

2023

ANNUAL REPORT



CYRUS R. VANCE CENTER
FOR INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE



H I G H L I G H T S O F 2 0 2 3



Alexander
Papachristou,
Executive Director

2023 was a year of deep global challenges, but it was also a period of reflection and celebration here at the Vance Center.

A series of **20th anniversary events** that began in October 2022 carried through this year, taking us to Bogotá and Johannesburg as we celebrated our achievements, looked back at our growth and ahead at the horizon. For more on these anniversary events, see [page 20](#).

We added four new full-time **staff** – two attorneys for our growing Lawyers for Reporters program, as well as the first director of our new Reporters Shield program and the Vance Center's first Communications Manager.

The Human Rights and Access to Justice Program expanded its advocacy efforts and strategic litigation on the rights of incarcerated women in

Latin America and the Caribbean through the Women in Prison Network, spoke out on behalf of imprisoned human rights defenders, and worked on several major projects on LGBTQ+ rights. The Program also took on responsibility for the Vance Center's **Keep Families Together** initiative, which has helped find pro bono counsel for more than 375 children, families, migrants, and asylum-seekers in the United States.

Our **Environment Program** pushed for environmental justice at all levels, from international climate litigation to support for communities defending their land rights in the Americas. The program assisted four UN Special Rapporteurs to submit amicus briefs in two significant climate cases before international tribunals; contributed key research to

major international publications and reports on environmental law; and developed country-specific legal toolkits to help a network of women environmental and land defenders in Latin America and the Caribbean protect their rights.

The **Good Governance Program** continued defending journalists and media organizations reporting in the public interest, assisting global investigative outlets to defend against legal threats and claims related to their reporting, advising clients on strategies to protect against retaliation, and helping exiled journalists from Europe, Central Asia and Latin America establish operations in the U.S., and represented high-profile Central American judges and journalists facing persecution in their cases before the Inter-American System.

For years, the Vance Center has worked closely with lawyers, anti-corruption activists, and other human rights defenders in **Guatemala**. Those networks were critically important this year, following a contested presidential election and the surprise victory of Bernardo Arévalo. In late 2023, as rumors swirled about whether corrupt actors in the Guatemalan government would allow Arévalo to take office in January 2024, we organized a delegation of international lawyers to analyze the state of Guatemala's judiciary and rule of law. In meetings with legal practitioners, policymakers, civil society organizations, and the president-elect, we exchanged solutions and best practices for protecting democratic institutions and the rule of law and came away with a set of recommendations for strengthening the future of Guatemala's judiciary.

In its fourth year, the need for **Lawyers for Reporters'** legal services was clearer than ever. We've now helped almost 200 news organizations from 35 states with a variety of legal matters, and almost doubled our client base this year alone. To meet that need, we added new staff and received significant new funding for the initiative.

In May, we officially launched **Reporters Shield**, an innovative global program to help defend investigative reporting outlets against defamation and related claims. The program admitted its first group of members at the end of the year, and we look forward to accepting many more in the future.

Our anniversary celebration in Johannesburg was an ideal opportunity for the **Africa Program** to showcase the growth and impact of the collaborative network we've built across sub-Saharan Africa. Women's leadership remained at the forefront, as the Advancing Women in the Workplace mentorship program welcomed its second cohort of mentors and mentees. We launched two more Women in the Profession chapters on the African continent, with Ethiopia and Kenya joining Nigeria. We led the conversation on critical topics ranging from threats to democracy and civic space in West Africa to the role of community practitioners in ensuring access to justice.

Our **Latin American Policy Program** continued to lead regional conversations on judicial independence. We published regional and country-specific assessments on judicial independence and international support mechanisms, supported judges presenting before the Inter-

American Commission on Human Rights, and brought together dozens of judges and experts, including a UN Special Rapporteur, for a cross-border dialogue in Mexico City on judicial independence. The program also delved into cryptocurrency legislation and policy in El Salvador and monitored judicial appointment proceedings. The **Lawyers Council for Civil and Economic Rights in the Americas** hosted a high-level discussion on anti-corruption measures and trade agreements, and released national- and regional-level reports on whistleblower protection.

