

ANNUAL REPORT 2020



CYRUS R. VANCE CENTER
FOR INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE

NEW YORK
CITY BAR

H I G H L I G H T S O F 2 0 2 0



Alexander
Papachristou
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

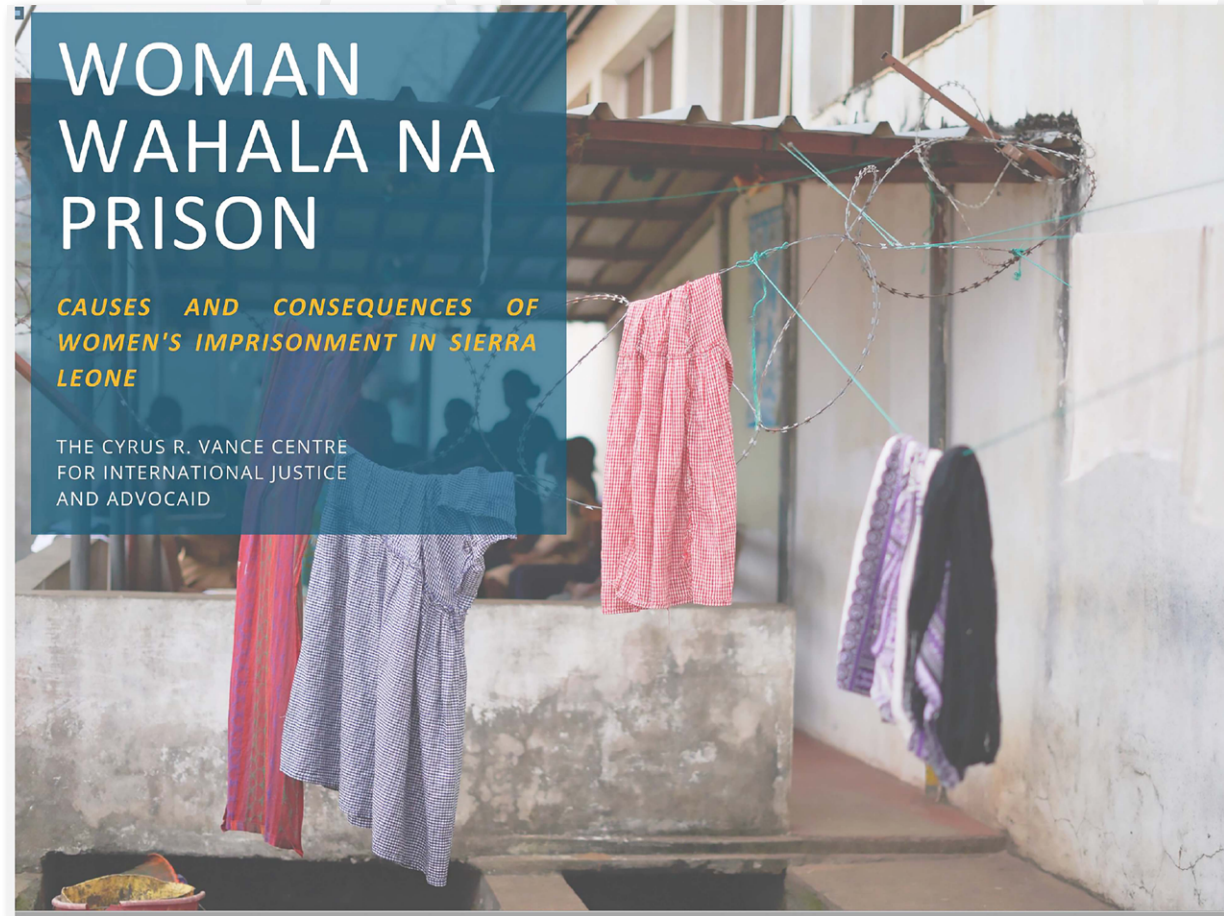
The pandemic year challenged the Vance Center like so many others, and we rose to it, pursuing new partnerships and programming, welcoming new staff and Committee members, and maintaining focus and morale, all virtually.

