



**Public Policy Forum**  
**Reforming the United Nations:**  
**Are We There Yet?**  
**Presented by**  
**Catherine Bertini**

*September 28, 2005*

*Richard P. Nathan:*

Good morning, my name is Dick Nathan and I am proud to be the director of the Rockefeller Institute and pleased as we start a new fall season of our public policy forums. It's my pleasure today to introduce a very distinguished speaker. Catherine Bertini is a graduate of the University at Albany and has gone on from there to have a truly special and distinguished career in the public service in the world and that's not an understatement. Most recently, she's been the Undersecretary General for Management at the United Nations. Before that, for ten years, appointed first by President Reagan and then re-appointed by President Bill Clinton, she was the executive director of the United Nations World Food Program (WFP), the world's largest international humanitarian agency. It serves 77 million people a year, typically in 82 countries. There is a staff of 8,000 people based in Rome. Catherine did that for ten years. Appropriately, in this scary moment for our own country in the Gulf region, Cathy has had special experience dealing with natural disasters and famine in North Korea, crisis in Bosnia, and starvation conditions in Africa, so she brings a lot of real experience dealing with things that everyone here cares a great deal about.

She previously served in government. When I first met Catherine, she was assistant secretary of agriculture for the Food Stamp Program, one of my favorite programs. Before that she was acting as assistant secretary, this was in the Reagan administration as I recall, for the welfare programs, now TANF but then AFDC. She knows how to work with people and knows how to get things done and is a caring person. She has seven honorary degrees in four different countries. *The Times* of London named her in 1996 as one of “The World’s Most Powerful Women.” She brings an immense amount of very important experience to us. She already has had an outstanding career in public service. She and her husband, Tom, live now in Cortland. Cathy is teaching at the Maxwell School and plays the clarinet in the Corning Town Band.

*Catherine Bertini:*

There are a couple of amendments to that actually. I played clarinet in 2002 when we first came home. Then when I was working in New York I couldn’t do it. I’m practicing again. Thank you, Dick. It’s a pleasure to be here and we did work together, starting with a welfare reform proposal back in the 1988 Welfare Reform Act. So I’ve been following your career too and have had the pleasure of getting a lot of information, background, and guidance from you. So thank you, it’s a pleasure to be here. Also to be in Albany, just down the street from the New York Republican State Committee where I got my start here. It’s nice to see everybody here.

UN reform, are we there yet? Is the UN reformed? When will it be reformed? Can it be reformed? Should it be reformed? These are several points I would like to talk about. First, some basic premises to why we are talking about this problem. What has happened and what hasn’t happened. Some recommendations and what the future looks like. Reform is really never done in any organization that wants to be vibrant, that has to react to different situations over which it has no control and some over which it does. It should never be done in the UN, in state government, in the federal government, or in any place else that wants to be dynamic and effective. It’s certainly never done in the UN. That’s premise number one.

Premise number two is the UN is not monolithic. It's not just those buildings and people in New York. This is something that I certainly didn't learn when I was in Cortland High School. I thought the UN was the buildings in New York. We even had Girl Scout trips through the UN. The tours are essentially the same now as they were then by the way. But it's not just New York. What's in New York is a very political entity that makes essentially political decisions. What's also in New York, overshadowed really by that, are the headquarters of the United Nation Children's Fund (UNICEF) and United Nations Development Program (UNDP). But in addition to the secretariat, which in addition to New York also has offices in Geneva and in regional headquarters around the world, there are also two other groups generally in the UN. One is called specialized agencies and those are agencies like the UN itself, which are funded by assessed contributions, by dues. Those agencies include the Food and Agriculture Organization in Rome, the World Health Organization in Geneva, the Educational Cultural Organization (UNESCO) based in Paris, and other large agencies that were created by governments on their own, separate from the UN, but as part of the UN system, which are funded by assessed contributions, and do a lot of work in setting standards, and providing advice and guidance in their areas of expertise.