Together with the **Pro Bono Network of the Americas**, we organized several regional events: at our anniversary celebration in Bogotá, a roundtable in Costa Rica, and Pro Bono Week in Buenos Aires, Argentina. In its 16th year, the annual Vance Center-Latin Lawyer Pro Bono Survey drew responses from more than 200 law firms representing 18 countries.

Through all these activities, we never lost sight of our commitment to fostering diversity in the profession and encouraging public interest lawyering. The **Access to Justice Practicum** supported three talented young female lawyers from Brazil, Chile, and Peru a year working on public interest projects with our national clearinghouse partners. In addition to launching its two new African chapters, the **Women in the Profession** program hosted events on gender equality and diversity, conducted surveys on gender gaps in the legal profession, and relaunched its Colombian chapter with renewed energy.

None of this would be possible without the generous support of our donors. Contributions from law firms, Committee members and individuals are the essential foundation that enable us to keep doing this work. We also received important funding and grant support from the **Oak Foundation, Tinker Foundation, Knight Foundation, MacArthur Foundation, National Endowment for Democracy, the U.S Mission to South Africa**, and others. The Access to Justice Practicum received generous support from funders including **General Electric** and **J.P. Morgan**.

I've now spent over a decade as the Vance Center's Executive Director. In that time, I've seen our small but dynamic organization transform to meet the shifting needs of our clients and an ever-changing legal environment. A new wave of authoritarianism around the world has given rise to new threats to justice, the rule of law and our fundamental rights – but we've evolved to meet these threats and keep providing civil society organizations with legal support to do their essential work. The Vance Center's continued success, more than 20 years since its founding, proves that an enormous community of legal practitioners is prepared and eager to answer our call to strengthen pro bono practice, continue pushing to make the legal profession more diverse and equitable, and expand access to justice for all.

IMPACT



119
Clients



175
Pro Bono Projects



636
Pro Bono Lawyers



161
Law Firms

Two thematic hearing submissions accepted by the IACHR, on judicial independence and women deprived of liberty

Organized an Inter-American Dialogue on Judicial Independence with **70+ judges** from **17 countries**. Produced reports on judicial independence in **15 countries**

Completed a project analyzing laws in **44 countries** related to gender-affirming care for transgender people

Keep Families Together (KFT) initiative responded to **140** requests for support, the highest number to date. Since its creation, KFT has provided legal representation to more than **375** separated children and families





Amicus briefs submitted with UNSRs in **two major international climate cases** before ITLOS and IACtHR

Conducted research on **free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC)** to inform **advocacy and training** for networks of Indigenous women environmental and land defenders in five countries in Latin America and the Caribbean

Helped the **largest independent news agency in Afghanistan owned and operated by Afghans** to structure and operate its business in the U.S. in response to increased censorship of media outlets

Lawyers for Reporters added **59 new clients**, averaging more than one per week

Reporters Shield vetted more than **100 applications** from public interest reporting organizations for the first round of membership since launch in May

With partners, we launched Kenya's **first pro bono clearinghouse**

Women in the Profession (WIP) added **two new chapters** in Nigeria and Ethiopia, bringing the global number of chapters to 22

80 mentors and mentees participated in the first two cohorts of the Advancing Women in the Workplace program in South Africa

Three new practitioners from **Brazil, Peru, and Chile** joined this year's cohort of the Access to Justice Practicum

HUMAN RIGHTS AND ACCESS TO JUSTICE

The Human Rights and Access to Justice Program worked to promote and protect the rights of vulnerable populations, pursue accountability for grave human rights violations, and promote responsible business conduct, through collaboration with partner networks and advocacy and engagement with regional and UN human rights mechanisms.

