

WOMEN IN INTERNATIONAL LAW: CHARTING THE PATH



L to R: Louise Firestone, Viviana Krsticevic, Hon. Delissa Ridgway, Caline Mouawad, Meriam Al-Rashid, Mélida Hodgson, Jennifer Thornton

On 14 November 2016, the New York City Bar Association's International Law Committee hosted the fifth edition of its bi-annual event entitled "Women in International Law: Charting the Path". The program is dedicated to celebrating talented women who have made valuable contributions to the field of international law. This year's distinguished speakers included **Louise Firestone** (General Counsel, LVMH Inc.), **Mélida Hodgson** (Partner, Foley Hoag LLP), **Viviana Krsticevic** (Executive Director, Center for Justice and International Law), **Jennifer Thornton** (Senior Policy Advisor & Counsel, Office of the U.S. Trade Representative), and the **Honourable Delissa Ridgway** (Judge, U.S. Court of International Trade). The program was organized by **Ulyana Bardyn** (ICC), **Cynthia Galvez** (Wiley Rein LLP), **Gamila Kassem** (Curtis, Mallet-Prevost, Colt & Mosle LLP), **Suzanne Knijnenburg** (UPenn), and ArbitralWomen member **Lena J. Wong** (Schindler, Cohen & Hochman LLP). The program was co-sponsored by ArbitralWomen, GQUAL, the Vance Center, the ABA Women in Dispute Resolution, in addition to the New York City Bar Association's Foreign and Comparative Law Committee and Women in the Legal Profession Committee. The program was well attended with over 120 registrants, almost half of whom were law students. The evening began with a cocktail reception and ended nearly 45 minutes after the allotted time, as the speakers inspired a captivated and energised audience.

Chair of the International Law Committee **Caline Mouawad** (Partner, King & Spalding LLP) delivered opening remarks, and ArbitralWomen member **Meriam Al-Rashid** (Partner, Dentons LLP) moderated the lively and candid discussion. Each panellist shared her unique path into the field of international law. **Jennifer Thornton**, who became interested in international law during her first year of law school, has developed her career in both the public and private sectors. While **Louise Firestone** and **Mélida Hodgson**, who are both multilingual and come from multicultural backgrounds, had pre-existing interests in international affairs, **Judge Ridgway** described herself as "accidental" international lawyer. For **Viviana Krsticevic**, her legal career was driven by her interest in social justice and desire to change broader policies. Each woman attributed her success to hard work and in part to "serendipity", a term that Judge Ridgway prefers over "luck". (She explained that men do not use the word "luck" to describe their careers.) The panellists agreed that women are good at recognising opportunities and that women need to seize those opportunities when they present themselves. Being interested in one's work and knowing when to transition into new positions were also important ingredients to their successful careers.

Ms. Al-Rashid then delved into the topic of shattering the glass ceiling and achieving parity in the legal profession. The speakers shared personal stories of the challenges they have faced. One speaker stated that she hits the glass ceiling on a weekly basis. Another commented that women who have family responsibilities will not be able to compete with men in private practice, so long as the billable hour is the key metric for contribution. When asked what the most pervasive issue for women in their respective fields is, the speakers agreed that there are too few women at the top. Several speakers shared similar personal experiences of how both women and men in senior positions felt threatened by young women lawyers rising in their careers. They also agreed that professionally established women need to give other women (and anyone of a diverse background) a hand up. For example, one speaker regularly encourages her colleagues to take an associate out to lunch, noting that it is important to forge bonds with younger attorneys early on.

The conversation shifted to the role of women on the bench. Judge Ridgway explained that gender parity among judges is important for at least three reasons. First, it is a matter of fundamental fairness that women should have equal opportunity to serve on the bench. Second, the judiciary is viewed with greater respect if it reflects the community it serves. Third, there is a growing body of data showing that the experiences of women judges affect the outcome of cases. Ms. Krsticevic introduced the GQUAL Campaign, of which ArbitralWomen is a signatory. She described its mission to achieve gender parity in international tribunals and courts by targeting the nomination and selection process and by publishing data.

Ms. Al-Rashid opened the floor to Q&A and concluded the program by asking each panellist to offer one word or phrase of advice. The responses were empowering: “don’t give up”; “hope”; “stand for your rights”; “engage”; and “fearlessness”.

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