Then there is a third category of UN agencies that are commonly called funds and programs. These include the World Food Program, UNICEF, UNDP, the UN Population Agency, and the UN High Commission for Refugees. These are agencies that were created by the UN as entities of the UN and are primarily funded by voluntary contributions. That means they don't get assessed dues. They don't get money from the UN in New York. A couple minor exceptions: the Refugee Agency gets a very small percentage of its budget from the UN, but mostly all the budgets are independently raised, mostly from governments and those are funds and programs. One other difference between funds and programs and specialized agencies are that the heads of funds and programs are actually appointed by the secretary general. When Dick mentioned the presidents who appointed me, really I think it's confusing in that they really endorsed me, but I was actually appointed by the secretary general. In specialized agencies, the heads are elected by the member states. Right in Rome, we had the World Food Program but

the head was appointed by the secretary general; likewise, the Food and Agricultural Organization, where the head was elected by the member states. So the UN is not monolithic and it's different. When we talk about reform, it's often discussed in the U.S. press; they mean reform of the New York secretariat, but there's really a much bigger UN.

Three, we say "are we there yet?" Well, "there" is relative not only from what one's preconceptions are about the UN when one starts talking about this, but also to a certain extent by what country one is from. For instance, we are having these debates in the U.S. about what needs to be done by the UN, but the debates are not very widespread in most other countries in the world. In most cases, the debates are a reaction to the American debates. I was on a panel recently. There was a woman from Pakistan on the panel and she said, "You know, in Pakistan our view is that the UN is not perfect but it's ours." She said, "I get the feeling that in America the view is the UN is not perfect and it's theirs." She went on to say, "We all belong to the UN. We all want to change what's not right about it, but we want to do it from the perspective of ownership. Just because we don't like certain parts of it that doesn't mean we therefore say we don't want to have anything to do with it." I think that was a good description of the difference between how many other countries talk about the UN and what's needed.

Four, is another premise, that there is a difference between political reform and management reform and sometimes they get all mixed up as well. Political reform meaning the Security Council reform, reform of the General Assembly, reform of the Human Rights Commission, creation of a Peace Building Committee. Those are what I consider political reforms as opposed to internal management reforms of management accountability, of holding assistance and people and procedures accountable for being more efficient and more effective.

The fifth premise is that the New York UN situation is extremely political. The member states, there are 191 of them, are all political bodies in New York. I say this just to show you the difference. When a country sends a representative to Rome, most often that representative is somebody who's an expert in agriculture, aid, development, or

humanitarian assistance. That's the person who comes to the board meetings of the World Food Program and the Food and Agriculture Organization and the other agencies that are based in Rome. When a country sends its ambassador or its junior members of the delegation to Geneva, they pick someone because the World Health Organizations (WHO), the Refugee Agency, and the World Trade Organization (WTO) are there. They'll send someone with trade or refugee or health experience. What's in New York? I mean, oh yeah, they have to deal with UNICEF and UNDP, but they send political people to New York and it's like a career move to have been in New York in your foreign ministry career. Then how do you make points when you're in New York? Well, you make political points for your country in New York. This is true for every government you can think about in New York. Currently, the foreign ministers of Palestine, Russia, and Egypt, before they were appointed foreign minister, were the ambassador of their country in New York. So when there are discussions even about reform of security of staff, even about whether or not the Department of Economic Affairs is going to have three more secretaries in it, it becomes a political discussion and this is I think one of the reasons why it's all been so hard for movement in New York.



Even in the Oil for Food program, the one guy who lost his job early on because he was manipulating contracts says the reason why he was doing it was because he was trying to put any money in his pocket. He was charged with not properly following the purchasing rules. Once a French government got Contract 1 for Oil for

Food then he said we have to make sure that the French company doesn't get Contract 2 for Oil for Food. We better make sure it goes to another country and it was Dutch. Then we had to make sure that another country gets Contract 3 and it was British, Swiss, and so forth. That was the reason why he lost his job. He didn't follow proper purchasing rules in this political environment.

So those are some of the premises to start with. Why do we have the problem of continuing to talk about UN reform beyond all the normal reasons why an agency or entity should reform itself? First of all, it's because it's a political place that does have a cumbersome secretariat. The building is a metaphor for the organization. You may have read that the building needs to be reworked from the inside. The building was built 50 years ago and the UN doesn't have to follow any basic New York City laws. So it doesn't have to have the fire department come in and say this not up to code and doesn't have to have the police department come in and say this isn't the right thing for security. So therefore, it didn't. Now, 50 years later, the building is filled with asbestos. It's got bad air. It's got the windows, which were up to code 50 years ago when they were built, that leak heat out. You can take an infrared picture of it and see all the red coming out of it in the winter. The place is a wreck. We give reporters dirty tours of the sub-basement to see how everything is held together and how brilliant the maintenance workers are who keep it together.