- We launched **Lawyers for Reporters**, providing pro bono help to local U.S. journalism in collaboration with the Press Freedom Defense Fund, selected the first participants in **TotalLaw Prep**, bringing Afro-descendent and Indigenous lawyers from Latin America to pursue LLMs in the U.S., initiated the **Access to Justice Practicum**, sponsoring public interest lawyers to work at our Latin American clearinghouse partners, and began an **Africa pro bono promotion** program.
- The **African Legal Fellows Program** included three Power Africa Legal Fellows and a South African Fellow. We held workshops for judges in Mexico and Kenya, as well as government lawyers from Nigeria, Kenya, and Ethiopia.
- Our **Women in Prison** project released its pilot report on incarceration of women in Sierra Leone, and the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment released a **report to the UN General Assembly** supported significantly by our Environment Program.
- Our reporting also focused on the immediate **effects of the COVID-19 pandemic** on corruption in government procurement in Latin America, human rights protection in 9 African countries, the operation of the judiciaries in Latin America and the Caribbean, and state and NGO protection against domestic violence in Latin America.
- **Keep Families Together** expanded pro bono representation of families separated by U.S. immigration policy with new partners and new countries of origin. **Uruguay** joined the Pro Bono Network of the Americas, which held frequent virtual events to maintain solidarity.
- We gave special recognition to Committee member Julissa Reynoso who left to join the Biden Administration. The Committee continued 2020-25 strategic planning, established new sub-committees, and welcomed new members Lisa Vicens, Kelly Librera, Maria-Leticia Ossa Daza, Melissa Raciti, Dorina Yessios, Richard Fogarty, Sabrena Silver and Sergio Urias.
- We gratefully received funding from the **Chubb Rule of Law Fund**, the **National Endowment for Democracy**, **UNESCO**, the **Democracy Fund**, the **Novo Foundation**, and the **Press Freedom Defense Fund**. Our law firm partners notably increased their pro bono support, nearly doubling the hours that they contributed to our client representation.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND ACCESS TO JUSTICE

THE HUMAN RIGHTS AND ACCESS TO JUSTICE PROGRAM gained a new staff attorney and continued its work to promote and protect the human rights of the most vulnerable through advocacy and engagement with human rights institutions and courts in Latin America and Africa. In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, we sought to address the new human rights challenges that it brought, including its disproportionate impact on vulnerable groups and the Global South. Our commitment to pursue accountability for human rights abuses continued unabated as we assisted groups from Brazil, the Gambia, India, and Eastern Europe, among others, in bringing human rights violators to justice.

- The Human Rights Program and Advocaid of Sierra Leone published a groundbreaking report [Woman Wahala Na Prison – Causes and Consequences of Women’s Imprisonment in Sierra Leone](#) and held workshops with police and prison officers in Sierra Leone on the report’s findings. Part of the Vance Center’s *Women in Prison* project, the report resulted from a year-long participatory pilot study of the causes and consequences of women’s imprisonment in Sierra Leone. It contributed to advocacy that led to the abolition of the death penalty in Sierra Leone in 2021.



The Human Rights Program and the Women in Prison Network submitted open letters to the [African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights](#) and [The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights](#) drawing attention to their joint [research](#) identifying the severe risks that women in detention face to their health, safety, and basic human rights as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, calling on these human rights institutions to urge member states to ensure that all Covid-19 responses relating to the prison population adequately consider the special needs and unique risks of women deprived of liberty, and laying out key recommendations.

- Together with our partner in Venezuela, we secured a victory at the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in favor of victims, represented since 2015 by the Vance Center's Human Rights Program and [White & Case](#), in *Mota Abarullo and others v. Venezuela*, and assisted two of the family members at a [virtual meeting](#) with the Court where they told the judges about how the deaths of their loved ones in a fire at a detention center and the lack of accountability affected them and their families.
- The initiative of the Vance Center's Human Rights Program to encourage the New York City Bar Association to develop a policy on Business and Human Rights culminated in it becoming the first local bar association in the United States to adopt a BHR [policy statement](#), endorsing the [UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#) and the [OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises](#).



THE ENVIRONMENT PROGRAM

The [Environment Program](#) continued its work on the intersection of environmental law and human rights, supporting efforts in the different arenas of advocacy, litigation and the United Nations system.

