International delegation of women leaders visits Law School

By Lauren Gold

Around the world, women and girls are victims of violence in alarming numbers. And while the cultural context of that violence may vary, many of the hurdles to preventing and prosecuting it are common across national borders.

Fourteen prominent women from 13 countries toured the Law School March 15 and met with faculty leaders of the Avon Global Center for Women and Justice to compare legal systems, discuss goals and forge ties for strong future collaborations.

The Avon Center works with judges, legal professionals, governmental and nongovernmental organizations to improve access to justice in an effort to eliminate violence against women and girls.

The delegation was part of the U.S. State Department's International Visitor Leadership Program, which brings current and emerging foreign leaders to the United States for short-term visits to build mutual understanding and trust. Participants are chosen by U.S. embassies in their respective countries; since the program began in 1940, thousands of people have participated; and more than 250 participants have gone on to be heads of state.

At the Law School, the group of attorneys, journalists, politicians and advocates got a warm welcome from Stewart Schwab, the Allan R. Tessler Dean and Professor of Law, and heard presentations by Sital Kalantry, faculty director of the Avon Center, and Sara Lulo, the center's executive director.

They also learned about local efforts aimed at preventing domestic violence from Tompkins County Judge John C. Rowley. Rowley spoke and answered questions about the county's Integrated Domestic Violence Court, which keeps cases with a domestic violence component in a single court with a judge trained in domestic violence issues.

Fatima Benli, a participant from Turkey, said the opportunity to relate and compare systems was helpful. "It was a good experience -- I share experiences with the judge," she said.

Kalantry said the visit was welcome recognition of the Avon Center’s work to promote the rule of law and end violence against women and girls.

"The visit from the delegation was very successful and engaging, and we have created lasting professional relationships with the visitors," Kalantry said. "We are all going to stay in touch."