

Vance News
September 2018

Vance Center Organizes International Conference on Women’s Incarceration



Dr. Kathy Boudin, Conference Keynote Speaker & Center for Justice at Columbia University (USA) (Right), Caroline Bispo, Associação Elas Existem (Brazil) (Middle), Deanne Benos, The Women’s Justice Institute (USA) (Left)

The Vance Center brought together 49 advocates from 23 countries, including nine formerly incarcerated women, for a ground-breaking international conference on [“Women in Prison: Evidence, Advocacy, and Reform”](#) in Bogota, Colombia. The conference focused on sharing information on women’s imprisonment across the globe and building capacity for improved and collaborative monitoring, reporting, and advocacy in accordance with the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Female Prisoners and Non-Custodial Measures for Women Offenders, known as the “Bangkok Rules.” Participants included academics, grassroots advocates, and international experts on women’s rights and women’s imprisonment from Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas.

The number of incarcerated women is increasing throughout the world, and at a rate higher than that of men. A greater percentage of women are being imprisoned for petty offenses as a consequence of harsher drug policies. The majority of women in prison have experienced violence in their lives, including sexual and emotional abuse. However, women prisoners’ healthcare needs, including mental healthcare, often go unmet by prison services

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and worsen in the prison environment. These trends are similar across the world whether in rich or poor countries. Moreover, there is little research available on the causes and consequences of women's imprisonment and data are even sparser in the Global South. The Vance Center conference was a first step towards addressing these shortcomings.

New York City Bar Association President, Roger Maldonado, welcomed participants at an evening reception to kick off the conference. In his remarks, Maldonado cited the City Bar's longstanding dedication to social justice and the protection of vulnerable groups. He expressed satisfaction at the Vance Center's achievement in bringing together such a diverse and dynamic group of advocates to champion such an important cause and his anticipation of the growth of this movement.

Dr. Kathy Boudin, co-Director and co-Founder of the Center for Justice at Columbia University delivered the conference's keynote address, describing her experience as a formerly incarcerated woman and her advocacy both in and out of prison for incarcerated women's rights and against mass incarceration. She underscored the importance of including formerly incarcerated women as equal partners and leaders in this work. Dr. Boudin also exhorted participants to change the narrative on women in prison away from victimhood and to adopt language, practices, and attitudes that empower these women.

Participants over the following two days met through a series of interactive panels and working groups to explore the growing trend of women's imprisonment around the world, the international legal framework regarding women's imprisonment, measures for improving conditions for women in prison, research methods on women's incarceration, and strategies for effecting change. They strategized on developing better data on much neglected issues, as well as advocacy for improving global compliance with the Bangkok Rules. Participants also agreed on the need to integrate formerly incarcerated women in research and advocacy and to adopt sensitive language when referring to women who have been in prison and their experiences there.

The nine formerly incarcerated women at the conference met separately and then addressed participants in an emotional and powerful presentation. They called for refraining from using language that dehumanizes women who have been in prison, deprives them of power, and justifies the dehumanization and abuse they suffered in prison. They also talked of the need to create an international network of formerly incarcerated women highlighting the positive experience they had at the conference and exchanging information with a diverse group of women who also had prison experience. They called for greater inclusion and consideration of formerly incarcerated women in

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research and advocacy, suggesting that, for example, women in prison may work as co-researchers and organizations working on women prisoners' issues might employ formerly incarcerated women.

The conference was the first component of a three-year grant-funded project that the Vance Center is implementing, in partnership with Penal Reform International. Broadly, the project seeks to promote global collaboration on improving conditions of women's imprisonment through effective application of the Bangkok Rules. In addition to the global convening, there is a subsequent two-year pilot project on researching the causes, conditions, and consequences of women's incarceration.

The Vance Center announced its partner for the pilot project at the conference: CleanStart, a non-governmental organization based in Nairobi, Kenya that provides training and psycho-social support to women inside prisons and women transitioning out of prison. CleanStart uses a unique model of employing formerly incarcerated women who return to the prisons to train and support the women still inside. Together, the Vance Center and CleanStart will implement the pilot project to generate and analyze data on issues relating to incarcerated women in Kenya, filling a critical data gap in that country. This pilot project will also serve as a model and collaborative learning process for the other conference attendees, who will then be able to implement similar projects in their own countries. The Vance Center also will share the results of the pilot project, both in terms of data and best practices, more widely through a published report and other advocacy activities.