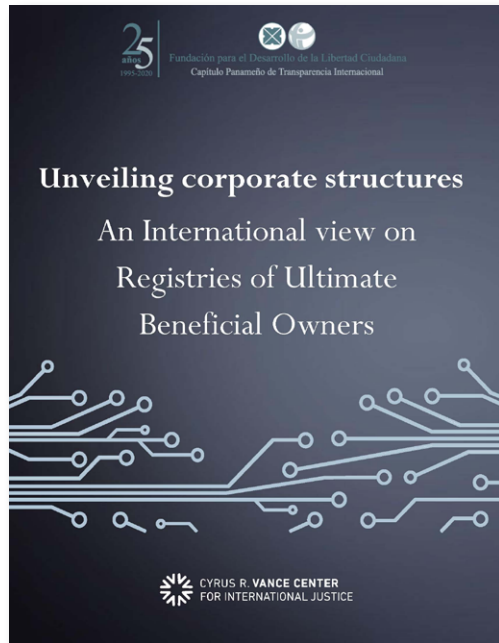
- The program completed a major research project for [United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment David Boyd](#), covering 193 UN Member States. Boyd relied on the research in his [report to the UN Human Rights Council](#), including the landmark finding that 80% of UN Member States have recognized a human right to a healthy

environment in constitutions, statutes and/or treaties. Dr. Boyd's finding bolsters the campaign for a formal UN instrument recognizing the right at international law. [Clifford Chance](#) conducted most of the underlying research, making it that firm's largest-ever pro bono project. [White & Case](#) and many other law firms also made significant contributions to the research.

- The program, together with client [International Rivers](#) and the [Earth Law Center](#), authored a [comprehensive report on the Rights of Nature](#) around the world. Launched at an online event, featuring several prominent experts, the report drew on developments in 14 different jurisdictions in five continents and tracked the growing trend of courts, legislatures, and agencies recognizing the legal personality of rivers and other natural phenomena. The report benefited local coalitions across the globe pursuing the Rights of Nature, especially on behalf of threatened rivers.
- The program assisted client [The Nature Conservancy](#) with its [Resilient Islands initiative](#) to advance climate adaptation in the Dominican Republic, Grenada, and Jamaica. Law firms [Dentons \(Barbados\)](#) and [Headrick](#) prepared country reports evaluating how the legal and institutional frameworks for ecosystem-based adaptation, which include domestic laws regarding forests and biodiversity, humanitarian/disaster risk, air, land, water, health, infrastructure, and energy, can be used to empower the countries against the climate crisis.

GOOD GOVERNANCE PROGRAM

The [Good Governance Program](#) added a staff attorney and, with new funding, launched a training program and broadened representation of journalists and transparency advocates.



