At Annual Conference, Cornell’s Avon Global Center for Women and Justice Receives New $600,000 Commitment from Avon Foundation

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On December 10-12, 2013, the Avon Global Center for Women and Justice at Cornell Law School hosted its fourth annual 2013 Women and Justice Conference, “State Responsibility for Eliminating Violence Against Women: The Due Diligence Principle and the Role of Judges.” Held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, NY, the conference convened more than 100 participants—senior and distinguished judges from national and international courts, scholars, and human rights advocates—from over fifteen countries.

At the close of the conference’s public events, Avon Foundation for Women President Carol Kurzig announced a new $600,000 commitment to support the Avon Global Center’s efforts to end violence against women. This will be added to the Foundation’s 2009 grant of $1.5 million, which made possible the launch of the Center and supported the first five years of its work. “With this generous grant from the Avon Foundation for Women,” said Stewart J. Schwab, the Allan R. Tessler Dean and Professor of Law at Cornell Law School, “the Center will be able to continue its important work with judges and governmental and nongovernmental organizations to advance access to justice in an effort to eliminate violence against women worldwide.”
The conference began on Human Rights Day with a panel and reception celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Vienna Declaration on Human Rights. The second day of the conference focused on the theory and practice of the principle of state responsibility to act with due diligence to eliminate violence against women.

“As state actors, judges—in partnership with other branches of government and civil society—play a critical role in realizing states' responsibility to eliminate violence against women and girls,” noted Elizabeth Brundige, executive director of the Avon Global Center. “By sharing best practices from around the world, participants gained information and insights that will support their efforts to fulfill this essential obligation.”

In her keynote address for the conference, Rashida Manjoo, UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, called upon participants to work to prevent harm, ensure accountability, address root causes, and improve policies and programs to eliminate gender-based violence. Added Hon. James Makau of the High Court of Kenya, one of the conference panelists, “The ultimate obligation for meeting the due diligence obligation rests on the state, and it cannot be delegated. If the fight against gender-based violence is to be effective, the judiciary has to play a leading role.”

At the Senior Roundtable on Women in the Judiciary, held on the third day of the conference, judges discussed strategies and solutions for addressing violence against women within and outside of their courtrooms. The event “promoted valuable dialogues among the judiciary and helped to find ways to eliminate violence against women and girls,” noted Taiwanese judge and Cornell Law School Visiting Scholar Claire Wu.

The 2013 Women and Justice Conference was co-sponsored by the Avon Foundation for Women, the Virtue Foundation, the Dorothea S. Clarke Program in Feminist Jurisprudence at Cornell Law School, the University of Miami School of Law Human Rights Clinic, and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.