The organization is, in a way, like that as well. It was created post-World War II on a political basis based on the state of the world. Also, on an organizational basis, based on the way organizations were created then. Then, because of all these other premises I've talked about, it is very, very difficult to make it be vastly different, but only to tinker on the edges and move it along in small ways. Nonetheless, the work that the UN did was so highly regarded that the United Nations and Kofi Annan won the Nobel Peace prize only a few years ago. By the way, it was a fabulous ceremony. He invited the program funds and program heads to go. It was an amazing experience of a lifetime. But that was where the UN was only some short time ago. Then what happened?

I think several things happened. Clearly from a U.S. perspective, one thing that happened was the vote in the Security Council not to go ahead and support the war. That was, I can tell you as an American, a really difficult time to be in the UN, regardless of anybody's views about who was right, and it was very difficult. I felt it was a little bit analogous to being a Republican on campus in 1970. This was a real issue. The UN didn't agree. The Security Council didn't agree to proceed as the U.S. and U.K. proposed

and a lot of people got very angry. A lot of people got very angry at the U.S. and U.K. for going this far and the U.S. and U.K., the U.S. especially, got mad at the UN for not agreeing to continue. It was a really a problematic issue. Colin Powell talks about regretting his statements at the Security Council when he sat there and went through his litany of reasons why this had to happen. You could feel the whole place feel let down. If Colin Powell, who was so highly regarded, said all these things, I don't know what's next. Either it must be true or they must be going to war. You knew the debate was over at that point and time. That's one thing that really caused a lot of criticism.

I think on the U.S. side where there was so much support for the war. Who was in the way of the war? Well, the UN. It gave a lot of opportunity for people who write in journals that nobody reads to write about what's wrong with the UN, but now with a lot more attention being paid to it. At the same time, one thing was that was also making the press that was wrong with the UN was the Oil for Food business. When it first started raising its head, the secretary general was trying to debate how to deal with this. They really couldn't have an internal investigation. It was big enough they needed to do an external investigation with the most highly regarded people he could find. He recruited Paul Volcker and Judge Goldstone and Mark Pieth. Goldstone is a distinguished judge from South Africa and Pieth was a distinguished lawyer who had done a lot of investigation into money laundering cases in Switzerland. So that's the way he chose to go about it. As they looked into what was going on, of course, then a lot more issues came up. And while that was going on then there was a sexual harassment case against Ruud Lubbers, head of the High Commission for Refugees, and the much worse rape and sex-for-hire discussions about the Peace Keepers in the Congo and elsewhere. Then, I think, the issues of Oil for Food related to Kojo, the son, were really harmful. In my own view, in terms of a lot of these other things, they were things that could be explained, could be weathered, could be fixed. But that issue became very hard to deal with. To me that's a problem.

Three, what happened? With this, we have to come back to the UN as a whole as opposed to the UN only in New York. I can tell you a little bit about the WFP

perspective. My point is going to be that there were a lot of different kinds of reform going on throughout the system. If you want to know more about what WFP did, go to the <http://www.wfp.org/> web site. If you look back to February 2002 we had a paper called “A Decade of Change.” The “Decade of Change” paper talked about what we did over my ten years at WFP, how we literally walked through every piece of the organization in order to change it and to make it as efficient, effective, and accountable as possible. Of course, reform had been talked about for years, so we were reforming constantly. But we were doing this because not only was it right but that we had to, which goes back to the fact that we’re funded by voluntary contributions. We’re not funded by assessed contributions.

You could see at the beginning of the 1990s already how the world was changing because in the 1980s there had been very few civil wars, very few man-made crises. Already in the 1990s, with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War, there were new crises in Eastern Europe and in Africa, and other kinds of changes in the political world that caused strife and therefore a need for humanitarian relief. So what happened from the perspective of the agencies like WFP, UNICEF, and the UN High Commission for Refugees is that we were on the frontlines in places we never thought of. We had to change our whole focus and our way of operating. We used to recruit people who would come, work for the organization, and move their families to Mexico City or Brasilia or Bangkok where we worked in peaceful places helping with development. Now we had to recruit people who would go live in Pyongyang, Kigali, and Sarajevo and couldn’t bring their families. Or they did. One young family who brought their little kids to Pyongyang, North Korea, put their little kid in nursery school and the kid comes home and says, “Mommy, do you know what God’s name is?” She said, “Well, God doesn’t necessarily have a name.” “Yes, he’s the great leader, Kim Jong Il.” So you had to recruit a different kind of person with a different kind of career and commitments and that made the organization have to change.

