



Vance News

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Vance Center Celebrates International Pro Bono Excellence



Juan Mendez speaking at the Celebration

Photo Credit: Karina Benzaquen

The Vance Center recently hosted the first annual Celebration of International Pro Bono Excellence at the New York City Bar Association, to acknowledge the work of six law firms on international pro bono projects this past year.

The celebration recognized two projects from each Vance Center program: human rights and access to justice; environment, and good governance. The projects shared a common feature of significant participation by lawyers in the firms' offices outside of the United States.

Vance Center Co-Chair Sabrena Silver opened the celebration, and Executive Director Alexander Papachristou introduced Professor Juan E. Mendez, UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and Professor of Human Rights Law in Residence at the Washington College of Law as keynote speaker. Mendez described his experience as a client of one of the projects celebrated, as well as a longtime advisor of the Vance Center.

The environment program celebrated, first, the project "Protecting the Environment Throughout Armed Conflict" in which the Paris, London, Milan, Moscow and U.S offices of **Cleary Gottlieb** advised Dr. Marie Jacobsson, Special Rapporteur at the

United Nations International Law Commission. Their review of the jurisprudence of international and regional tribunals concerning environmental protection during and after armed conflict helped Jacobsson prepare a series of reports on opportunities to develop international law. Cleary Counsel Michael Volkovitsch expressed appreciation for the project and the lawyers who worked on it.

The environment program's second project was "Respecting Human Communities in Protected Areas", in which the Madrid office of **Allen & Overy** advised Asociación Bufete Jurídico de Derechos Humanos (BDH), a Guatemalan nonprofit legal organization that promotes human rights and the rule of law. The firm's memorandum in Spanish and English guided BDH in crucial negotiations with the Guatemalan government to accommodate communities living in environmentally protected areas. Vance Center Committee member and Allen & Overy partner David Flechner read remarks by his colleagues who worked on the project and added his own appreciation.



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The human rights and access to justice program recognized **White & Case** for the project on “Securing Rights for Syrian Refugee Women” on behalf of MADRE, an international women’s rights organization. Lawyers in the firm’s Dubai and Paris offices prepared a brochure in English and Arabic, in the accessible form of a comic strip, to educate Syrian women refugees on the importance of birth and marriage registration and the procedures to obtain locally available resources, based on their registrations. MADRE executive director Yifat Susskind explained that the brochure helped refugee families obtain essential goods and services using identity cards obtained as a result of registering births and marriage. She described that judges in Iraq had requested similar brochures and posters for courthouses, which the firm also provided.



Photo Credit: Karina Benzaquen

The human rights and access to justice program also celebrated the project “Defining Coercion and Consent in the Context of Sex”, which **Morrison & Foerster** lawyers in the Tokyo office undertook on behalf of Amnesty International. Research on international criminal law and international human rights law standards regarding coercion and consent in the context of sex, and other legal and ethical standards regarding consent helped Amnesty International in its ongoing human rights work in this area. Morrison & Foerster Pro Bono Counsel Jennifer Brown spoke in appreciation of the project on behalf of her colleagues.

The good governance program acknowledged the project “Assessing Solitary confinement Regulations” which **Weil** conducted on behalf of Professor Mendez for his mandate as U.N. Special Rapporteur on Torture. The firm drafted a questionnaire on the regulation of solitary confinement, completed by lawyers in many Weil offices, along with other law firms, in a total of 26 countries covering 35 jurisdictions. Former Vance Center Committee member and Weil partner Eric Ordway who led the project expressed gratitude for working with Mendez on it.

The good governance program then celebrated “Requiring Financial Disclosure for Visas”, in which lawyers in many **Linklaters** offices and affiliated firms conducted a survey of 23 jurisdictions regarding the requirements of financial disclosure by visa applicants. The project assisted Transparency International’s Secretariat to consider policy refinements in its effort to hold corrupt actors accountable by restricting their travel. Linklaters senior associate Caitlin Potratz spoke on behalf of herself and many colleagues in appreciation of the project and presented a short video.

Please see the full [program here](#).

