

Catherine Ann Bertini

(1950-)

Catherine Bertini was born March 31, 1950 in Syracuse, NY and was a 1967 graduate of Cortland High School. She developed an interest in government and politics early: while a student at the University of Albany, she worked for Governor Rockefeller; at 24, she was appointed Youth Director of the Republican National Committee.

Bertini worked in the private sector for ten years, and then joined the federal government, first in the Department of Health and Human Services then in 1989, she was nominated by President George H.W. Bush and confirmed by the Senate as Assistant Secretary of the US Department of Agriculture.

There she created a food package for breastfeeding mothers in the WIC program, convinced Congress to allow electronic benefit transfer cards for food stamps, and established the food guide pyramid.

In 1992, Catherine was nominated by President Bush to the United Nations to be Executive Director of the UN World Food Program, the world's largest humanitarian

agency. She was re-nominated for a second term by President Clinton. For ten years, Catherine led a

WFP credited with saving millions from starvation in Africa, Eastern Europe and Asia amidst regional

conflict and instability. She instituted significant organizational reforms and highlighted the seminal role of women in ending hunger. Catherine was the first American and first woman to lead WFP, and the third woman ever to head a UN agency. Secretary General Kofi Annan brought Catherine back to New York in 2003 as Under Secretary General for Management for the entire

UN.



Catherine was named the 2003 World Food Prize Laureate, for “transforming the World Food Programme from a development assistance program to the largest and most effective humanitarian food relief organization.” She donated the significant cash award to a newly established Catherine Bertini Trust for Girls’ Education to help educate girls in developing countries.



In 2005, Catherine returned to Central NY as Professor of Practice at the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University. She was appointed by President George W. Bush and then by President Obama to the Board of International Food and Agricultural Development, she worked for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, was recognized by 12 universities in four countries with honorary doctorate degrees, and

was honored by the governments of Italy and Ireland.

Catherine’s work at the Maxwell School and several advisory boards keep her extremely active and enable her to continue to inspire and educate graduate students.