

Vance News

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Vance Center Participates in Transparency International Events in Panama



Mr. Papachristou participating in the panel at the Annual Membership Meeting in Panama

Photo Credit: Transparency International

Vance Center Executive Director Alexander Papachristou attended client Transparency International's Annual Membership Meeting and International Anti-Corruption Conference in Panama City, Panama. These events highlighted TI's global leadership in combating corruption and its current 2020 Strategy focusing on grand corruption.

The Annual Membership Meeting brought together representatives of most of TI's more than 100 national chapters to consider the state of the TI Movement, enact policy reforms, and elect board and other leaders. Papachristou

participated in a panel on grand corruption, describing TI's new legal standard. The Vance Center and a partner law firm worked with TI experts over two years to develop the standard, which TI now is promulgating with help from the Vance Center.

The International Anti-Corruption Conference, a bi-annual event, gathered a wide range of more than 1,600 participants, including government officials, development bankers, journalists, legal and business practitioners, and civil society representatives. Focusing on the themes of justice, equity, security, and trust, it included presentation of TI's International Anti-Corruption Award to the Brazilian public prosecutors pursuing the widespread corruption investigation called "Car Wash" and presentation of the final report of the Panamanian government commission established to consider reforms in the aftermath of the Panama Papers disclosures. The commission came under controversy when two members quit and subsequently released their own report.

Vance Center and Latin Lawyer Release 2016 Pro Bono Survey



Latin Lawyer Logo

Photo Credit: Latin Lawyer

The Vance Center has teamed up with Latin Lawyer for the fifth year in a row to conduct an annual survey of pro bono practice in Latin America. Over 100 law firms from more than 20 countries participated in this year's survey, which the Vance Center and Latin Lawyer use to measure the character and quantity of pro bono work that Latin American law



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firms are doing, and track the progress of the institutionalization of pro bono practice on a national and regional level.

The results of the 2016 survey offer grounds for optimism. A significant number of firms have started to implement different institutional measures to meet the 20 pro bono hours per year target set forth by the Pro Bono Declaration for the Americas. For instance, the number of firms that consider pro bono as billable hours for associates increased to 62%. Perhaps because of this, the number of firms with 50% or more of their associates reaching or surpassing the 20 hours benchmark also grew in 2015. There has also been an uptick in the firms that have pro bono policies and of the firms with a pro bono committee (64%). Furthermore, more firms reported a year-on-year increase in total pro bono hours than in the previous year.

Other developments this year also indicate progress. The institutionalization of the Pro Bono Network of the Americas was completed, signaling cohesion and commitment to regional pro bono development and collaboration. The growing pro bono infrastructure in mostly all Latin American countries also seems promising. As Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP partner and Vance Center executive subcommittee member Todd Crider explained to Latin Lawyer “It’s encouraging to see all the clearing houses created over the last 16 years (...). With that you create a permanent infrastructure to facilitate pro bono work. It then becomes a question of growing deeper roots and finding ways to deliver appropriate work for law firms to engage with, so lawyers feel their time has been effective. When you achieve that, the roots tend to grow deeper.”

Indeed, now that the infrastructure is in place, the next stage is to help firms make pro bono work part of their daily lives. The findings of the joint survey show that law firms are focusing their efforts on implementing policies, working on high-impact, complex cases, and scaling up their resources and those of their NGO clients. “Pro bono clients may reach for the moon in requesting pro bono legal help,” explained Linklaters partner and Vance Center Committee Co-Chair Sabrena Silver to Latin Lawyer. “One of our jobs as counsel is to flesh out the scope of work requested, work with the client to prioritize workstreams and develop a scope of engagement to maximise the impact of the lawyers’ work. Communication and planning can help ensure that the work is manageable for the lawyers and the work product is useful for the clients.”

Nevertheless, in spite of areas of progress, the survey also indicates that, to have sustained growth in the quality and quantity of pro bono work, greater involvement of partners and more hours worked per lawyer need to take place within the law firms. In any case, as Davis Polk & Wardwell LLP partner and Vance Center committee member Maurice Blanco explained “This is very much a marathon not a sprint. One can’t expect there to be a radical change overnight or even from one year to the next. This will need a much longer time horizon in same way as it did in the US”.