If you want to see more pictures [click here](#)



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Vance Center Assesses Programs in Kenya



Africa Program Manager
(middle) with Isaac Okero
(President) and Mercy Wambua
(Secretary/CEO) at the Law
Society of Kenya
*Photo Credit: Law Society of
Kenya*

Vance Center Africa Program Manager Brenda Kombo traveled to Nairobi, Kenya recently to assess opportunities to expand programs there. Kombo recently joined the Vance Center to strengthen overall activities in Sub-Saharan Africa. Kombo timed her visit to attend the Pan African Lawyers Union (PALU) annual conference, a gathering of about 30 bar leaders and law practitioners from around the continent. The PALU conference afforded the opportunity to learn about current legal issues and network with a diverse group of legal practitioners. The keynote speaker at the opening session was the President of the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights Sylvain Oré. Law Society of Kenya President Isaac Okero, Strathmore Law School Dean Luis Franceschi, and leaders of various law societies also made opening remarks. Conference sessions covered a broad range of topics, including: business and human rights; lawyers' responsibilities in fighting corruption; using the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court at the national level; opportunities to engage with regional mechanisms (i.e. African Peace & Security Architecture and African Governance Architecture); litigating with the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa; defending human rights defenders; compliance standards in drafting oil and gas contracts; among others.



Africa Program Manager with
litigation team at Katiba Institute



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During her time in Nairobi, Kombo also met with leading Kenyan law firms, the director of the Judiciary Training Institute, Justice Professor Otieno-Odek, as well as representatives of donor organizations and civil society organizations. The law firms included Bowmans (formerly Coulson Harney)—the home of current Vance Center African Legal Fellow Rosemary Maina—and Walker Kontos. These meetings, coupled with those held with civil society organizations, helped to introduce the various organizations to the Vance Center's Africa Program, get a sense of the pro bono practice landscape in Kenya, and explore possible avenues for collaboration.

Photo Credit: Katiba Institute

In the recent years, the Vance Center has worked with Kenyan civil society organizations including Kenya Human Rights Commission and Federation of Women Lawyers – Kenya on human rights and access to justice projects. Following the 2007-2008 post-election violence, the Vance Center also advised former United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan in his mediation efforts.

Vance Center Hosts Spanish Law Firm Delegation

In an effort to promote pro bono practice in Spain, the Vance Center's Senior Fellow in Pro Bono Practice Leire Larracoechea and Vance Center Committee Founding Chair and Simpson Thacher & Bartlett partner Todd Crider, organized a visit by partners and counsels of leading law firms in Spain and the Madrid bar association to various New York law firms and pro bono and other legal organizations to assess pro bono practice here. The firms were Cuatrecasas, Clifford Chance, Garrigues, Gómez- Acebo & Pombo, and Pérez-Llorca. The Spanish delegation, together with Larracoechea, a Spanish lawyer herself, and other Vance Center staff, had the opportunity over two days to visit main sites of pro bono activity in New York, as well as to confer with the leadership of pro bono practice worldwide. These included: the pro bono counsels



Meeting at the New York City Bar Association

Photo Credit: Karina Benzaquen

and coordinators, as well as partners and associates, of the international firms Simpson Thacher & Bartlett, Davis Polk, Debevoise & Plimpton and White & Case; New York City Bar Association president John S. Kiernan, and Vance Center Committee Co-Chairs Elchi Nowrojee and Sabrena Silver, as well as representatives of the City Bar Justice Center and New York Lawyers for the Public Interest. The meetings addressed the importance of adapting pro bono work to the legal

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market and socio-cultural circumstances of each jurisdiction, the social impact of pro bono work, and the advantages of using a clearinghouse.

The trip also included meetings with pro bono leaders from Latin America: Paula Samper, founder of the ProBono Colombia Foundation and partner at Gómez-Pinzón Zuleta Abogados, and Pablo Guerrero, president and founder of the Pro Bono Chile Foundation and partner at Barros & Errázuriz Abogados. They described to the Spanish delegation the key role that clearinghouses have played in the development and institutionalization of pro bono work in their respective countries and throughout Latin America.

The visit concluded with a presentation on the current situation of pro bono work in Europe and Spain, as well as informal discussions on the challenges to pro bono work in Spain and possible solutions, led by Larracoechea and Crider.