From start to finish, this was an active year for our Women in Prison initiative:

- In January, the Human Rights and Access to Justice Program held a [conference in Bogotá](#) on strategic litigation initiatives in Latin America and the Caribbean. Over three days, more than 30 advocates, activists, and lawyers from the region engaged on key topics around women's incarceration, including the fundamentals of litigating strategic cases before the Inter-American and United Nations human rights systems, best practices in identifying common issues and building cases with a wide regional impact, and documenting/highlighting existing cases with strong potential for addressing key aspects of women's incarceration.
- The Program also extended national- and regional-level pro bono legal support through the Women in Prison Network. We supported members in Guatemala with research on exploitative conditions for



women in mixed prisons, the right to health and adequate nutrition, and the criminalization of women human rights defenders, including assisting Guatemalan organization Colectivo Artesana in preparing a request for precautionary measures before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights on behalf of children and adolescents with incarcerated parents. In Bolivia, our efforts focused on strategic litigation regarding the criminalization of self-defense in cases of domestic violence and of sexual harassment. At the international level, the program assisted with the submission of reports to UN bodies on women deprived of liberty and advancing racial justice and equality in the context of law enforcement.

- The Program coordinated a proposal on behalf of Women in Prison Network organizations for a thematic hearing before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights on rights of women deprived of liberty in the Americas. The Commission accepted the proposal and scheduled the hearing for its first round of sessions in early 2024.

- We assisted with submission of several reports to UN bodies on women deprived of liberty and advancing racial justice and equality in the context of law enforcement. The program supported Women in Prison Network partners in Latin America in a submission to the United Nations Human Rights Council in connection with the Universal Periodic Review process, as well as to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and the United Nations Human Rights Committee. We also assisted our partner in Brazil to submit information to the International Independent Expert Mechanism to Advance Racial Justice and Equality in the context of Law Enforcement.



WOMEN IN PRISON | EVIDENCE ADVOCACY REFORM

- In coordination with committees at the City Bar, we spoke out on behalf of criminalized human rights defenders in Guatemala, releasing statements denouncing the persecution of imprisoned prosecutor Virginia Laparra and the subsequent criminal proceedings against human rights lawyer Claudia González. In addition to public statements, the Program provided general support to González and other criminalized human rights defenders, and supported international advocacy efforts calling for their release.

A significant amount of the Program's work in 2023 focused on rights for LGBTQ+ individuals around the world:

- The Program worked with law firm co-counsels to assist Human Rights Watch on two projects: the first analyzing a multinational survey on laws related to gender-affirming care for transgender people and outlining standards from international and regional mechanisms, and another providing research for an amicus brief submitted in Uganda challenging the country's recent Anti-Homosexuality Act.
- In our ongoing efforts to bolster advocacy on LGBTQ+ rights in Venezuela, the Vance Center coordinated a [dialogue with the IACHR Rapporteur](#) and Venezuelan civil society organizations. The meeting between Venezuelan human rights organizations and the IACHR Commissioner and Rapporteur on the Rights of Lesbian, Gay, Trans, Bisexual, and Intersex Persons, Roberta Clarke, offered a forum to address urgent issues related to LGBTQ+ rights, including violence against transgender individuals.



KEEP FAMILIES TOGETHER

In its fifth year of operation, Keep Families Together continued expanding its geographic reach and scope of services, linking immigrants in the US with pro bono legal support in their countries of origin. As of 2023:

- KFT has identified pro bono co-counsel for more than 375 families seeking immigration relief in the United States. This has come from partnerships with more than 150 entities around the world, including pro bono clearinghouses, corporate law firms, immigration legal services, non-profit organizations, bar associations, and law school clinics.
- The program is now active in 27 countries, including new locations in Africa and Southeast Asia, though the majority of referrals still come from Central America.
- In 2023, KFT received referrals from eight new organizations and worked with 24 new law firms around the globe.
- In April, we hosted with Fundación Pro Bono Guatemala the third annual KFT awards ceremony recognizing 11 law firms from Latin America for their notable pro bono contributions to clients. For the first time, the event took place in person, with a webcast available for an international audience.