We refocused the organization around the issue of ending hunger, which was our job. That meant we focused on women because they’re the cooks. So, therefore, we

needed more women. We only had 17 percent female professional staff when I was there. If you go to India, you can't talk to your clientele if you're a man. So the UN created a goal of 50 percent women. Well, that's nice, but we had a real operational reason for the change in staff. We had to do it. If we're going to delegate to the field, we had to be able to build a communication system and computerization. WFP became the leader on communications in the UN by setting up the towers in Afghanistan, for instance, once the bombings stopped in 2001, for the entire UN communication network.

There was a lot of reform. But it had to be done also for funding because we are voluntarily funded and we could see as these humanitarian issues were growing that if we didn't reform ourselves we could lose the funding. A government like the U.S., which gave the WFP anywhere between a third and half of its contributions in any given year could decide to do it themselves through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) or give the money to some nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) like Save the Children or Catholic Relief Services or Care, which they did anyway. But my point is that there is a lot of competition going on and the needs were growing on the humanitarian front. Unless we could show we were good and accountable for what we did, we would lose out.

When George McGovern became the ambassador in Rome to the UN agencies in Rome, which was in the second term of the Clinton administration, he came in and I introduced him to all our staff. They were so excited to meet him. I don't know if all of you know my background in Albany. I'll tell you this story. I welcomed him to my office and he was really lovely. I introduced him after we met all of the senior staff at WFP. They lined up to meet this dignitary. You know, ambassadors come and go, but all these folks are within five years of my age. I'm 55 now. So I was 22 when McGovern ran for president. Everybody, no matter what country they were from, knew of George McGovern. They couldn't wait to meet him. So they line up and they come through and some guy says, "Hello." "Where are you from?" "I'm from Germany." "Oh, where in Germany?" "Munich." "Oh, I used to spend a lot of time in Munich." He didn't tell him he bombed Germany. Then there was another person who said, "I'm from Canada." "Oh,

my mother was Canadian.” Then this guy says, “Hi, I’m an American. I’m from Montana and I’m so proud to tell you that I cast my first vote for you when I was 22 years old.” He turned and said, “Well, that’s wonderful, Gary. I’m really happy. I bet Ms. Bertini can’t say the same thing.” I was speechless.

What he had said in the private meeting before we got to that point was, “Look, I came here and I was really looking forward to meeting you because we have so many friends in common and they speak well of your work at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).” He was on the Ag Committee and so we did have a lot of friends who worked on the same issues, as Dick did. But he said also, “I want to tell you what it says in my briefing from the State Department. It says, ‘If you want to see real UN reform in practice, look at what happened at WFP.’” I use this WFP commercial to say that there were a lot of different reforms going on in the UN.

When Kofi Annan came in 1997, he then embarked on a big reform proposal. He moved reform ahead in my estimation quite a lot, especially looking at it from the perspective of running an agency. He moved ahead on issues of inspection and accountability and moved a first step towards results-based budgeting, except we can’t call it that at the UN. Those are like four-letter words, results-based budgeting. He also very significantly brought the heads of the programs in, in an effort to have more management accountability, more communication, and more cooperation. Before, we were just out there running our program, but now we did actually have accountability. We had weekly cabinet meetings even by videoconferencing with him. He organized us into humanitarian, development, and other groups so that we could actually coordinate our work together. He made very many significant strides in improving the management right off the bat when he first came in. He also created the job of deputy secretary general and put in Louise Fréchette, who is still there, as a diplomat from Canada. This was a job I thought was very important because he can’t possibly manage all the UN. He needs some help and she was certainly useful and helpful in that end.