The Spanish lawyers expressed great appreciation for the opportunity to broaden their understanding and share ideas on further steps in the formalization and promotion of pro bono practice in Spain. There was a consensus that, based on the experiences in New York and Latin America, pro bono work in Spain would benefit significantly from the collaboration among the main law firms through a clearinghouse. The Vance Center agreed to take an active coordinating role to help advance this project.

Vance Center Presents at the United Nations Side Event on Solitary Confinement



Vance Center Executive Director Alexander Papachristou participated on a panel at a United Nations General Assembly “side event” on solitary confinement, led by U.N. Special Rapporteur Juan E. Mendez. The event served to launch the report “Seeing into Solitary: A Review of Solitary Confinement Practices Around the World”, a Vance Center project for Mendez, prepared by the international law firm Weil.

Mendez issued a landmark report in 2011 determining that solitary confinement constitutes torture, except in strictly limited circumstances. To follow up on that report, he asked the Vance Center to survey solitary confinement practices in 35 jurisdictions in 26 countries around the world. Weil served as coordinating pro bono counsel, drafting the survey, calling on many of its international offices to participate alongside lawyers recruited by the Vance Center, and then synthesizing the survey responses into the report.

The report determined that prison authorities in the countries surveyed make use of solitary confinement for several reasons, including administrative, as well as disciplinary, and while



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regulations are detailed, they fail to provide appropriate limitations on solitary confinement. In some instances, the regulations are not written or consistently applied, so abuses are difficult to identify.

The U.N. event, sponsored by the missions of Switzerland and Argentina, featured a range of perspectives on solitary confinement. Besides Mendez, speakers included Jamil Dakwar, Human Rights Program Director of the American Civil Liberties Union, Colorado Department of Corrections Executive Director Rick Raemisch, University of Pittsburgh School of Law Professor Jules Lobel, US Prisons Policy and Program Director Rev. Laura Markle Downton, and Weil partner Eric Ordway, who led the project for the firm.

Papachristou joined Ordway in presenting the methodology of the report, explaining that they sought private lawyers to complete the surveys, rather than NGO practitioners who might have been more familiar with the issues, to enhance the report's appearance of objectivity. He described that some of the survey respondents had to visit prisons in their countries to learn what the regulations are, since they are not published officially. Others, he said, expressed concern that their participation in the survey could cause business difficulties in light of political conditions in their countries.

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Vance Center Welcomes 2016-2017 African Legal Fellows

Three African lawyers selected to participate in the newly expanded Vance Center African Legal Fellows program arrived in New York to begin work at their respective firms. Joba Akinola, a Nigerian lawyer from Olaniwun Ajayi joined Sullivan & Cromwell, Rosemary Maina, a Kenyan lawyer from Bowmans (formerly Coulson Harney) started at Debevoise & Plimpton, and Jabulile Ndweni, a South African lawyer from Werksmans Attorneys began at Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton.

The Vance Center since 2002 has promoted diversity in the legal profession through its South African Legal Fellows Program. The program invited South African lawyers from historically-disadvantaged backgrounds to spend a year working in leading New York law firms or corporate legal departments. Forty-five lawyers completed the program, then nearly all returned to South Africa where they rejoined their firms or went on to senior roles in corporate legal departments.

This year, the Vance Center expanded the reach of the program, inviting lawyers from Kenya and Nigeria to participate in the renamed African Legal Fellows program. To select the fellows, the South African program alumni nominated candidates from their country, and the Vance Center solicited nominations from leading law firms in Kenya and Nigeria. The firms agreed that the fellows, once back at the firms, will help to strengthen pro bono practice there, including through collaboration with the Vance Center. During their fellowships, Akinola, Maina, and Ndweni will work as foreign or international associates (within the established programs of their firms) and receive from their firms' pro bono programs and the Vance Center exposure to strong cultures of pro bono practice. Plans are underway to consider further expanding the geographical scope of the program next year.



The New York City Bar Association Executive Director Bret Parker, Vance Center Africa Program Manager Brenda Kombo, the New York City Bar Association President John Kiernan and the '16-'17 Africa Legal Fellows Joba Akinola, Jabulile Ndweni and Rosemary Maina

Photo Credit: Jadesola Falode