Law School unveils center for women and justice, funded with $1.5 million from Avon foundation

By Susan Kelley

Laws against domestic violence are only as effective as the judicial systems that enforce them. The new Avon Global Center for Women and Justice at Cornell Law School, funded with a $1.5 million grant from the Avon Foundation for Women, will help improve the judiciary’s understanding of laws protecting women around the world.

Starting in the fall, the center will work with judges, legal professionals and governmental and nongovernmental organizations to improve access to justice, in an effort to eliminate violence against women and girls. Its main initiatives will include intensive legal clinical projects, providing legal research for judges, hosting conferences and events, and maintaining an extensive online library of relevant laws, articles and reports. The center also will serve as a forum for judges and legal practitioners to share ideas and strategies on the role of the justice system in facilitating access to justice for women victims of violence.

Stewart J. Schwab, the Allan R. Tessler Dean and Professor of Law at Cornell Law School, and Andrea Jung, CEO of Avon Products Inc., made the announcement March 3 during the Global Forum for Women and Justice, a two-day meeting in Washington, D.C., hosted by the International Association of Women Judges.

The new center "is the first center of its kind to work with judges worldwide in an effort to bring justice to women survivors of violence," said Barbara Holden Smith, vice dean of Cornell Law School. "This is a historic moment. The center is prepared to address the epidemic of violence against women and girls, and to work toward greater justice for those who have survived such violence."

Population Reports (1999) states that one in three women worldwide experience violence in their lifetime, and in the United States, a woman is assaulted every nine seconds, according to the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics. Around the world, services for victims are often vastly underfunded or unavailable, and in many countries, laws to protect women do not exist or are not enforced.

"In spite of the national and international laws meant to guard women against violence, gender-based violence continues to be a global epidemic. In too many cases and too many places, the justice system is not effectively enforcing these laws," said Sital Kalantry, Cornell assistant clinical professor of law and the center’s faculty director. "The Avon Center will work with judges and governmental and nongovernmental organizations toward effective enforcement and implementation of these laws."