

Honorable Professor Lelieveld, distinguished guests,

It happens to all of us regularly: we are deeply moved by something that people elsewhere in the world experience.

A disaster.

A conflict.

A grave injustice.

We read about it in the newspaper.

We watch it on the news broadcast.

It leaves us shaken for a while.

We lie awake for a night or so.

Perhaps it motivates us to act.

So we donate money.

Maybe we even become a volunteer.

But more often, we feel powerless.

What can we do about the suffering in the world?

And thus, we return to our daily routines.

Just before the end of your professional career, a terrible tragedy unfolded in Africa in 2002.

Among other causes, ongoing drought and failed harvests led to severe food shortages in the Horn of Africa.

About 15 million people suffered from extreme hunger.

The sad thing was, that sufficient emergency food was indeed being supplied.

Partly in the form of genetically modified maize.

But due to bureaucratic hurdles and regulatory barriers, this emergency food was not allowed into various countries.

So it never reached the people who needed it so desperately.
Which directly resulting in many, many unnecessary deaths.

Instead of feeling powerless, you made a bold decision:
The decision to dedicate yourself to alleviating hunger and improving food security.

Thanks to your many years of work experience at Unilever, you had the knowledge needed to navigate through complex international regulations and to ensure safe food production.

You sought collaboration with like-minded scientists, professionals, and food producers.

Together, you embarked on the mission to address issues related to regulation harmonization.

And to promote education on food safety and food production.

You did not stand by, feeling powerless.

Instead, you applied your knowledge, your organizational skills, and your ability to inspire others to volunteer for a good cause.

Which lead to the creation of the Global Harmonization Initiative: the GHI.

Today, GHI does so much more than promote the harmonization of legislation based on solid scientific research.

Under your long-standing chairmanship, it has grown into a network of over fifteenhundred scientists, experts, and representatives from food producers as ambassadors for GHI in more than sixty countries worldwide.

GHI's activities also expanded to projects that promote food safety, food security, and sustainable food production globally.

This is a truly monumental achievement!
With an impact on the lives of so many people!

For example, there is GHI's Safe Water Project.
It explores groundbreaking technology to extract safe drinking water from the air.
Especially in areas that suffer from water scarcity or pollution.

And then there is the Food Safety Clubs initiative.
Its goal is to increase understanding of food safety among schoolchildren in Africa.
Children who might one day become the food scientists of the future.

There also is the Safe Cassava Project.
It investigates how high concentrations of Linamarin can be removed from cassava leaves.
Cassava is an essential food in many African countries.
But its safety is concerning.
Because high levels of Linamarin are linked to a paralysis disease, affecting about 3 million young children in Africa.

And I should also mention the Whistleblowers Food Safety Incidents Report website.
Here, anyone working in the food industry can report serious food safety incidents that are not addressed by, for example, food producers themselves.
GHI then urges local food safety authorities to take action.
And to close the loop, the experiences gained from this, are used as learning cases during conferences.

Your extensive experience as a researcher and manager of the Research & Development department at Unilever helped you to achieve all this.

In these roles also, you consistently brought together different disciplines and scientists from around the world, to develop groundbreaking technical innovations in food production and food safety.

Even then, you believed that these innovations should benefit not only Unilever, but the entire food industry.

This led to the founding of the European Hygienic Design Group, the EHEDG, where you also served as chairman for a long time.

This organization continues to have a significant impact on the food industry today.

Not only in Europe, but worldwide.

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What I've highlighted here, are just a few examples of what you have initiated — during your professional career and ever since you were confronted with the immense human suffering in Africa in 2002.

It is very clear, Professor Lelieveld, why you are regarded as a pioneering food scientist, a visionary, a leader, and someone capable of bridging different worlds.

Why you are regarded as a pioneer with a deep sense of humanity; a team player who has left a lasting mark on the fields of food technology, food safety, and international regulation.

Your simple yet powerful motto is: If I can help someone, I will.

What a beautiful motto to live by!

After your many years of tireless dedication to GHI, you are now stepping down as its president.

I'm honored to let you know on this occasion, that it has pleased our Majesty the King to appoint you Officier in the Order of Oranje-Nassau. Many congratulations on this very special token of appreciation!