The Vance Center and Latin Lawyer are grateful to the Comisión de Trabajo Pro Bono in Argentina, Brazil’s Instituto Pro Bono, the Fundación Pro Bono in Chile, the Fundación Pro Bono Colombia, the Costa Rican Comisión Pro Bono, the Dominican Republic’s Fundación Pro Bono, Fundación Barra Mexicana and Appleseed in Mexico, CIDSEP in Paraguay, the Alianza Pro Bono in Peru and ProVene in Venezuela, for their invaluable support of the survey. Also due thanks are JP Morgan, BTG Pactual and Credit Suisse for their generous endorsement of the survey.



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Vance Center Holds Panel Discussion With African Legal Fellows at Cleary Gottlieb

Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton recently hosted a Vance Center panel discussion on the theme “The Legal Landscape and Pro Bono Practice in Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa.” The panel featured the Vance Center’s African Legal Fellows: Jabulile Ndweni, a South African lawyer from Werksmans Attorneys placed at Cleary Gottlieb; Joba Akinola, a Nigerian lawyer from Olaniwun Ajayi working at Sullivan & Cromwell; and Rosemary Maina, a Kenyan lawyer from Bowmans (Coulson Harney) who is at Debevoise & Plimpton. About 100 attendees filled the room in Cleary’s New York office, and participants at its Washington, D.C. office joined via teleconference.

In her opening remarks, Cleary partner Francesca Odell noted the role that Senior Counsel Evan Davis played in founding the Vance Center and the Fellowship program. Odell also emphasized Cleary’s commitment to the program, indicating that the firm has hosted 8 Fellows in the last 14 years. Vance Center Executive Director Alex Papachristou then briefly introduced the organization. Subsequently, the Fellows took the stage, along with the panel moderator, Vance Center Co-Chair Elchi Nowrojee, and Africa Program Manager Brenda Kombo.

The Fellows spoke about their practices back home, their law firms, and their experiences in New York. Maina described her surprise at the similarity in practice between Kenya and the United States. In her view, a U.S. lawyer who travels to Nairobi would face little difficulty understanding corporate work in Kenya. “It’s just the terminology that is different,” she said. Ndweni shared this perspective. Reflecting on diversity within the profession, the Fellows noted the dearth of female partners.

The Fellows also noted the varied pro bono landscapes in their countries. While Ndweni spoke about the requirement in South Africa that lawyers complete pro bono hours, Akinola and Maina said that Kenya and Nigeria lacked such requirement, and pro bono engagement varies from firm to firm. All of the Fellows expressed admiration for the institutionalization of pro bono practice at their U.S. firms.

Evan Davis closed the discussion with a powerful comment about lawyers’ ethical obligation to promote access to justice through pro bono practice. Describing the role that the New York City Bar Association played in advocating for divestment from South Africa during apartheid, Davis asked the Fellows to take back with them the message that the Bar continues to stand in solidarity with them in promoting justice.



Vance Center African Legal Fellows with Elchi Nowrojee, Vance Center Co-Chair, and Brenda Kombo, Africa Program Manager at the Vance Center

Photo Credit: Karina Benzaquen



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Vance Center Joins Global Water Summit at Columbia University

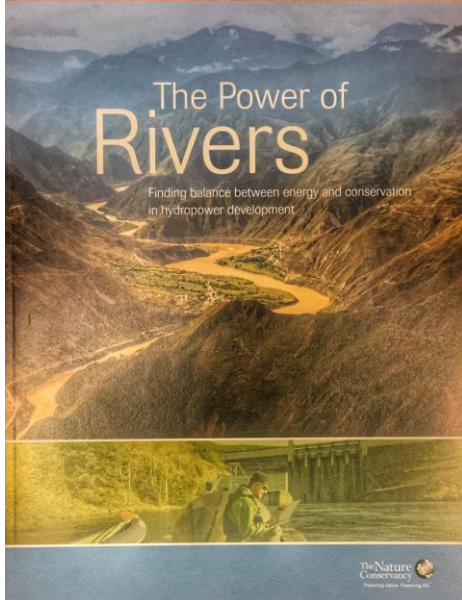


Photo Credit: Maria Tigre

Vance Center Environment Program Director Susan Kath and Program Attorney Maria Antonia Tigre attended the Global Water Summit 2016, a two-day conference sponsored by Vance Center client The Nature Conservancy (TNC) at Columbia University. The conference focused on how to achieve sustainability in the use of water resources and ensure water security across the globe.

TNC works on the ground across the world to preserve and restore river connectivity, create financially sustainable water conservation programs, and develop investment vehicles that improve the allocation of water uses in scarce water systems. Through expert panels, case studies, and workshops, participants at the conference helped TNC identify how to accelerate these efforts and better protect water resources globally. In particular, discussion centered on renewable energy and its emergence as a key to a low-carbon future, allocation of water use through water funds to protect against the limits of affordable supplies, and the critical need to recognize watersheds as water infrastructure eligible for financing in order to achieve food and water security.

