



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media contact: Shelli Lissick
shelli@bellmontpartners.com
651-276-6922

Minnesota Leaders Form Global Rights for Women Nonprofit to End Violence Against Women Around the World

Women's rights advocates Cheryl Thomas and Helen Rubenstein to host and participate in four panel discussions at the United Nations' Commission on the Status of Women March 9 – 20

MINNEAPOLIS (MARCH 12, 2015) — Worldwide, it has been estimated that violence against women is as serious a cause of death and incapacity among women aged 15 to 44 years as cancer, and a greater cause of ill-health than traffic accidents and malaria combined, according to World Bank data. And more than 600 million women live in countries where domestic violence is not yet considered a crime. A new Minneapolis-based nonprofit organization, [Global Rights for Women](#), is working to end violence against women around the world drawing on the experiences of Minnesotans who are leaders in advocating, writing, implementing and upholding laws to protect women.

Founded in September by local attorney and women's rights advocate Cheryl Thomas, Global Rights for Women promotes women's human rights internationally with a focus on achieving effective systemic and legal reform on violence against women and girls. In addition to conducting research on leading issues and speaking engagements – such as hosting and participating in panels at this week's United Nations' Commission on the Status of Women in New York – the organization also travels around the world at the invitation of international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to consult on legal reform to protect women.

Global Rights for Women brings together Minnesotans who are experts in various aspects of the legal system as it pertains to laws that protect women, including police officers, judges, prosecutors and lawyers. Then, when women's rights advocates from international NGOs contact the organization for assistance in getting these critical laws passed or implemented in their countries, the organization assembles a team of relevant experts and trainers to travel to the country and consult with those on the front lines of the effort. For example, Hennepin County Judge Kathryn Quaintance, retired Duluth Police Lieutenant Scott Jenkins, and advocate Shelly Carlson will travel with Global Rights for Women founder and executive director Thomas to Lithuania and Serbia next month to consult and train local police forces, prosecutors, judges and service providers on how to apply and enforce the new laws to protect women in every day practice. These legal professionals appreciate the decades of experience and expertise offered by their Minnesota counterparts.

Through these training events, the Global Rights for Women team helps professionals in countries around the world build their capacity to understand the causes and consequences of violence against women – knowledge that has been developed through more than 40 years of research and practice in

Minnesota and nationally. This enables them to better protect victims at the scene of the assault and throughout the justice system process. During these international training trips, police officers can explore together important techniques like identifying the primary aggressor in a violent situation. Prosecutors can better understand why victims often withdraw their claims due to threats, fear or dependence on abusers. All professionals can hear about the lessons learned in Minnesota on the importance of interagency collaboration and communication, a strategy developed in Duluth, Minn., in the 1980s called the Coordinated Community Response. This model is now being duplicated around the world – and referred to as the “Duluth model” – and recently received an international award from the World Futures Council of Hamburg, Germany.

Within just five months, Global Rights for Women has begun working with advocates in Armenia, Morocco, Russia, Lithuania, Serbia, Turkey, Tonga and Romania.

“We work at every level to get laws that protect women passed and implemented,” Thomas says. “Many people locally may not know that Minnesota has a rich history of supporting laws for women’s rights dating back to the 1970s, and a depth and breadth of expertise in the area that is unparalleled. As a leader in women’s rights, Minnesota is often the first place international advocates turn to for this expertise. We are also experiencing a unique moment in international women’s rights, where mainstream awareness of the issues is growing, and we formed Global Rights for Women to maximize the impact we can make now and for years to come.”

Thomas and Rubenstein each have more than 20 years of experience working on women’s rights issues, and as a result, are well-known in the local, national and international communities. That’s enabled the new nonprofit to have a prominent role in the [United Nations’ 59th Commission on the Status of Women](#), the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women, taking place today through March 20 in New York. Global Rights for Women is hosting or participating in four events along with other renowned women’s rights advocates from the White House, United Nations, Amnesty International and other organizations:

- **Today: International and Regional Legal Standards on Violence Against Women** – The panel, presented by Global Rights for Women, focuses on the strengths and weaknesses of the current international legal framework on violence against women and how regional treaties can serve as models for a stronger international response. It will also explore the role strong international law can play in enforcing national laws on violence against women and how the United States’ International Violence Against Women Act (I-VAWA) can contribute to a stronger international response. Thomas will moderate and speak on the panel.
- **Today: Countering Cyber Violence Against Women** – Rubenstein will speak on how the Internet is being used to prey, stalk and harass women everywhere – from Minnesota to internationally – and what actions can be taken to counteract the disturbing trend.
- **Today: Rights to Reality: Strengthening the International Response to Violence Against Women** – Global Rights for Women is hosting the panel which includes Thomas and other high-profile experts, including newly appointed White House Advisor on Violence Against Women Caroline Bettinger-Lopez, who will discuss existing international and regional legal standards on violence against women, their strengths and weaknesses, and proposals for improvement. Thomas will moderate the panel discussion.

- **Wednesday: The Human Right to Live Free From Violence – How Far Has It Become a Reality for Women since 1995?** – Thomas will speak on a panel that explores the progress and remaining challenges in the past 20 years since the landmark 1995 United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing, China and the resulting Declaration and Platform for Action. The event is hosted by the network Women Against Violence Europe (WAVE).

“The fact that we, as a new organization, are able to host panels and attract these high-caliber speakers at this prominent UN event is a testament to the leadership Minnesota has shown in helping to end violence against women on the international stage,” Global Rights for Women program director Rubenstein says.

Minnesotans interested in the organization and helping to end violence against women around the world can visit www.globalrightsforwomen.org to learn more, or donate money or professional services. For example, Minneapolis-based law firm Lindquist & Vennum has donated office space for the organization, and FindLaw recently developed the Global Rights for Women website as a pro bono project. Thomas and Rubenstein also encourage Minnesotans to contact their legislators to support the [International Violence Against Women Act](#), which is a pending bill in Congress that could result in U.S. foreign policy incorporating issues relating to violence against women.

About Global Rights for Women

Founded in September 2014, the mission of Global Rights for Women is to promote women’s human rights internationally with a focus on achieving effective systemic and legal reform on violence against women and girls. Global Rights for Women advocates influence law, policy and practice on women’s human rights and violence against women and girls around the world through speaking, writing, training and other outreach. For more information or to make a donation, visit www.globalrightsforwomen.org.