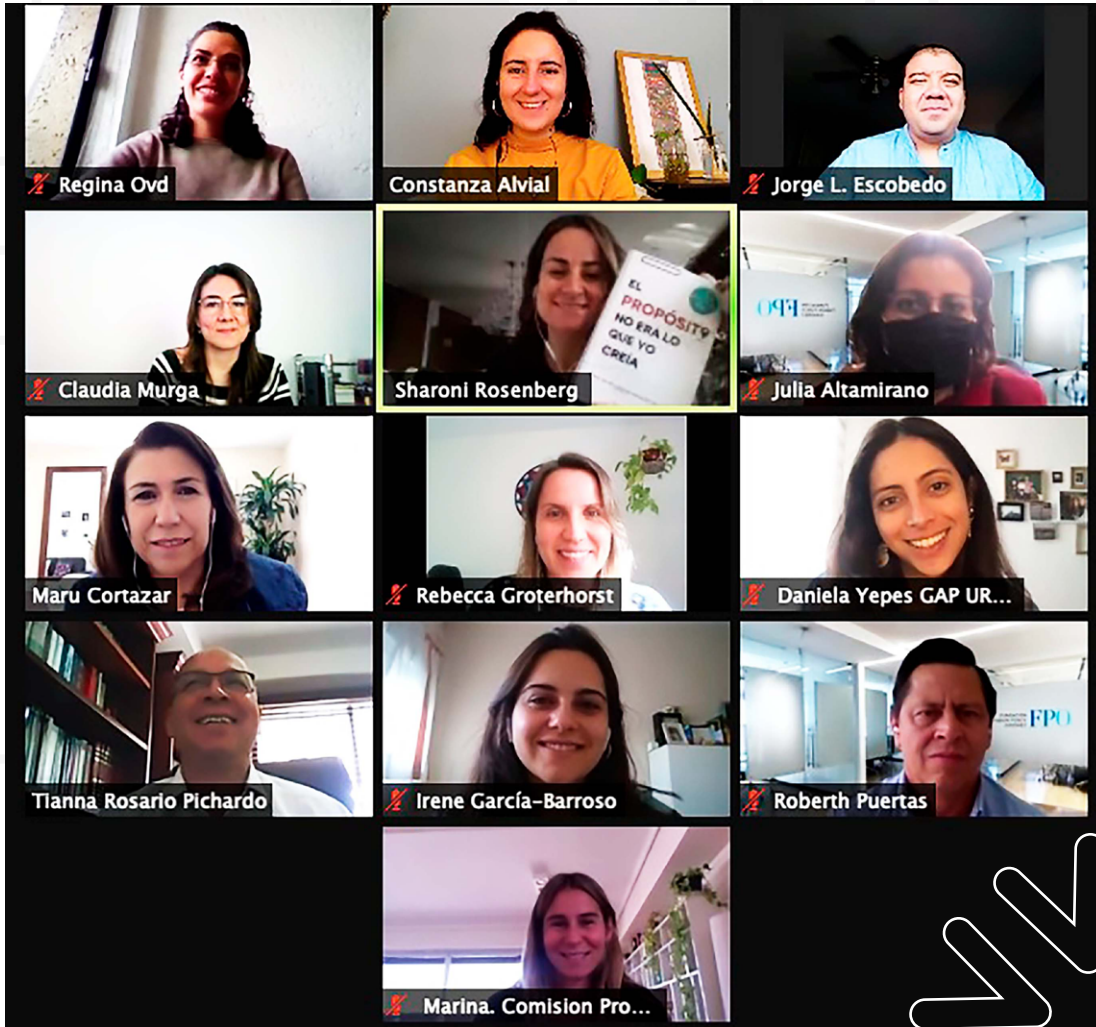
- The Vance Center and Milbank produced for the Panamanian Foundation for the Development of Citizen Freedom, the National Chapter of Transparency International, the report [“Unveiling Corporate Structures: An International View on Registries of Ultimate Beneficial Owners”](#). The report reviewed the legislation and regulations for registries of ultimate beneficial owners of companies in Panama, Colombia, Costa Rica, Spain, the United Kingdom, the Cayman Islands and the State of Delaware in the United States. [See more here.](#)
- With support from the Chubb Rule of Law Fund, the Vance Center organized the virtual conference [“Judicial Independence and Gender Equality in the Judiciary: an International Perspective”](#), in partnership with the International Association of Women Judges, Centro Mexicano Pro Bono, and Abogadas MX. Participants from Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America focused on the findings of a multi-jurisdictional survey and research project comparing issues of judicial independence and gender equality in the judiciaries of 7 countries. [See more here.](#)



- [A Culture of Safety Alliance](#) and the [Frontline Freelance Register](#) asked the Vance Center and Sullivan & Cromwell to prepare a model contract for freelance journalists working in conflict conditions, and Baker & McKenzie prepared an Arabic translation. Executive Director Alexander Papachristou presented the model contract in a [podcast](#) for the World

News Publishing Focus of the [World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers](#), as well as at [the Arab Reporters of Investigative Journalism](#) annual conference. The Vance Center and Covington & Burling also assisted ACOS Alliance to develop an insurance program for freelancers.

PRO BONO PRACTICE



- In lieu of in-person meetings during the pandemic, the Vance Center together with other members of the [Pro Bono Network of the Americas](#) organized a six-month series of engagements featuring pro bono clearinghouses in the region. Structured in weekly and country-specific installments, the series highlighted each Network member's institutional responses to the pandemic. As a complement to this clearinghouse-focused engagement, and with support from the [United States Agency for International Development](#), the Network and Fundación Pro Bono Colombia organized a conference on pro bono practice in October 2020. In addition, the Network organized a set of thematic panels throughout 2020 on domestic violence, statelessness, and the regional migration crisis in Latin America, with participation by officials from the [United Nations](#) and the [Organization of American States](#).
- The Network welcomed newly-registered Fundación Pro Bono Uruguay, incubated by the [University of Montevideo](#). The Network also pursued efforts to develop new clearinghouses in Guatemala and Bolivia.
- In its 13th year, the annual Vance Center-Latin Lawyer Pro Bono Survey saw [record-breaking engagement](#) from the corporate legal sector in Latin America, with a record of more than 160 law firms in the region participating. Survey results indicate that pro bono institutionalization at law firms and corporations is at an all-time high: 85% of survey respondents are members of their local pro bono clearinghouse and 90% have dedicated pro bono coordinators.