The Vance Center has been working for almost five years to support TNC in its efforts to achieve sustainability in the use of water resources and to protect communities and nature in the face of scarce water supplies. The Environment Program has provided pro bono legal assistance to the organization as it has evaluated the legal requirements to set up water funds in Peru, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic, as well as undertaking ongoing projects in Jamaica and Colombia. Water funds are an innovative way to pay for clean freshwater while providing biodiversity-related services. Through investments from large water users, such as utility companies, suppliers, and bottlers, long-term secure funding for conservation projects is guaranteed. With these investments, the water funds promote sustainability by creating and strengthening protected areas, helping neighboring landowners switch to conservation-friendly practices, paying for conservation easements, and financing other important environmental initiatives for local communities.

The Vance Center is providing pro bono assistance to TNC in connection with the new energy reform law in Mexico, which will guide TNC in its future work in renewable energy in the country. With the passage of this new law, TNC is evaluating how it can promote its sustainable energy strategy with a focus on solutions that balance energy development with ecosystem services provided by rivers. The project involves comprehensive legal research on the regulatory framework established by the law, and how it will impact the planning, development, construction, and operation of hydropower and renewable energy projects in Mexico.



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Vance Center Issues Annual Appeal for Financial Support

Access full letter [here](#).

Dear Friend,

The world's challenges seem tougher and closer than ever. Doubt clouds society's fundamental commitment to human rights and justice under law in so many places, including right here. We at the Vance Center **are determined to resist the growing threats to the principles of equality, freedom, and openness**. We will continue to pursue international consensus on combating climate change, resolving conflict and restoring justice through agreement, and maintaining everyone's unrestricted access to information, expression, choice, and association. The very way that the Vance Center works **manifests such international consensus**. Over the course of the year, we collaborated with more than **525 lawyers** from **260 law firms** in **67 countries**. This active network of professional engagement across borders to advance social justice defies the inward-looking and other-excluding trend of our times. That all of it happens on an entirely pro bono basis animates our work with genuine moral commitment.

What have we accomplished this past year and what will we continue to pursue?

- We advised Colombian civil society on the permissible **parameters of political amnesty in support of the historic peace agreement**, ending decades of conflict that killed and displaced millions; and we now are preparing civil society groups to help indigenous and Afro-descendant women and others to obtain justice in the transitional justice process;
- We guided organizations **assisting smaller, poorer nations highly vulnerable to climate change** to participate in negotiations of the Paris accord, driving limits on CO2 emissions and promising hope to the world; and we now are developing legal strategies to confront political threats to this accord;
- We helped to develop and launch a **global initiative to combat grand corruption** -- leaders robbing and impoverishing their people -- through promulgation of a new criminal standard focused on human rights harm, and joined in investigations of specific cases in Panama, the Dominican Republic, and Ukraine; and we now are **supporting investigative journalists working to uncover the global system** facilitating and protecting such grand corruption.

The many organizations which we have helped include **The Nature Conservancy, Amnesty International, Transparency International, Human Rights Watch, the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists**, and many others.

In addition to these and many more pro bono representations, we recently launched **the Lawyers Council for Civil and Economic Rights in the Americas**, a group of leading legal practitioners from 14 countries who are identifying issues and strategies for collective engagement in defense of fundamental rights. In addition, there is a new organizational structure for the **Women in the**



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Profession program, providing women lawyers in Latin America with ways to strengthen their professional roles and engage in pro bono projects on behalf of vulnerable women.

We also expanded our **Africa program**, pursuing the success that we have had in Latin America. A new Africa program manager so far has started collaboration in Kenya, Tanzania, and the African human rights system, and we have included lawyers from Kenya and Nigeria in the program that for more than a dozen years has brought lawyers of color from South Africa to work for a year in New York City law firms and corporate legal departments.

All of this work happens on an **annual budget of less than \$1 million** (while producing legal services worth well over \$6 million). A significant part of our funding comes from generous individuals who recognize the social value and economy of our work. We ask that you **join in this essential support, especially at this critical time.** We thank you for your help.

Sincerely,
Alexander Papachristou
Executive Director

P.S. Please feel free to contact me with any questions at apapachristou@nycbar.org and also visit our website at www.vancecenter.org