What else happened? Quite a few things actually happened in this General Assembly that just finished, even though there are a lot of reports that it could have been

a lot bigger. They finally agreed to do away with the Trusteeship Council, which was created years ago and was still hanging around. It was so hard to do away with something. They actually agreed they were going to do that. The Japanese government was pleased that they agreed to take out of the charter the reference to enemy states, which was a post-World War II emphasis. The Japanese government, by the way, pays 19.5 percent of the overall budget of the UN. The U.S. pays 22 percent of the assessed budget. Yet, the Japanese are not on the Security Council, which they continue to point out, where most of the decisions are made for peace-keeping budgets, which is a large part of the system. They agree on the issue of internal intervention to have a collective international responsibility agreement, which is to say you can't have genocide. You can't have a repeat of Rwanda or a repeat of World War II Germany without an explicit option for the UN to actually go in and participate. They strengthened the human rights system and they put in some guiding principles for the internally displaced, which are people who might be called refugees except they haven't crossed a border and they have had to leave their homes. They did reaffirm the millennium development goals. They did finally agree to condemn terrorism, but they have a lot more work to do in order to work out a lot of these different pieces. They have created a Peacebuilding Commission. They did not reform the Security Council. They did not reform the General Assembly or any of its committees or make any significant reforms in terms of management of the UN.



Reforming the Security Council really must happen over the long term. They have the five permanent members now. They're very powerful. That's really the most important decision-making body of the UN. It doesn't include Japan, the second biggest payer and a very important member of the world community. So the secretary

general had originally proposed a couple of ideas of making the Council into 24 members rather than 15, adding several permanent members, not necessarily with veto power. That

hasn't gone anywhere yet and it needs to. The General Assembly, 191 members, has different committees — a legal committee, an administrative committee, and other committees — that are all committees of the whole. Now imagine the New York Legislature here, if every committee was a committee of all the Senate or all the Assembly. Or Congress, if everybody got to go the Senate Judiciary Committee and ask Judge Roberts questions. We have committees of the whole, so on the administrative side 191 people can come to the committee that's going to discuss any real management reform of the UN. So you think you have an arrangement with the guys that are there and then new guys come the next night. Of course, countries don't always speak with one voice because it could be the third secretary, could be the second secretary, or could be the fourth secretary. It's seldom the ambassador. They don't want to get their hands dirty on this administrative stuff. When they do, the other guys resent it.

One reform I forgot to mention was the reform of the security of the UN, which we accomplished with the secretary general. Reforming the security structure to make sure staff is secure, making sure the systems are in place so that command and control are clear and there are enough security officers. Those kinds of things were so important. We had meetings of the ambassadors in order to discuss these things with them and get their buy in. Then the third secretary would just get mad that we talked to the ambassador and goes back to the meeting that the third secretary goes to and they just do whatever they want to do in terms of holding it up or changing it or moving it. It's a system that doesn't work and there isn't too much that you can reform without getting the General Assembly's approval. That's the committee you have to go through in order to do it, the system you have to go through, which gets back to the issue I said before about how political everybody is.

Boy, some of these countries really score a lot of points. Some of the countries that believe they should be on the Security Council, for instance. The word is they got directions from their capitols — no matter what the topic is (security, culture, or anything else) — to be really tough about it, to show our strength so that we can show we really do

belong on the Security Council. It becomes really problematic. I believe it absolutely needs to be changed.

As far as the management is concerned, the Volker Commission as well as the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), I believe, talked about how there should be a chief operating officer. I think that is a very worthwhile step forward. The secretary general has over 40 direct reports, which is impossible. You can't do that. You can't run it that way. So therefore nobody is accountable. The deputy secretary general, while an important step forward, doesn't have anybody officially who reports to her except occasionally people who get assigned to report to her, like the guy running Oil for Food. But there are no systemic reporting relationships to her. They try to run the UN essentially out of the chief of staff's office. It just doesn't work. So I think reforming that could be extremely useful.

Another issue is there isn't an accountability system set up. It's very hard to hold the rest of the organization accountable if you don't start with the top people. Another issue I think that needs to be reformed is peacekeeping oversight. As I mentioned, the Security Council makes decisions, which are really the biggest budget decisions in the UN. Then there are assessments to countries for the peacekeeping budgets, much bigger than the operating budget of the UN. There's really no peacekeeping oversight. It's considered another division of the UN. It's huge. It needs to have its own governing body and its own accountability mechanisms.

