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CONFRONTING GENOCIDE: *THE 1979 IOWA SHARES CAMPAIGN TO AID*

CAMBODIA REFUGEES

Speaker: *Ambassador Kenneth Quinn*

October 15, 2018 – 10:45 a.m.

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I'm now going to talk about something much less hopeful. I'm going to talk about genocide and Iowa and genocide, and about two million people losing their lives. We're honoring Governor Ray's legacy today with what he did in confronting genocide, and the Iowa SHARES program 39 years ago, 1979, how Iowa came together to relieve the suffering and feed desperate, dying people.

But to understand who we helped, you have to, I think, understand about the Cambodian genocide from beginning to end. And I don't know if you recognize this guy, but he was a 26-year-old foreign officer who dreamed of going to Europe and being in fancy ballrooms and sipping champagne. And instead he was sent to Vietnam in the middle of the war and not in the embassy, but I was out in Southeast Asia, so not in Saigon, but I was out along the Cambodian border at a place called Chau Doc.

And in June 1973, my wife Le Son, who was at that time my fiancé, and I went out to the Cambodian border, and we went up on this hill called Nui Sam, and we looked out into Cambodia. This is not us there. This is a more recent picture. But when you get up there, you can look into Cambodia, and you see this broad VISTA, and you can see miles and miles into Cambodia—except that day what we saw was something that looked like this, this billowing smoke coming up, not from one place or two place, from 50 places. Everywhere you looked into Cambodia as far as you could see in every direction there was billowing smoke coming up, as every village was on fire. Everyone was being burned, and it was being burned at the direction of this man on the right whose name was Ta Mok and who was implementing the radical plan of the man on the left Pol Pot, the Khmer Rouge.

And on that day the Khmer Rouge went into every village, made everybody stand up, marched them out into the countryside, and to ensure they never could go back to their home, they burned every house to the ground. That's what we saw where the smoke was coming up. And we only found out about this because many people escaped; they flooded across the border, Cambodians into Vietnam.

And I interviewed them, and I wrote this report in February of 1974. It was classified in the U.S. Government but since then declassified, and it was titled *The Khmer Kraham* (which is Cambodian for "red") *Plan to Create a Communist Society in Southern Cambodia*. And the idea was that in doing this, they would be putting in place this new social structure, political structure that could never go back. No one in the U.S. Government believed me. No one accepted my report. Fourteen months later on April 17th, 1975, the Khmer Rouge rolled into Phnom Penh. The American ambassador, carrying the American flag, had to fly away a few days before that.

And Cambodians thought—Well, there's going to be peace. The war is over—except that the Khmer Rouge came in brandishing guns and did the same thing. They had everyone stand up and walk out of the

city. They emptied every city. They emptied the capital, forcing people out into the countryside so that it looked like this—empty. There was a beautiful Catholic Church. They took it apart brick by brick so it was completely gone. They made Buddhist pagodas and temples into pig sties. They made the national library into a place where people kept animals.

And instead, they imposed this peasant revolution, which meant that they took people out in the countryside, formed them into labor brigades and it was there that they would now have their new lives in forced labor, this collective approach to everything. And they went through to weed out everybody who they thought might be a revolutionary, everyone who was educated, everyone wearing glasses. If you wore glasses, it meant you studied, you could read, you were educated, you were a threat.

And they created these torture centers. And here, pictures of individuals brought into these centers. You see all the women. Women wore long hair in Cambodia. Everyone had to have their long hair cut off because that was an affectation. These are the pictures of those who were interrogated and then executed. And their bodies would be taken out. You've heard of the killing fields. There's the killing fields, burial pits where bodies were dumped in there. You've heard of killing fields. This is a killing tree. This is where they would take small children and swing them by their feet and bash their heads in against the tree. Can't believe that—right? You think that's a made-up story, except so many people told this story—this was what was happening in that country. And it wasn't just one killing field. Here are the killing fields all over Cambodia that were found.

Four years, Cambodia had seven million people—two million are dead within four years. And here is what would be discovered afterwards when the Khmer Rouge were overthrown—these incredible, terrible burial pits. I'm sorry to show you the pictures, but this is the reality of what that population lives with. Everybody in Cambodia who lived through this has PTSD, every one. I had employees who, every employee had been through this. I was in a room once like this. Just imagine—I said, "Everybody that was in a Khmer Rouge Camp, put up your hand." Every hand goes up. "Everybody who lost an immediate family member—your Mom, your Dad, your brother, your sister, your spouse, your children—raise your hand." Every hand goes up. Who can imagine this?

