leave this place without looking at each other. Please look at the person next to you and say, "We will end hunger and malnutrition in our time." Give them a high five. I thank you all very much for coming, and God bless you all.

**Ada**

Thank you, everyone. This was really special, sharing this moment with you. Dr. Adesina will be signing copies of his book on the second floor just by the restaurant, if you would like to meet with him and get a signed copy. Thank you very much. Have a good evening.