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Visiting Professor Brings A Global Perspective

For a person who grew up at the very center of the United States — in Fort Dodge, Iowa (population 25,894) — Catherine Tinker makes a good case for the global perspective. As an expert in international environmental law, she spoke at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held amid great fanfare last summer in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. And her work at the Ford Foundation and the United Nations Association, an advisory group, has helped forge plans to make the U.N. more effective and inclusive.

Professor Tinker is interested in international jurisprudence: how international law evolves in different cultures, and changes in response to global conditions. As a visiting associate professor at UB Law this past year, she taught four courses: in the fall, International Environmental Law, and U.N. Law, including a series of four colloquia on aspects of environmental law; and in the spring, International Business Transactions and White Collar Crime.

"The fact is, people have to deal with a transnational world. Every aspect of life is affected by this new political environment," says Tinker. It's an environment with an especially strong presence in Buffalo, she notes. Think of the cross-border shopping by people looking for bargains, the interchangeable use of Canadian and U.S. currency, property ownership that reaches across the border, transborder manufacturing and sales.

UB Law, according to Tinker, has recognized Western New York's part in the globalization of politics and eco-

nomics, and has responded. "I see some of the same kind of thinking here that is transforming the United Nations and the practice of law, searching for new models of cooperation," she says.

She came here from New York City, where she has been a law professor and senior policy analyst for the United Nations Association — USA. She also is completing course work for the J.S.D. degree at New York University School of Law, a rarely awarded doctorate in law.

An inquiring spirit has led her across the world: During her sophomore year at Minnesota's St. Olaf College, at the height of the Vietnam War, she went to Thailand. That was followed by a year in France. Later, as a Rockefeller Foundation Fellow in the Humanities, Tinker lived in Brazil.

After graduating from George Washington University School of Law, she practiced law and was a public prosecutor first in Iowa, then in New York City, where she served under Elizabeth Holtzman in the Kings County District Attorney's Office in Brooklyn.

When the opportunity arose to work on a Ford Foundation study "A World in Need of Leadership: Tomorrow's U.N." she was intrigued. The question being investigated had broad import: How could the U.N. improve the way it picks its secretary-general, potentially the most powerful leader in the world of the future?

The process always has been a secretive one, she says, conducted by "a handful of diplomats behind closed doors in a few world capitals." Tinker went to Washington and London and, at the National Archives and the British

Public Records Office, read through some of the founding documents of the U.N., combing the original source materials for descriptions of the secretary-general's selection.

The study on which she collaborated advises bringing the backroom process out into the open. Specifically, the report suggests: establishing a rigorous search committee to screen candidates; beginning the search well in advance of the leadership transition; and making the secretary-general's tenure a single seven-year term, instead of the current five-year term with an option for a second term.

Now that "A World in Need of Leadership" has met with solid support, Tinker says, "I think this plan will be the blueprint for the selection of the next secretary-general in 1996."

That project dovetailed nicely with Tinker's work at the United Nations Association — U.S.A., a non-governmental organization founded by Eleanor Roosevelt that studies the U.N. in hopes of making it more effective. There, Tinker embarked on a study of economic sanctions as a tool for constructive change in the world.

"We make huge leaps. We say we tried economic sanctions and they have failed, so we need to escalate to the use of force without really learning whether they worked or not," she says.

So Tinker and her associates looked back at sanctions imposed on Rhodesia, South Africa, and most recently, Iraq. She gathered a host of academic experts, U.N. officials, and diplomats for an off-the-record, candid discussion of economic sanctions. One idea that resulted: Instead of a traditional naval or



trade embargo, a more persuasive approach in this computer age might be a stoppage of electronic bank transfers to the targeted nation. Implementation of such an idea depends on the political will of nations and their ability to match rhetoric with action.

In Rio de Janeiro last year, Professor Tinker joined other specialists in working through the issues of environment and development — two often-conflicting ideals that are at the core of the global economy. She wrote in *Consordare*, a Harvard University Law School newsletter for environmental negotiators, that the conference succeeded — not because it solved the world's environmental problems in a

week, but because it “broke ground” for future progress by nations of the North and South newly committed to a common goal.

Professor Tinker also filled a role as legal advisor to the Women's Environmental and Development Organization, led by former Rep. Bella Abzug. This group made sure the language of the Rio conference's agreements encouraged the participation of women in decision-making at all levels, and considered the effect on women of any policies adopted.

She was also involved in the negotiations of the U.N. Convention on Biological Diversity, as an academic observer and a non-governmental organi-

Professor Catherine Tinker

zation representative. She is currently writing a book on the negotiation process, analyzing the sections of the new treaty and its effect on the future conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity.

“Difference gives strength to the whole,” Tinker says. “So let's honor and respect difference in species, difference in genes, difference in ecosystems, and difference in both genders...That's what ultimately is going to ensure the survival of the earth.” ■