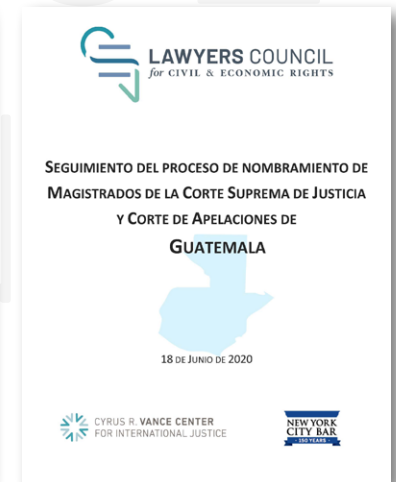
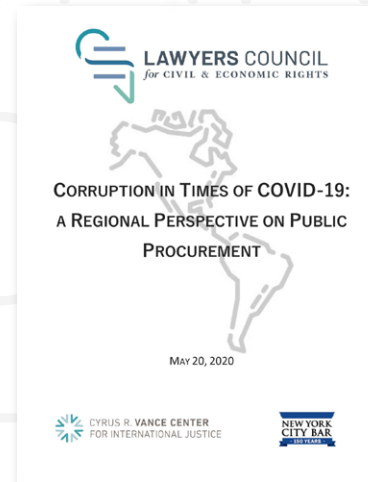
KEEP FAMILIES TOGETHER

- The only international pro bono co-counseling effort of its kind, [Keep Families Together](#) continued to expand in geography and scope of services. As of 2020, the initiative has formalized partnerships with 100 domestic and foreign partners: pro bono clearinghouses, corporate law firms, immigration legal services organizations, and law school clinics. KFT also grew its services to include expertise on family law issues, from guardianship and custody matters to litigation support for Hague Convention cases.
- KFT saw an increase in the demand for services and also in the complexity of delivering them. With many civil registries and other agencies closed due to the pandemic, KFT engaged its partners more than ever before. As of 2020, the initiative operates in 20 countries around the globe—recently expanding into Africa and Southeast Asia. To date, it has provided international pro bono counsel for 170 migrant children and their families.

LATIN AMERICA

The Lawyers Council for Civil and Economic Rights in the Americas continued focusing on combating corruption, strengthening judicial independence, and supporting civil society.

- The Lawyers Council produced the report [“Corruption in Times of COVID-19: a Regional Perspective on Public Procurement”](#), summarizing the exceptional legal measures of regional governments in response to the pandemic, particularly in public procurement, and highlighting the resulting corruption risks. Attracting media attention throughout the Americas, the report cited notable civil society and media initiatives to monitor government responses to the pandemic. [See more here.](#)
- The Lawyers Council published a follow-up report analyzing Guatemala’s judicial appointments process and the new presidential proposal to amend the constitution’s provisions for selecting judges and reforming the justice system. [See more here.](#)
- The Lawyers Council supported the NGO Alliance for Reforms in Guatemala with the report [“Revisions to the Law on Non-Governmental Organizations”](#), produced with Paul Weiss. The report reviewed changes to Guatemalan law in light of international human rights standards, including: the government’s heightened control over NGOs and greater discretion to de-register them; new criminal and civil liability for directors of NGOs; and increased and onerous reporting requirements. [See more here.](#)



WOMEN IN THE PROFESSION PROGRAM

WIP PROMOTES THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN IN THE LEGAL PROFESSION, emphasizing individual and institutional leadership. The program's 19 Latin American chapters regularly host events, pro bono projects, mentoring programs, and other initiatives. In 2020:

- The WIP International Steering Committee met virtually to review each chapter's pro bono efforts and programs throughout the year of the pandemic. Many chapters continued programming virtually with panels on various issues regarding the pandemic.
- WIP chapters contributed to two reports: [Protecting Women in Latin America from Economic Violence, prepared with Eversheds Sutherland](#); and [A New COVID-19 Crisis: Domestic Abuse Rising in Latin America, prepared with Paul Hastings](#).
- Representatives of WIP chapters and the Pro Bono Network of the Americas joined a [panel discussion](#) on domestic violence in Latin America during the pandemic building on the report.