The ultimate goal of the conference and the pilot project is to empower those working on this issue, and formerly incarcerated women themselves, to improve the situation for women in their countries' prison systems. The project also aims to foster a global movement where women prisoners' rights advocates learn from and work with each other to improve conditions for women prisoners worldwide. This project builds on the Vance Center's prior work on women prisoners' rights, including a similar collaborative project in Jamaica, as well as research on the causes and consequences of women's imprisonment in Bolivia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Ecuador, Chile, Paraguay, and Colombia, which led to recommendations for improvement in light of the Bangkok Rules.

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Vance Center Pursues Keep Families Together Initiative in Central America

Director of Pro Bono Partnerships Jorge Escobedo traveled to Honduras and Guatemala to promote the “Keep Families Together” initiative, the Vance Center’s response to the immigrant child separation crisis in the United States. The initiative provides U.S. lawyers representing Latin American children in immigration detention or otherwise separated from



their families by the Trump Administration’s “zero tolerance” and other policies with the support of Latin American lawyers for their cases. More than 380 such children remain in detention, while many of their parents or other relatives have been deported. The Vance Center has secured the commitment of more than 20 law firms in Brazil, Colombia Guatemala, Honduras, and other countries to help children obtain documentation and other information in their home countries for their U.S. immigration cases.

In Honduras, Escobedo met with interested law firms and non-profit partners to confirm their participation in the initiative. He presented the case of a 10-year-old Garifuna (indigenous) child in U.S. detention whose mother was deported to Honduras. The Vance Center is providing the child’s U.S. counsel with a Honduran firm to help with the case.

In Guatemala, Escobedo joined the monthly meeting of the board of directors of Fundación Pro Bono Guatemala, a key strategic partner for both the Keep Families Together initiative, as well as the ongoing effort to institutionalize pro bono practice in the region. The 11 partners and associates representing the Fundación’s founding law firms expressed strong support for the initiative.

The Vance Center continues to work with immigration legal services providers in the United States, including: [Kids In Need of Defense \(KIND\)](#), [Safe Passage Project](#), [Justice In Motion](#), and the [Legal Aid Society of New York](#), whose clients may need legal support in their home countries. Vance Center Committee law firms Mayer Brown and Paul Weiss have guided and aided the initiative.

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Vance Center Partners with USAID's Power Africa



The Vance Center has agreed with [Power Africa](#), a program of the U.S. Agency for International Development, to expand the [African Legal Fellows Program](#) to include Power Africa Legal Fellows and thereby contribute to strengthened capacity of the African legal profession in the field of electric power generation, distribution,

and financing. Two such Power Africa Legal Fellows have begun working at the New York City offices of Vance Center Committee law firms, with more expected soon.

Power Africa brings together the world's top companies, political leaders, and financial institutions to help overcome Africa's energy crisis. Its transaction-centered approach directly addresses the constraints to project development and investment in sub-Saharan Africa's energy sector. It works with the private sector to build local capacity by supporting innovative ways to make traditional assistance programs more effective and sustainable.

The Vance Center partnership with Power Africa will provide the Power Africa Legal Fellows with specific programming on the U.S. power sector and its place and potential in Africa, the African power sector and its opportunities for U.S. investment, and the vital role that lawyers play in bringing together U.S. and African partners in energy power transactions. They will return to their home countries with specific skills and experience from the program and their work at U.S. law firms to share with colleagues in the private and public sectors. The Vance Center's African Legal Fellows Program will continue to include fellows from other practice areas, as well.

Since 2002, more than 50 lawyers, primarily from South Africa but in recent years also from Kenya and Nigeria, have spent a year working at a U.S. law firm or corporate counsel's office, returning to greater professional opportunities at home, through the African Legal Fellows Program. The program's original purpose was redressing the legacy of apartheid in the South African legal profession and now includes promoting pro bono practice in certain African countries.

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Vance Center and Client Release Joint Report on the Detention of Sex Workers in Asia

The Vance Center and longtime client Asia Catalyst released a joint report, *Legal Review on Detention Centers for Sex Workers in Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam*. The report, based on a year of extensive desk research by a Vance Center Committee law firm in the United



States and an Asia regional law firm's offices in *Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam*, analyzes the legal framework and provisions governing arrest and compulsory detention of sex workers in these countries. It particularly looks at the four countries' laws and procedures governing sex work and the legal framework for the detention and "rehabilitation" of sex workers.

