

FACULTY PROFILE

Government Worker

Catherine Bertini's pride in doing public good led her to the United Nations, where she operated the largest food-assistance program in the world. Now she's at Maxwell, where her understanding of the power of humanitarian service extends also to improving the education of girls worldwide.

As chief executive of the United Nations' World Food Programme, Catherine Ann Bertini directed relief efforts from Afghanistan to Somalia; and as Kofi Annan's Under-Secretary-General for Management, she tackled reform of the U.N. pension investment management and administered multibillion-dollar budgets. Succeeding at such jobs requires exceptional focus and discipline, and Bertini clearly had an abundance of both even as a teenager. "You know in the high school yearbook where you put your picture and a quote? I chose Edmund Burke: 'All that is necessary for the forces of evil to win in the world is for enough good men to do nothing,'" recalls Bertini, who grew up in Syracuse and Cortland. "So that was really my commitment. I said I wanted to be a 'government worker,' because 'public service' sounded too elite."



While running the United Nations' World Food Programme, Catherine Bertini (left) visits a refugee camp for Rwandans in Goma, Congo.

Bertini's life came full circle in 2005 when, after a dozen years with the U.N., she returned to Central New York to join the Maxwell School as a professor of public administration. Her teaching at Maxwell taps directly into her deep experience in humanitarian work, not only with the U.N. but in Washington, where she spent five years managing low-income assistance programs for the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and for the Department of Agriculture.

A life-long active Republican, Bertini was appointed to HHS during the Reagan administration, and to the Agriculture post by President George H. W. Bush (who also recommended her to become the first American and first woman to lead the World Food Programme). Yet Bertini also won support from President Clinton for a second term at WFP, and from members of both parties in Congress. "My belief and understanding is that I gained a respect on both sides of the aisle because I tried to do the right thing," she says. "I was regarded as a public servant who wasn't doing her job in a partisan manner." Even today, she serves on both the New York Republican State Committee and the advisory board for the Clinton School of Public Service at the University of Arkansas.

In her first year at Maxwell, Bertini has taught courses on humanitarian action and U.N. reform. Starting next spring she will teach on a subject that has engaged her for many

years: girls' education. When Bertini won the World Food Prize in 2003, she used the \$250,000 award to create a trust fund for girls' education at the Friends of the World Food Program.

"After I'd been at WFP for maybe five years," says Bertini, "I remember thinking, Well, if I were named king or queen of the world, what would be the one thing that I would do? And the answer was: Make sure every girl is educated. So many positive steps are taken when girls are educated. Educated girls have half as many children: 2.9 on average as opposed to six. Their infant-mortality rates go down. The health outcomes of their families go up. Their economic opportunities grow because they can read and write. They are more likely to send

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their children to school. If they're in farming, their agriculture production is higher. . . . There are lots and lots of important development issues, but this is the one that would, for a fairly limited amount of resources, have the most impact on everything else."

All of Bertini's teaching at Maxwell has a strong grounding in real-world situations. Her course Humanitarian Action: Challenges, Responses, Results, for instance, analyzes man-made and natural disasters around the globe since 1992, and groups of students are assigned to represent different humanitarian agencies and NGOs. In one segment of the class, students make pitches for project funding to Bertini, who plays the role—no doubt very convincingly—of the head of a major aid organization.

"I have the best of all worlds," Bertini reflects. "I've traveled all around the world, had fabulous jobs and really felt like I made a difference, and now I can come back, live at home, be with these wonderful students, and share my experiences at a great university. So how much better can it get than this?" .

—Jeffrey Pepper Rodgers