ACCESS TO JUSTICE PRACTICUM

The Vance Center launched the Access to Justice Practicum to mitigate the access-to-justice gap in Latin America and create a pipeline for public interest lawyering. Through the Practicum, outstanding recent law graduates have the opportunity to work on one-year projects at pro bono clearinghouses in the Pro Bono Network of the Americas, tackling systemic problems facing poor and marginalized communities, initially in Argentina, Colombia, and Mexico. [See more here.](#)



ACCESS TO JUSTICE PRACTICUM

TOTALLAW PREP

The Vance Center and TalentoTotal launched TotalLAW Prep, to engage law firms, companies, bar associations, law schools, and pro bono clearinghouses to create a broad and ethnically diverse leadership pipeline of highly talented Afro-Descendant and Indigenous lawyers from Latin America. The program selected the first class of candidates, who will receive mentoring and other support to pursue LLM degrees and one-year placements in international law firms in the United States or Europe [see more here.](#)

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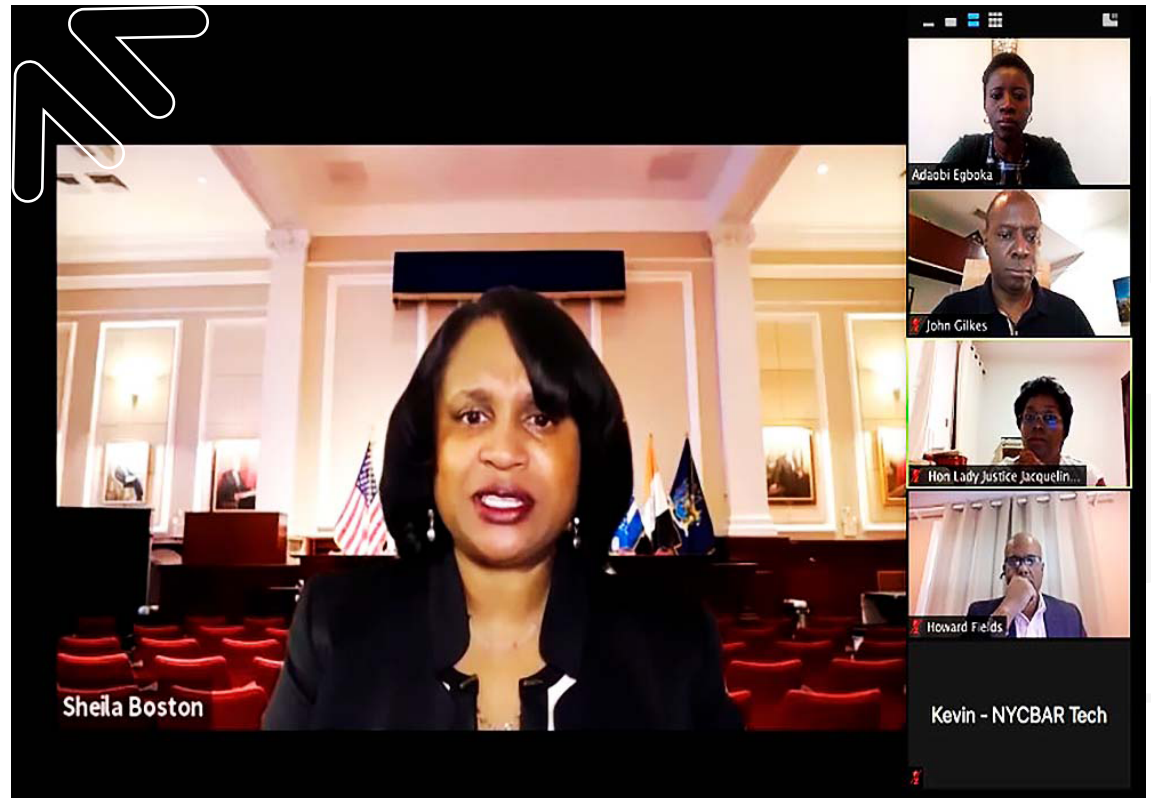
NEW YORK CITY BAR

