Violence against women is pervasive throughout the world. It takes place in all settings – on the street, in schools, workplaces, or custodial settings, on the battlefield, in the home – and affects women across all national, economic, ethnic and other divisions. Globally, one in three women has been a victim of violence. Yet far too often these cases go unreported and unpunished.

Under international law, states have an obligation not only to refrain from violence but also to act with due diligence to prevent and respond to violence committed by non-state actors. This means that all forms of violence against women – whether public or private – are a matter of state concern and state responsibility.

In June 2013, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women released a groundbreaking report that elaborated upon the meaning of the due diligence obligation and evaluated its implementation by countries worldwide. The report explained that the responsibility includes both a duty to individual victims of abuse and a duty to create a well-functioning system to eliminate violence against women. It concluded that, despite positive developments, “violence against women remains endemic and the lack of accountability for violations experienced by women is the rule rather than the exception in many countries.”

The Conference, which will include several public events and a closed-session judicial roundtable, will examine the nature of states’ responsibility to eliminate violence against women through the lens of the concept of due diligence. What does the responsibility to act with due diligence to eliminate violence against women entail? Why have state actors and institutions – including judicial systems – failed to respond effectively to gender violence? What solutions are needed to prevent, investigate, punish, and provide redress for violence against women, and to address its root causes? The Conference will focus on the role of courts and judges, examining what judges can do within and outside of their courtrooms to interpret and apply the due diligence principle, hold accountable both perpetrators and state officials who fail to protect or respond, provide meaningful redress for victims of abuse, and help states realize their responsibility to eliminate violence against women.
Draft Program

Tuesday, December 10

Panel Event: Women’s Rights as Human Rights: 20 years after Vienna

Time: 6 p.m., followed by a wine and cheese reception
Location: United Nations Headquarters

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the landmark World Conference on Human Rights, held in Vienna in 1993. The Vienna Declaration and Program of Action adopted at the Conference acknowledged, for the first time in an international document, that women’s rights are human rights. It affirmed their universality and identified violence against women as a key human rights issue. Vienna thus represented a critical step forward in recognizing and realizing the human rights of women globally.

On Human Rights Day 2013, a panel of international experts will assess the significance of the Vienna Conference, the accomplishments of the past two decades, and the challenges that remain for the promotion and protection of women’s human rights. For despite the great strides that have been made, violence and discrimination against women continues globally, often with impunity. Panelists will also discuss ideas and strategies for addressing these implementation challenges and holding governments accountable in order to realize Vienna’s promise for women throughout the world.

Panelists:
- Liesl Gerntholtz, Executive Director, Women’s Rights Division, Human Rights Watch
- Lenora Lapidus, Director, Women’s Rights Project, American Civil Liberties Union
- Rashida Manjoo, United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences
- Judge Ann Williams, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit

Wednesday, December 11

State Responsibility to Act with Due Diligence to Eliminate Violence Against Women

Time: 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.
Location: United Nations Headquarters

10 – 10:15 a.m. Welcoming Remarks

- Stewart Schwab, The Allan R. Tessler Dean & Professor of Law, Cornell Law School
10:15 – 11:15 a.m. **Keynote Address: State Responsibility to Act with Due Diligence: Practice and Reality**

Rashida Manjoo, UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences

Introduction by Barbara Holden-Smith, Vice Dean and Professor of Law, Cornell Law School

11:15 – 11:30 a.m. **Break**

11:30 a.m. – 1 p.m. **Panel 1: State Responsibility to Act with Due Diligence to Eliminate Violence Against Women: From Theory to Practice**

**Panelists:**
- Caroline Bettinger-López, Associate Clinical Professor and Director of the International Human Rights Clinic, University of Miami School of Law
- Bahaa Ezzelarab, Legal Advisor, North African Litigation Initiative, Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights
- Mónica Roa, Programmes Director, Women’s Link Worldwide
- Charlotte Bunch, Founding Director and Senior Scholar at the Center for Women’s Leadership, Rutgers University

1 – 2 p.m. **Lunch Break**

2 – 3 p.m. **Panel 2: State Responsibility to Act with Due Diligence to Eliminate Violence Against Women: Victim Care and Services**

**Panelists:**
- Cindy Dyer, Vice President, Human Rights, Vital Voices
- Other panelists T.B.A.

3 – 4:30 p.m. **Panel 3: State Responsibility to Act with Due Diligence to Eliminate Violence Against Women: The Role of Judges**

**Panelists:**
- Hon. Desiree Bernard, Caribbean Court of Justice
- Hon. J.A. Makau, High Court of Kenya at Meru
- Hon. Mandisa Maya, Supreme Court of Appeal, South Africa
- Hon. John Rowley, Tompkins County Integrated Domestic Violence Court, Ithaca, New York
- Hon. Shiranee Tilakawardane, Supreme Court of Sri Lanka
- Judge Joanna Seybert, U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of New York (Moderator)
4:30 – 5 p.m.  

Closing Remarks

* These events will be followed, on Thursday, December 12, by a closed-session judicial roundtable.