Here's something that ought to happen at the UN. People who are qualified should be appointed to jobs. This is not a problem with the people appointed by the secretary general, generally speaking, but it is a problem with people appointed by governments or elected by governments because it's horse-trading. The International Civil Service Commission, which sets the rules for all the staff throughout the world who work for the UN and all its entities, says, "Well, let's see, we'll put you on this, ambassador, and you do this. You're going to get paid a lot more money being on this commission than you are being the ambassador of many countries." Why would you need personnel management experience to be on an international civil service commission?

The same with the Administrative Tribunal, which adjudicates and is the final arbiter of staff issues within the system. It's all a bunch of horse-trading. The same is true with the Joint Inspection Unit, which is supposed to actually do evaluations, which the UN never does enough of. There's a new counterterrorism entity organized where you're supposed to go through the normal UN process, except there's a little group of countries that decided that one country would get to be the head of it, another country would be the deputy, and two other countries would get to be number three and four. They then complain to the secretary general when the system doesn't accept those people they put forward because they didn't have the best qualifications. There are other poor people out there in the world who applied for these jobs and have some credentials and didn't know that they were all taken already. So these are some of the issues that could be dealt with as well.

There's a long list, but I think those are some of the primary ones, except for two more. One is don't elect the heads. Whether it's to these commissions or whether it's the head of the agencies, they should all be appointed. People are much more accountable if they're appointed and they have a boss than if they're elected by the member states. I think it would be a big step forward. Also, I believe, and I testified to this point in May before Congress, there should be more agencies that are voluntarily funded. I believe the reason why WFP, UNICEF, UNDP, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) are the best-run agencies is in part because they're voluntarily funded. If we're not good, we'll die. If you know you're going to get money, even if the U.S. holds back 20 percent of its dues, you're still going to get a big chunk of money. No matter what you do, you have no impetus to reform.

Finally, what is the future? The secretary general has a little over one year left of his term and he's still very committed to reform. But how much can anybody reform in his ninth year of his ten-year commitment? I'm not sure. So to me, very key, and the Volker people made reference to this, is thinking about the next secretary general. With due deference to this one, but in terms of changing the organization now, we should think about the next one and his or her strengths as a manager or a commitment to

management. They have to be a political person. They have to be good at peace building, peacemaking, all of that, but they have got to be either a good manager or know how to run the place. That ought to be part of the selection process. The selection process is going to now keep going. The Asians consider it their turn. It kind of rotates. When Boutros-Ghali was finishing his first term and Kofi Annan was elected secretary, some people said, "Well, Kofi can only be there for one term because that would be two terms for Africa and then it's Asia's turn." No, Kofi was doing a good job, so they kept him for a second term. So now people from Asia are saying it's their turn. I think the U.S. position is, "We don't care who it is. We want somebody good." I think that's the right position, but nonetheless now is a key time for heavy-duty diplomatic discussions and strategies in order to gear toward that next move, which is a very important move.

There also has to be some steps forward to resolving issue of better representation for the Japanese. Over the long term that could undercut the organization. As the Japanese political scene ebbs and flows, it goes more and more toward the direction of "Look at all of this that we're doing and we're not getting much out of it," especially if the Americans do anything more about cutting back on dues. The administration said it's not, but Congress wants to. I would predict the Japanese would say, "Why are we being so silly paying all this money?" I think that's an issue that somehow has to be resolved in the process.

So are we there yet? It doesn't even necessarily depend on the definition of what "there" is. It does mean that we have to continue to work very diligently on a lot of issues in order for the UN to continue to do what it does well and to improve what it needs to improve.

*Richard P. Nathan:*

I think what you said is really put very well and really important. I have a question and I'm sure other people have questions. We have a little more time and so I'll open it up to the audience and save my question.

*Robert Nakamura:*

I'm director of the Center for Legislative Development. I enjoyed the talk very much and I take your point that the UN is a bunch of different organizations. I recently read over a bunch of case studies of peacekeeping missions, which involve both specially created organizations and UNDP. In all of them, one persistent problem was, of course, that the UN is responding to a collective body other than the Security Council in respect to doing stuff. Or collectively, as in Bosnia and Kosovo, that we were relying on other organizations as well for bits and pieces. So these are all the familiar problems of collective action that you encounter in the American federal system responding to hurricanes or wherever. One of the persistent reforms that's suggested, and you mentioned a couple of times, is expansion of the Security Council. I know that at least in American politics, the more people making the decision has an impact on consistency, speed, and persistence. I understand the arguments for expansion. How would you reconcile that?