TalentoTotal

AFRICA

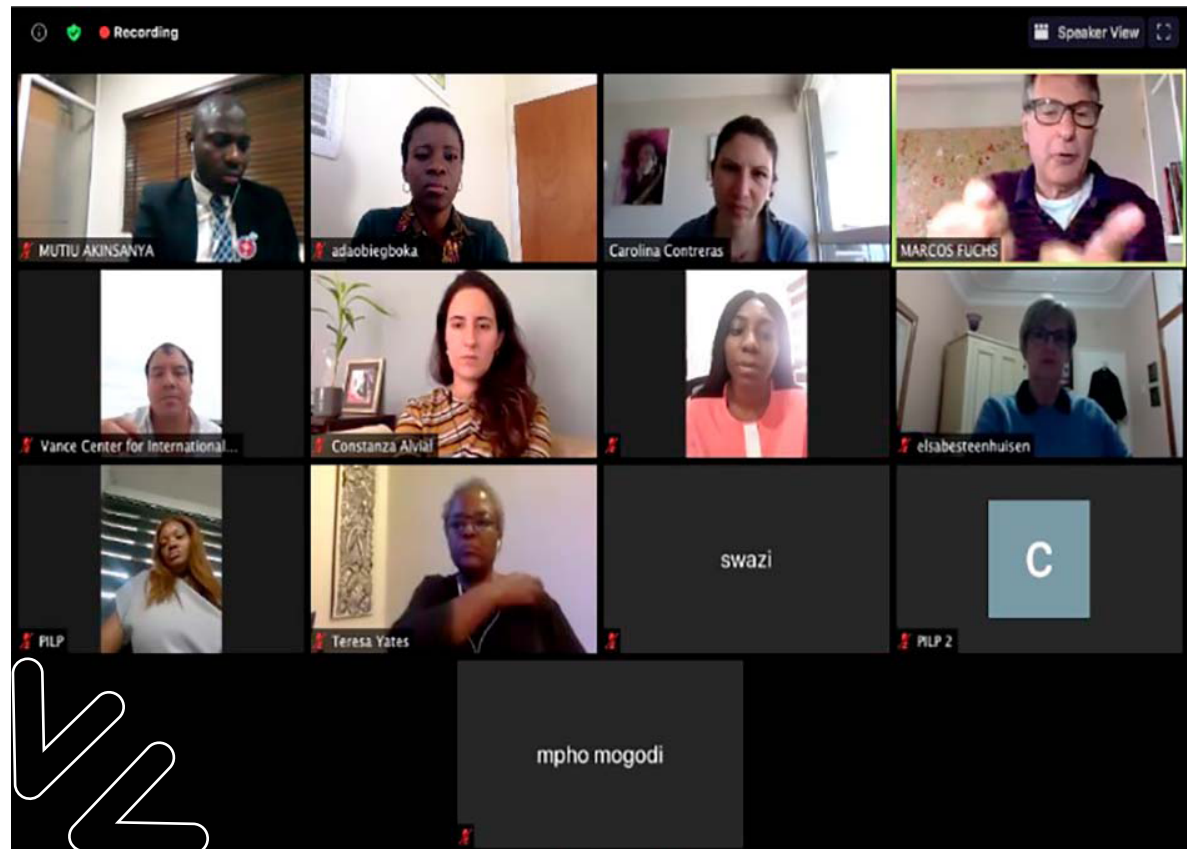
- At the peak of the pandemic, the Vance Center supported the [International Commission of Jurists South Africa](#) to review whether the emergency measures of South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda, Malawi, Eswatini, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, and Ghana respected fundamental human rights. [Orrick](#) led a team of lawyers in the countries to research how the executive, legislative, and judicial actions followed constitutional and other legal requirements regarding sexual and gender-based violence, economic, social and cultural rights, freedom of expression, and transparency and accountability measures.
- With the support of the [Chubb Rule of Law Fund](#), the Vance Center organized [virtual workshops](#) on transnational corruption and cybersecurity for more than 70 Kenyan judges and magistrates, conducted by in-house multinational legal counsel and law firm practitioners. [The Kenyan Judges and Magistrates Association](#) requested the workshops to strengthen its members' capacity to adjudicate cybersecurity, cyber forensics, and transnational corruption cases. A subsequent consultative forum identified best practices to improve the handling of these cases by the judges and magistrates.
- The Vance Center [launched](#) the Africa Pro Bono Series, a cross-border discussion of pro bono practice in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America in partnership with South Africa's [probono.org](#) and Nigeria's [Public Interest](#)

The Africa program continued focusing on supporting civil society and expanding partnerships with law firms and legal institutions across the continent and Latin America.