In the vast majority of countries in Asia and across the globe, sex work is criminalized, leading to abuse and other harsh treatment of sex workers, including by law enforcement officials. One such abuse is the regular and repeated illegal and arbitrary detention of sex workers, which constitutes or results in human rights violations. Some countries detain sex workers for months for "treatment," or "rehabilitation." During detention, they experience a wide range of human rights abuses, including violations of the right to freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention; denial of due process and a fair trial; exposure to torture and cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment; forced labor; and compulsory medical testing and treatment.

Advocacy for and by sex workers on these issues is still nascent in Asia. Understanding what leads to their detention and what legal procedures are involved is essential to addressing these violations. The report seeks to contribute to this understanding and to support advocates seeking recognition and respect for the human rights of sex workers.

Please [click here](#) to read the full report.

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Third Annual Pro Bono Celebration is Approaching

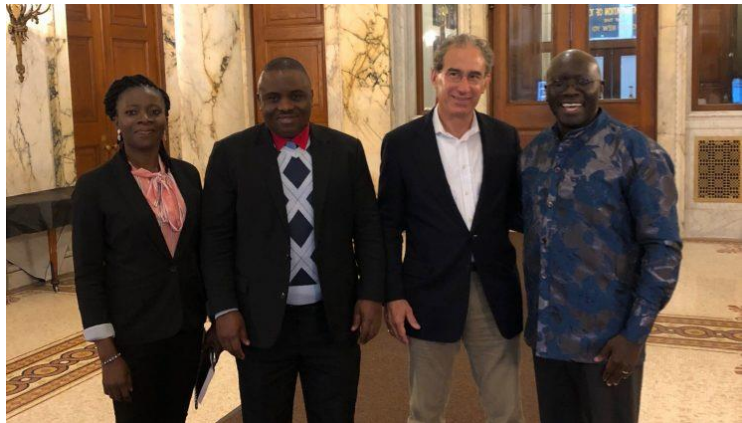
The Vance Center will host the 3rd annual Celebration of International Pro Bono Excellence in late October 2018, recognizing the achievements of six Vance Center Committee law firms. A law firm in Peru will receive special recognition for its pro bono work in Latin America.

The Vance Center has benefited over the last year from the pro bono contributions of 333 lawyers from 97 law firms in 76 countries who co-counseled with Vance Center staff lawyers in 81 matters for 47 social justice organizations worldwide. The annual celebration highlights all of this work, while focusing on a few law firms.

If you would like to attend the celebration, please email kbenzaquen@nycbar.org with your name, email address, and organizational affiliation.

Vance Center Welcomes New Staff

Adaobi Egboka has joined the Vance Center as Africa Program Manager, responsible for managing the African Legal Fellows Program, including the new Power Africa partnership, supporting pro bono representation in human rights, environment, and good governance in African countries, and guiding an initiative to extend the Women in the Profession Program from Latin America to the continent. She replaces Brenda Kombo who left the Vance Center earlier this year. On her second day, she joined Executive Director Alex Papachristou, in meeting Lord Mayor of Kampala Erias Lukwago.



Egboka is a Nigerian-qualified lawyer who for nine years helped lead the Legal Defence and Assistance Project (LEDAP), a pre-eminent Nigerian criminal justice reform organization. She received an LLM from the University of Washington School of Law in 2018, interning at

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the Center for Reproductive Rights, American Civil Liberties Union of Washington, Columbia Legal Services, and North West Justice Project. In 2013-2014, she was a PILnet Fellow in New York City. Egboka has served as the representative of the West Africa focal point of the Coalition for an Effective Africa Court, and the Lagos State coordinator of the National Coalition on Affirmative Action (NCAA) seeking to domesticate CEDAW in Nigeria.

Sam Bookman has joined the Vance Center as Fellow in Pro Bono Practice after completing an LLM at Harvard Law School and receiving the prestigious Kaufman Public Service Venture Fellowship. Bookman is a New Zealand-qualified lawyer who previously practiced as a Judge's Clerk and barrister, working on a range of human rights issues. He is supporting the Vance Center's Human Rights and Access to Justice Program, as well as the Environment and Good Governance Programs.