

Remarks by Dr. Norman Borlaug

November 6, 2008

New Delhi, India

Greetings to everyone gathered in New Delhi for this important meeting on Ug99. I want to thank all of my good friends at ICAR, especially the Director General Dr. Mangala Rai and Deputy Director General Crops Dr. P.L. Gautam, for hosting this meeting. Special appreciation is also due FAO for their contributions in supporting the meeting. My greetings also to each of the Honorable Ministers from SARC who have gathered for this important conference.

Wheat rust honors no political boundaries, and neither can our commitment to provide food for this planet. The aim of our global rust initiative is to fix the problems of rust we face today, and ensure that we never again are as vulnerable as we are today. In today's world, this takes political will, good science, and most importantly, talented young scientists backed up by a commitment to long term funding. Thanks to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the many institutions that have joined forces under the BGRI, this is now happening, and I am very gratified to see it come to pass.

The data that allowed us to have the confidence to push the green revolution wheat varieties like [name some of them] came from all over the world, generated in an open collaborative network of young scientists trained by Rockefeller, FAO, national research programs, and others. They had a common purpose and a pressing, obvious objective. Things were simpler back then.

You need to find the common ground and advocate for solutions with a single, powerful voice. We can differ on the fringes, compete with each other in markets; but we cannot afford to fail to recreate the spirit of purpose that laid the groundwork for the incredible successes you and your predecessors have had to date. You've got to keep the herd together.

So back to the BGRI. I challenge you to take the momentum generated in reaction to Ug99 and translate that into the means for jointly identifying the problems and opportunities that lay ahead; and upon that common ground, ensure that the necessary resources are brought to bear. I leant my name to this initiative, the BGRI, because I believe it is a means of harnessing modern technology to achieve what is needed to not only protect, but to enhance production of wheat.

You've succeeded in making Ug99 and a global rust initiative known throughout the governments and international funding agencies of the world. But are you going to stop there and each go your own way? Or do you have the will power to take this rust initiative turn it into an instrument of lasting good?

I'm pleased to announce that India, represented by the Director General of ICAR, will join FAO, CIMMYT, ICARDA and Cornell in the 'permanent members' group of the Executive Committee of the BGRI. This reflects the commitment of India to pursue this goal of a truly global rust initiative that will find that common ground, keep the herd together, and ensure our collective priorities, have foresight, and carry through. The world needs

India at the forefront of wheat research and advocacy for wheat research. I commend the honorable minister, and I commend Dr. Mangala Rai, DG of ICAR, for his insistence on assuming this deep responsibility.

Along with this announcement, I am also issuing a challenge to the now five permanent members of the BGRI Exco. Make this initiative work for all of mankind! Get past the rhetoric and plans and get to work. By March, when we assemble for a technical meeting of the BGRI where I started, in Cd Obregon Mexico, I hope you can show me a plan that optimizes everyone's role in making the BGRI a success.

In your symposium packet you will find a list of the organizations that agreed to serve on the executive committee of the BGRI. This is an impressive group representing in large measure the wheat producing nations of the world, and the organizations charged with safeguarding and enhancing our planet's supply of wheat in the international arena. Gaps still exist, with the absence of large wheat producers in South America and the former soviet republics for instance, but I understand that efforts to redress those gaps are underway.

Thank you for inviting me to comment. I wish you all a successful meeting.