

Highlights:

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LAWYERS SHARE STRATEGIES FOR ADVANCING WOMEN IN THE LEGAL PROFESSION

Around the world, women lawyers face many of the same challenges in pursuing successful legal careers. In April 2007, representatives from the New York City Bar's Committee on Women in the Profession and the Cyrus R. Vance Center for Institutional Justice traveled to Argentina to meet with women who are working to address these issues in Latin America. The delegation included the Chair of the Women in the Profession Committee, Carrie H. Cohen, who works as an Assistant U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York, and Joan Vermeulen, the Executive Director of the Vance Center.

While in Argentina, Ms. Cohen was a panelist at the International Conference on Women in the Legal Profession, where she presented the "Best Practices for the Hiring, Training, Retention and Advancement of Women Attorneys." The Best Practices had been issued by the City Bar's Women in the Profession Committee at a symposium at the House of the Association in February 2006 and was translated into Spanish courtesy of Greenberg Traurig for the conference. The Best Practices report outlines strategies for advancing women lawyers at all stages of their careers. The conference was organized by the University of Buenos Aires Law School and gender-rights organizations Equipo Latinoamericano de Justicia y Género and Articulación Regional de Justicia y Género. More than 100 lawyers and legal scholars from across Latin America attended.

"Having a New York lawyer on one of the panels to share ways in which other women New York lawyers have overcome obstacles was very encouraging," said Beatriz Kohén, one of the organizers of the conference and the executive director of Equipo Latinoamericano de Justicia y Género. "It showed that others have found solutions to these problems and that we can do so in Latin America as well."

In addition to the conference, Ms. Cohen and Ms. Vermeulen met with junior and senior women lawyers in Buenos Aires to exchange strategies for addressing common challenges women face in their firms that ranged from finding mentors in large law firms to obstacles to re-entering the workforce after childbirth. These meetings included a roundtable discussion with approximately 50 attorneys who practice in-house and in private practice. The roundtable discussion was hosted by Marval, O'Farrell & Mairal (a major law firm in Argentina). There also was a meeting with junior attorneys at the Universidad de San Andrés' law school.

The meetings were particularly important because women lawyers in Argentina generally have few opportunities to gather and discuss their common challenges, said Paola Bergallo, a law professor in Buenos Aires who worked with the Vance Center to organize the meeting at the Universidad de San Andrés.

"Issues facing women in the profession are not usually talked about in legal education or once

women enter the work force," Ms. Bergallo said. "These meetings helped to put these gender issues on the agenda for women in elite law firms. The women who came to the seminars were also excited to receive a resource [the Best Practices manual] that will help them move forward on this issue."

Women lawyers in Argentina are indeed eager to continue the dialogue. A follow-up roundtable discussion to the one held at Marval recently took place on July 3 and Argentina's private bar association is pursuing plans to publish and distribute copies of the Best Practices in Spanish.

"The goal of our visit to Buenos Aires was for the Women in the Profession Committee and the Vance Center to provide practical solutions to the issue of gender discrimination in the legal profession," Ms. Cohen said. "We hope that the Best Practices manual will be a useful tool for women attorneys in Latin America."

For more information on the Women in the Profession Committee's and Vance Center's work in Latin America contact Joan Vermeulen at jvermeulen@nycbar.org. For more information on the Vance Center's work in general contact Elise Colomer Grimaldi at ecolomer@nycbar.org. The Best Practices report can be found in English and Spanish at www.nycbar.org.