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Vance Center and Human Rights Watch File Amicus Brief in U.S. Supreme Court Marriage Equality Case



The Vance Center partnered with Human Rights Watch in submitting an amicus curiae brief to the United States Supreme Court in the case *Obergefell v. Hodges* in support of marriage equality for same-sex couples. In this case, the Court is expected to decide whether the 14th Amendment's equal protection clause requires a state to license a marriage between two people of the same sex, and whether a state is required to recognize such a marriage when performed out of state.

The amicus brief invites the Court to look for guidance in the experience of other countries that have legalized same sex marriages, namely the Netherlands, Canada, South Africa, Argentina, and New Zealand. Other human rights organizations in these countries joined in the brief: the Canadian Civil Liberties Association; The National Council for Civil Liberties ("Liberty"), UK; Legal Resources Centre, South Africa; Center for Legal and Social Studies, Argentina; and La Federación Argentina de Lesbianas, Gays, Bisexuales y Trans, Argentina. The law firm of Weil, Gotshal & Manges, including partner Rick Levine and associates Robert Vlasits III, Jay Minga, William Brewer and Jennifer Johnson, served as counsel for the *amici*. The Vance Center is grateful to the law firm of Beretta Godoy in Argentina for its contribution to the brief.

For the full amicus brief please click here [click here](#).

(Photo Cred: Britannica)

Vance Center Convenes Meetings in Panama on Women in the Profession and Pro Bono Practice

The Vance Center's Women in the Profession program held a conference in Panama earlier this month with broad participation by Panamanian lawyers, as well as colleagues from the United States and Latin America. The conference addressed many challenges facing women lawyers in Panama, including pay equity, and in this regard echoed discussions at [previous WIP events](#).

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Vance Center Committee members Antonia Stolper, Carrie Cohen and Marcia Maack, as well as Director of Pro Bono Partnerships Dina Stukanow, helped lead the meeting, along with other members of the Women in the Profession Steering Committee. Keynote speaker H.D. Ana Matilde Gomez of Panama's National Assembly and that country's first and only female attorney general discussed the cultural, structural, physical, and personal challenges that women lawyers face even at the highest levels of an organization.

The WIP event was the first such gathering in Panama and attracted widespread and active interest. The Panamanian law firms Alemán, Cordero, Galindo & Lee, Alfaro, Ferrer & Ramírez, Anzola Robles & Asociados, Arias, Fábrega & Fábrega, Benedetti & Benedetti, Fábrega, Molino & Mulino, Galindo, Arias & López, Icaza, Gonzalez-Ruiz & Alemán, Morgan & Morgan, Patton, Moreno & Asvat, Sucre Arias Reyes, Tapia, Linares & Alfaro, Vallarino, Vallarino & Garcia Maritano helped to organize and host the event. Afterwards members of the Steering Committee discussed recent gender diversity initiatives in their respective countries, as well as priorities for programming in the coming year.



(Photo: H.D. Ana Matilde Gómez Key Note speech)

Alongside the WIP event in Panama, the Vance Center also pursued its pro bono initiatives. As coordinators of the Pro Bono Network of the Americas, the Vance Center and Fundacion Pro Bono Chile organized a pro bono roundtable discussion with the support of Morgan & Morgan and Galindo, Arias & Lopez.

Topics of discussion included the origins of pro bono practice in the Americas, the need for an institutional structure within a law firm to support a pro bono program; and the role that clearinghouses play in identifying, screening, and placing pro bono matters. The roundtable included 7 law firms in Panama as well as lawyers from Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Peru, and the United States, including **Arturo Alessandri**, partner at Alessandri in Chile; **Antonia Stolper**, partner at Shearman & Sterling LLP; **Marcia Maack**, Assistant



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Director of Pro Bono Activities at Mayer Brown LLP; **José Ugaz**, partner at Benites, Forno & Ugaz in Peru; **Claudia Barrero**, partner at Philippi, Prieto Carrizosa & Uría in Colombia; **Carolina Zang**, partner at Estudio Zang Bergel & Viñes in Argentina, and **Matías de Marchena**, partner at Claro & Cia in Chile, who shared with Panamanian law firms their countries' experiences in promoting and institutionalizing pro bono work.



Vance Center Environment Program Client John Knox Presents Good Practices Report to U.N. Human Rights Council



Professor **John Knox**, the UN Independent Expert on Human Rights and the Environment, recently presented his third and final report this year to the Human Rights Council. The report describes more than 100 good practices of governments, international organizations, civil society organizations, corporations and others that “employ human rights obligations relating to the environment in ways that go beyond basic human rights obligations.”

The good practices include procedural obligations to make environmental information public, to facilitate public participation in environmental decision-making, to protect rights of expression and association, and to provide access to legal remedies. Substantive obligations,

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including obligations relating to non-State actors, trans-boundary harm, and those in vulnerable situations, are also included in the report. A searchable, stand-alone website includes one-page summaries of the good practices: <http://environmentalrightsdatabase.org>.

In addition to contributing a good practice to the new report, the Vance Center Environment program previously assisted Professor Knox in the preparation of his March 2014 report by securing and coordinating pro bono counsel with legal expertise in the area of international environmental and human rights law to assist him in researching and writing the report.

The new report can be accessed [here](#).

(Photo Cred: OHCHR)

Vance Center Welcomes Legal Fellows in Environmental and Human Rights Law

Maria Antonia Tigre, an environmental lawyer from Brazil, has joined the Vance Center as an environmental law fellow. Ms. Tigre worked over the past 8 years as an environmental lawyer in law firms, corporations, international organizations and nonprofits. Following five years' practice as an environmental lawyer in Brazil, she interned at the Permanent Mission of Saint Kitts and Nevis to the United Nations on sea level rise issues, and recently finished a fellowship at the World Resources Institute on urban governance in developing world cities. Ms. Tigre has a law degree from PUC-Rio, in Brazil, and is an LL.M. graduate from Pace Law School. At the Vance Center, Ms. Tigre is working in the Environment Program on various projects under the supervision Program Director Susan Kath.



Carolyn Buff (left) and Maria Tigre (right)

Carolyn Buff, a British-trained lawyer, has joined the Vance Center as a legal fellow in the International Human Rights and Access to Justice program while she completes an LLM in U.S.



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law at Fordham Law School. Ms. Buff worked for eight years as a legal officer in the chambers of the international tribunals for Rwanda and Sierra Leone and as a human rights officer and election monitor in South Africa, Haiti, and Bosnia. In Haiti and Bosnia, Ms. Buff focused on judicial reform and anti-corruption initiatives. At the Vance Center, Ms. Buff is assisting with a range of human rights initiatives, particularly relating to Africa, under the supervision of Programs Director Marie-Claude Jean-Baptiste.

Vance Center Congratulates Martin Zapiola

The Vance Center congratulates **Martin Zapiola Guerrico** of Zapiola Guerrico & Asociados as the 2015 recipient of the Pro Bono Leader of the Year award presented by Latin Lawyer. Mr. Zapiola played a key role in the creation of Comision de Trabajo Pro Bono e Interes Publico, the first pro bono clearinghouse in Argentina and otherwise was responsible for introducing and developing pro bono legal practice in Latin America. The Vance Center has collaborated actively with him and his colleagues over many years and is proud that he received this prestigious award.

Late last year, Latin Lawyer published the results of the annual pro bono survey that the Vance Center conducts with that publication. For information about the survey, please click here. To learn more about Martin Zapiola and the Latin Lawyer award, please click here.