*Catherine Bertini:*

Yes, more people in a room is harder. But are these the right five guys in the room?

*Robert Nakamura:*

You can't kick people out of the room.

*Catherine Bertini:*

No, no. I mean, if you are really doing this, if you were starting over, you'd have one European, one rotating or something, but you'd have one. You'd probably have China. I don't know if you would have Russia. You might have Russia, but you might not. You certainly would have the Americans. You'd have to get some developing country representation, but you can't compete with the U.S. or with Europe generally. To me, part of the reason for expansion is to include the Japanese and some other major developing

country representation. But the other thing is, I think, that the balance between the Security Council and the General Assembly is not great. The Security Council, I think, is the decision maker. So the General Assembly tries to make their point through the General Assembly. This would make, I think, the Security Council even stronger, but at least more representative and then it might push the General Assembly to do some more of its own reform. I think in the balance since you can't start over again, it's better to expand than to keep the balance the way it is.

*Frank Thompson:*

I'm the Dean of Rockefeller College. You've had this brilliant career in leading all sorts of organizations. You know there was a book written once about impossible jobs and these were jobs that even the best people would have a hard time succeeding at. As you describe the UN as a sort of management problem, this strikes me as really hard even if we did some things — shored up the hierarchy a little bit. Of course, the critics love this. Given this political environment, you can have too many people and not a lot of cronies, not very good at contracting. It will be a miracle if it isn't done on some politicized basis. I'm a supporter of the UN. I think there's a lot of good stuff. But they're saying to you, "Yeah, we'll do this but you are well aware that we're always going to have incompetent people." There is going to still be too many around. It will be a miracle if you can get a contract that is not politicized. What would you tell them behind closed doors as to why they shouldn't cut their support for the UN?

*Catherine Bertini:*

Well, I'd go back to somebody like that with the political cover that the UN gives. I can't do an accurate job of reciting this, but if you look through the U.S.'s objectives around the world and how many of them the UN helps them meet, including running elections in Iraq, by the way. Then the list would be so long it would be impossible to say, "We don't want anything to do with this organization." So why don't we work in order to help to support it? I'm not saying the UN is perfect as I described. It has lots of issues to deal with. But the rhetoric from the U.S. does its best to deflate the UN, not to support it.

Imagine people who work for the UN in New York of any nationality who have to wake up with their commute into the office and read the papers that day about the latest problem at the UN, a politician that's blasting the UN. It's very deflating for those people. But I would say to those American policymakers, "Look at all of these things that the UN does, whether through the WFDP or through the UN itself.

*Frank Thompson:*

Just a follow-up and I'll be quiet. You would say, "You might get some modest recruitments leveling with you on this management stuff." But it's just sort of a cost for all the good that they do otherwise, whether if it's helping with elections or so forth, sort of a loss leader.

*Catherine Bertini:*

Yes. Two more things to say on this. One is what I would do is put a bunch of people together who know the UN and like it, but who can really dig into the guts of it on the American side and look into all sorts of issues, including the way visas are handled for people who work in the UN, the way green cards are used or not used, and all of the other support mechanisms. Really dig into how we can use this to make it more efficient and less prone to attack. The other thing is that this is one reason why I, as an American, am very glad that John Bolton is the ambassador in the UN because you can't change this place by little nudges. John knows it very well and he knows the UN very well. Despite some of the things he might have regretted saying in the past, he cares about it and he's really going to be able to push as much as he can until his term up, which is coincidentally the same time as Kofi Annan's term.

*Thomas Gais:*

I'm co-director here at the Rockefeller Institute. I was just wondering if you could talk a little bit more about your idea of reducing the size of the committees and how that would actually operate? You would think, given the way such things have happened in Congress

and a lot of power goes along with those who decides who serves on what committees and leadership of the committees, there would be power going somewhere. I was wondering whether that would go to the Security Council or to the secretary general? And is that a good thing? Would that be a helpful thing for other aspects?