Here is the scene then in 1979, four years after the Khmer Rouge had taken over Phnom Penh, that Governor Ray, Mrs. Ray and I saw. We walked into a place called Sa Kaeo on the Thai-Cambodian border. This is people who had escaped, 30,000 Cambodians who had escaped across the border. They're lying strewn about this open field—it's like the entire student body of Iowa State University was there—but emaciated. This woman, she was at a water tank to get water, and she couldn't go anymore. She just stopped, like—I can't do anymore. Here I am. And the mother with a child, a little bit of shelter, trying to nourish her child. Young children laying in a makeshift hospital—you couldn't call it a hospital—a covered area where doctors were endeavoring to treat them.

And when Governor Ray came back and at the airport in November 1979 he said, "I watched people die. I watched five people die just while we were there in a couple of hours." And this message spread across our state, in such a dramatic way, and it grew it's created Iowa SHARES, this partnership led by *The Des Moines Register and Tribune*. So glad Carol Hunter is going to be here, because the paper covered itself—and Michael Gartner and David Yepsen and those who were directly involved in this—and the paper covered itself in incredible glory, leading this humanitarian effort that brought in contributions from all across our state, over \$550,000 dollars. And at lunch we'll be awarding and honoring those organizations, those individuals who were part of this incredible humanitarian experience that ended up bringing food to those people, bringing medicine.

There's Dr. Bill Rosenfeld who called me up and said, "I want to go to Cambodia." So I got a ticket for him, got a place where he could work and he went there—first of about ten doctors and nurses from Iowa, all who volunteered to go. It was this incredible moment in that where Iowa saved people, saved lives, nourished people.

We have some of the Iowa SHARES representatives and some of the people who were involved. Where are you here? Over here, okay. We're going to see all of you at lunch, as you're being honored and being recognized.

But the Khmer Rouge was still there in 1990. There was still 25,000 of them left. And I was Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, and I had \$13 million of your tax money and my tax money, and I used it to pursue Norman Borlaug's approach to—how do you deal with terrorists? How do you deal with mass murderers? You build roads into their area, and you send the latest agricultural technology. So these are what roads look like in Cambodia. The first thing we had to do was go in and de-mine them, and I can tell you a harrowing experience to be out there with the de-miners looking for mines. But we succeeded. We got the roads built. We brought in new agricultural technology—it was the one thing the Khmer Rouge, the Pol Pot followers, they couldn't stand it. It undermined them in a fundamental way, and they started surrendering and giving up.

And soon they were left to this one small stronghold at a place called Anlong Veng. It was there capital where Ta Mok was living. And the government's troops got there and got close. They fled across the border into Thailand. I was there. I was the first ambassador there, interviewing people, finding out, where did they hide in Thailand, sending information to our embassy. We put the squeeze on and squeezing on.

And on March, the 6th, in 1999, my phone rang, and it was the prime minister's office saying, "Ta Mok has surrendered." This is what he looked like, not that when he started. And he and the other Khmer Rouge leaders were brought to face trial, to face a tribunal there, to some sense of justice in this.

But we had eradicated the worst genocidal, mass-murdering organization of the second half of the 20th century. And Iowa had taken food and medicine in the middle of that and aided those victims of genocide—not just that one time, not that first shipment of food that reached the border on Christmas Day, but for another year, food, medicine, life-saving efforts, and done in a way that brought Iowans together in a truly remarkable fashion.

So I want you to know, with whom we were dealing, and that it will always be and always should be a profound part of our state's legacy and about the incredible, inspirational, humanitarian leadership of Governor Robert Ray and how people came together, all religions, all political parties, everyone come together as a state to reach out 12,000 miles who people who didn't look like us, didn't speak our language, didn't worship the same God that we worship—and yet they were fellow human beings. That was Governor Ray's approach.

So I will be at lunch telling you a little bit more about our Iowa SHARES winners and what they did, and hear that. Please come for the SNAP luncheon.

And I want to say, where's Madeline, Madeline Goebel? Stand up, Madeline. This room is so terrific. Madeline is our director of the Hunger Summit. She's done a terrific job. Could you join me in thanking her for all her efforts? I told her, "What do you mean? We can't fill the ballroom like this." She said, "Just watch me. Just watch me." So, good.

So 1999 was when I got that call. In 1999 was when a doctor from England named James Smith was beginning to work on the Kosovo crisis, and that experience led him to become involved in the issues of terrorism and genocide. And he formed Aegis Trust, and through that organization has become involved with the support of the UK foreign office in staging the first major international conference on genocide prevention and also dealing with genocide recovery. He and Aegis were involved in establishing the Rwanda Genocide Memorial in Kigali. It is this incredible experience—in 1994 Rwanda went through a terrible genocide. And I met Dr. Smith for the first time and members of their staff. I had seen their work, and I said, “You have to come. You have to be part of the Hunger Summit.” You have to tell us how nutrition, fighting hunger works to prevent genocide and also to help countries recover. So please join me in welcoming Dr. James Smith to the stage.