Annual Avon Global Center Women and Justice Conference Discusses Women, Prison and Gender-Based Violence

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The Avon Global Center for Women and Justice at Cornell Law School hosted its fifth annual Women and Justice Conference in Washington, D.C., on April 14–15. The conference, which was held at the law office of Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP, focused on women, prison and gender-based violence, and the role that judges can play in addressing the causes, conditions, and consequences of women’s imprisonment.

The conference examined the implementation of the United Nations’ “Bangkok Rules,” which were adopted in 2010. The Bangkok Rules recognize that the principle of nondiscrimination requires states to address the unique challenges and needs of women offenders and prisoners. Yet, much work is needed to implement their standards in laws, policies, and practices globally.
Participants included senior women judges and NGO leaders from the United States and around the world. Speaking about participating in the conference, Judge Mavis Kwainoe from Ghana said, “This was a very enriching program on ways to eliminate violence against women at the pretrial level, during trial, and also after conviction. As judges, we have realized we have a role to affect the lives of persons we sentence to avoid revictimization.”

Professor Elizabeth Brundige, executive director of the Avon Global Center for Women and Justice, said, “the two days were very exciting, with judges from five continents sharing their insights and brainstorming ways to alleviate the devastating impact that women’s imprisonment has on women and their families.”

The conference was co-hosted by Seneca Women and the Virtue Foundation. The Avon Global Center also partnered with Seneca Women in holding a special tribute to the Honorable Sandra Day O’Connor, retired associate justice and first woman justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, at the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C. The tribute included panels on Justice O’Connor’s impact beyond the bench and her influence on bringing women in the judiciary from around the world together. The three current female justices--Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Sonia Sotomayor, and Elena Kagan
—attended the ceremony, with Ginsburg delivering tribute remarks. Recorded videos of the forum can be found on the Seneca Women’s website via this link (http://senecawomen.com/event/seneca-women-global-leadership-forum/).