[Law Partnership](#) and [Pro Bono Clearing House](#), along with members of the [Pro Bono Network of the Americas](#). The four-part series reviewed [regulatory challenges and opportunities](#) to promote pro bono culture and engaged staff, [private practice lawyers](#), and [beneficiaries](#) of three African pro bono clearinghouses in an open dialogue among themselves and with their Latin American counterparts. The Vance Center also continued to provide pro bono representation to regional and national civil society organizations across the continent and engaged law firms in Kenya and Ethiopia to pursue the institutionalization of pro bono practice.

- Pandemic restrictions constrained the Vance Center from selecting participants for the African Legal Fellows program for 2020-21; however, one fellow from Nigeria-- the 60th fellow overall-- was able to work at [King & Spalding](#). In partnership with the [East Africa Energy Program](#) and [Nigeria Power Sector Program](#) of the [U.S. Agency for International Development](#), we [launched](#) Power Africa Legal Fellows professional development workshops for government lawyers in Nigeria, Kenya, and Ethiopia. More than 100 government lawyers participated in presentations on complex financial transactions in the international energy sector, which continue through mid-2021, with support from four international law firms and 15 law firms from Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Kenya. The virtual professional development program fulfills the Vance Centers' commitment to supporting USAID and [Power Africa](#) in their efforts to improve the government legal capacity to support energy project development, financing, and contracting in sub-Saharan Africa.









LAWYERS FOR REPORTERS

Lawyers for Reporters is a new collaboration of the Vance Center and the Press Freedom Defense Fund, providing pro bono legal services to nonprofit local and national news reporting organizations throughout the United States. In 2020:

- More than 30 clients in 13 states, focusing on local government, racial justice, the environment; the LGBTQ+ and immigrant communities, extremism, youth issues, included: the Asheville Watchdog; the Tiny News Collective; BK Reader; the Boulder Reporting Lab; the Shasta Scout; the Rio Grande Guardian; Q Voice News; and NY Focus.
- More than 50 lawyers from 20 major law firms co-counseled with Lawyers for Reports in the practice areas of corporate, tax, intellectual property, media, and litigation.

BY THE NUMBERS

	FY 2019-20	FY 2020-21
 REVENUE:	\$1,128,890	\$1,574,229
 EXPENSES:	\$1,225,467	\$1,467,343
 PRO BONO CONTRIBUTIONS:	\$5,500,000	\$9,500,000
 IN-KIND SUPPORT:	\$180,376	\$40,950

80



Clients Served

10

LAWYERS

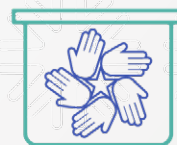


Our Staff

2

ADMINISTRATORS

117



Pro Bono Projects

573



Pro Bono Lawyers

127



Pro Bono Law Firms



U.S.

29



Non-US

98

SOURCES OF SUPPORT

National Endowment for Democracy	UNESCO
Democracy Fund	Chubb Rule of Law Fund
Power Africa	Kirkland & Ellis
Press Freedom Defense Fund	Open Society Foundations
Novo Foundation	

Allen & Overy	Arent Fox	Baker & McKenzie	Cleary
Akin Gump	Clifford Chance	Davis Polk	Debevoise
Eversheds Sutherland			Hughes Hubbard
King & Spalding	Linklaters	Mayer Brown	Milbank
Morrison & Foerster	Orrick	Paul Hastings	Paul Weiss
Proskauer Rose	Simpson Thacher	Shearman & Sterling	Skadden
Sullivan & Cromwell	Weil	White & Case	Winston & Strawn



VANCE CENTER COMMITTEE AND VANCE CENTER STAFF

VANCECENTER.ORG
42 WEST 44TH STREET
NEW YORK, NY 10036
+1 212 382-6680
VANCE@NYCBAR.ORG