*Catherine Bertini:*

No, it wouldn't go to the secretary general. I'm not trying to say that the legislative process doesn't have its place. It would be horse trading among the member states to choose the people on the committee as they do now for other things. For instance, my proposal is that they use the same formula that they had for choosing member states to be on the boards of the funds and programs because each of us have 36 members of governments on the programs. They have three-year terms so a third are elected every year. There's a formula so that a third of them are from donor countries and the two-thirds are split from each region. They figure that out amongst themselves. If 36 members is good for the board of UNICEF, then why isn't that good for the administrative committee of the UN? I would use exactly that same structure and put it on the committees.

*Brian Stenson:*

I'm deputy director here at the Institute. You've talked about the interest in reform from the United States. What about the rest of the countries in the UN? Is there interest for reform or is there a sort of split that the heavy contributors are interested in reform and the others are not?

*Catherine Bertini:*

Exactly. How it plays out in New York is again with the assessed contributions. If you have so much money going in to each department and so many jobs and the administrative committee reviews even a secretarial position, everybody protects their turf. I've seen it happen multiple times. If you put forward that a professional job should

be upgraded and you put that in the budget, then guaranteed the person sitting in that job right now their country will be the guy who's the strongest guy to try to get that promotion done. What I did at WFP was I took it all out. I didn't know this. It's a good thing I was at WFP before I was at the UN or there would be things I'd assume I couldn't do. But when I was at WFP, the first time the budget came to me and somebody said, "I want my secretary to get a promotion." I said, "That doesn't belong in the budget." They said, "They're member states. That's what they do. They vote on that." I said, "No. It's none of their business. They need to assess how I manage the place, but it's not their job to manage it." So I went to the governing body and said, "Look, we've had on average 20 promotions every year, so we'll put in the budget X amount, a very small amount, for 20 promotions." We averaged it out on the mid-level job difference. "I'll not put any promotions in the budget. I'll come back to you in two years to tell you what jobs were changed. I don't mean promotions of people as much as the job-level change. I'll come back to you in the next budget and tell you what jobs I changed. If you don't like it, you can do something about it, but it's my job to do that, not yours." So I got rid of the problem.

*Dorothy Davis:*

I would like to recall, if you don't mind, what Reinhold Niebuhr said many years ago. I met him myself 75 years ago. He made a very simple statement. He said, "The United Nations can be compared to a marriage. It will be restarting over again, looking at itself over again, trying again the next day." I just wanted to say that to you.

*Catherine Bertini:*

That's a very astute comment.

*Richard P. Nathan:*

I could comment on that but I'm not. I'm going to ask a different question. Thank you very much. Good government is hard government, democracy particularly. The freer we

are about letting people into the game and be part of it, the harder it is. What I hear you saying is, yes, there are important things that strike me as concrete things that would help the workability of this institution. There's also an underlying dimension to this of getting people to think about the UN in better ways and part of that is to respect it for having kept its building up and made its management system better.

Now, being just a little reflective, American government is not so beautiful. Mr. Bolton down there telling people how to do good government has got a kind of funny twist to it, particularly now with the great sense we're messing up so much in the response to the disasters in the Gulf of Mexico. So I wonder if, as a person who has been in American government, in American politics, and a person who has obvious management savvy, you might sort of reflect a little bit. How can we change our image in the same way that I'm suggesting that your agenda would help to really change things, but also to change perceptions for the UN?

*Catherine Bertini:*

Oh, that's a big one. I think the Katrina example shows us many things, but one of them is how important perceptions are and how policy is sometimes driven on perception and not fact. We still don't know all the facts about what happened there, but we sure all have our opinions about it. I don't know about you, but I had my opinions right off the bat about what was happening and then I would listen to somebody from the federal government more about what happened and I'd say, "Well, yeah, maybe there's a lot more things that I haven't thought of about it." Then you listen to somebody from one of the states and you say, "Well, all right, I haven't taken that into account." But what happens with the UN, and I hope I'm answering your question, is there are very few people who counter the negative perceptions in the U.S. They're going on and so then it becomes harder to actually have friends with the UN to be able to actually move forward. Not necessary in New York but in Washington, which then brings me back to John, to say that if he goes to Washington and says, "This part of the UN is really okay," there's no better commercial than that in Washington today in my estimation.

*Richard P. Nathan:*

We are in your debt for your wonderful public service and this good talk. The thought I have as I listen to your comment about having opinions and then looking into what is actually happening in the world, the one postscript I would put on all of that, a personal postscript, is thank God for CSPAN. Anyway, Cathy, thank you very much.