

**Special High-Level Meeting of the Economic and Social Council with the
Bretton Woods Institutions, WTO and UNCTAD
United Nations, New York, 10-11 March 2011**

**Intervention by Barry Herman on behalf of civil society on
*“The role of the UN system in global economic governance”***

Mr. President,

My name is Barry Herman and I teach in the Graduate Program in International Affairs at The New School. I am pleased to have been asked to speak here on behalf of the NGO Committee on Financing for Development.

My civil society colleagues have mentioned specific proposals to strengthen the role of the UN in global economic governance. I want to speak about something intangible that is necessary to realize the kinds of reforms we advocate. It is often called “political will” and is usually used in sentences like, “There is no political will here.” I prefer a more dynamic concept: “political momentum.”

In 2002, Financing for Development had strong political momentum. I believe the government leaders, finance and foreign affairs ministers and heads of all the major international financial and trade institutions were sincere when they promised to *stay engaged* in a collective effort to forge coherent international policies for development. I think they were comfortable saying this in Monterrey because political momentum had built behind realizing a shared vision. Civil society had engaged. Wall Street had engaged. Everyone pushed in the same direction. Sure, there were differences, there were enemies, but there was also a common purpose.

While an interesting discussion has taken place today on financial and trade policies, I frankly do not see much political momentum. I see a focus on tactics, not strategies to bring bold visions to life. Outsiders notice. I can tell you that many civil society organizations no longer are keen to come to these meetings because they do not think it worth the expense.

And the world does not wait for the UN. Decisions on global economic and financial policies are made in other forums after limited debate behind closed doors among members of restricted clubs, or they are not made at all. Few problems get solved. Indeed, I know of no serious expert in financial matters who thinks the reforms enacted by the Group of 20 thus far have removed global vulnerability to financial crisis.

The UN can help find stronger solutions. It is THE global forum where – if they so choose – the powerful players and the not-so-powerful players can exchange views. I do not mean that the UN is where the lion lays down with the lamb. Power is what it is. The UN cannot change that. But the UN can structure discussions so it is safe for government representatives to try out ideas, and see which ones gather support, which are premature. The UN can be the place where good ideas from small countries can get heard and where political momentum can grow around good ideas from whatever stakeholder corner.

I am talking about more than a talk shop. To say that ideas gather political momentum is to say they will become actual international policies. And momentum will include pressure to implement the policies because the global body politic will hold the relevant actors accountable.

Mr. President,

Leaders among the delegates sitting in this room need to convince their colleagues that it is time to take some risks to again make the UN an attractive forum for serious and detailed exchanges of ideas. Policy change will come when the dialogue begins to gather political momentum.

It can happen here. There is nowhere else.

Thank you.