FAMILIAS UNIDAS



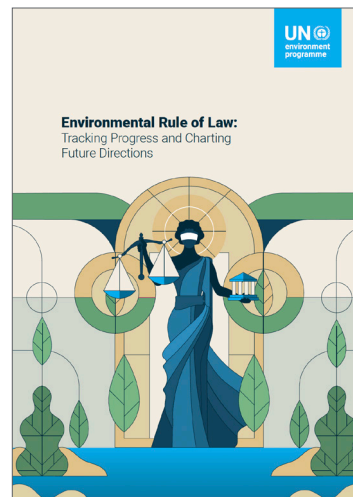
ENVIRONMENT

The Environment Program advanced environmental rights and advocated for climate justice across the globe, supporting the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in Latin America and beyond, and partnering with clients and other advocates to uphold the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

- The Program built on its growing body of work with client the Women's Earth & Climate Action Network, International (WECAN) with two new projects:
 - Evaluating whether laws in Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru meet international legal standards on Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC).
 - [Developing Escazú Agreement Toolkits](#) for Women Land Defenders and Frontline Communities for Antigua and Barbuda, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru. The project will produce documents for each country that are accessible for non-legal audiences and address priority topics, including the rights of women land defenders, scenarios in which defenders' rights are violated and local resources to access free, pro bono, or discounted legal assistance.
- Our research contributed to several major international publications and reports on environmental law.



- In August, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child published [General Comment 26](#), a landmark general comment on children's rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change. Along with law firm Clifford Chance, we provided crucial advice and multiple legal memoranda to client Terre des Hommes, which directly informed the final text of the General Comment.
- Near the end of the year, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) released its [Second Global Report on the Environmental Rule of Law](#). The agency's flagship report relies extensively on data we collected with co-counsel White & Case, in one of the largest research projects ever undertaken by the Vance Center.
- The Program delved deeper into climate litigation, including several amicus curiae submissions before international tribunals in cases related to States' obligations in the face of climate change. The tribunals are expected to issue decisions in 2024, with the potential to have a major impact on global climate policy and future cases.
 - Together with co-counsel law firm Milbank, we represented three United Nations Special Rapporteurs in an amicus submission to the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) addressing States' responsibilities to protect oceans from the effects of climate change. The brief analyzed the climate change-related obligations of States under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), a comprehensive legal framework that regulates all ocean space, uses, and resources.



- Working again with Milbank and three UN Special Rapporteurs – rapporteur on human rights and the environment David Boyd; rapporteur on toxics and human rights Dr. Marcos Orellana; and rapporteur on the right to development Surya Deva – we filed a comprehensive brief in a landmark climate case before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. Following a request from Chile and Colombia, the Court is considering an advisory opinion outlining obligations that States owe in relation to the climate emergency under the American Convention on Human Rights.
- We also assisted two youth-led climate justice organizations working at the cutting edge of climate law in [preparing materials](#) to help guide states in making innovative submissions to climate litigation before the International Court of Justice.

GOOD GOVERNANCE

The **Good Governance Program** advised journalism and advocacy organizations reporting on public interest matters and represented Guatemalan judges and human rights defenders before the Inter-American System.

- The Program regularly advised on intellectual property, corporate governance, employment, and journalistic collaboration, for clients including the Prison Journalism Project (employment matters), award-winning podcast In The Dark (assistance with negotiating a move from American Public Media to The New Yorker), and the Virginia Center for Investigative Journalism (entering into a partnership with WHRO, a National Public Radio broadcaster in Virginia).
- The Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) turned to us for assistance on a broad range of matters, including defamation defense, governance policies, pre-publication review, and establishment of Floodlight, producing feature films from investigative stories.
- We helped exiled journalists from Afghanistan, Belarus, Central America, Cuba, Russia, and Venezuela to restructure their operations, enabling them to continue reporting effectively and safely.
- As co-counsel with pro bono attorneys from King & Spalding, we sought legal redress for Guatemalan Judge Erika Aifán and 13 other Guatemalan jurists in proceedings before the IACHR, as well as urgent precautionary measures for two Central American media outlets: broadcaster Canal 12 and publisher El Faro.





- We pressed the IACHR for award-winning Guatemalan journalist José Rubén Zamora's release from illegal imprisonment in Guatemala and welcomed the Commission's request to visit Guatemala to meet with government officials to address the case.
- In coordination with committees at the City Bar, we spoke out on behalf of judges facing threats in Mexico and Guatemala.

At the end of 2023, to accommodate our expanded work, Good Governance split into two new practice areas: **Institutional Integrity** and **Public Interest Reporting**, focusing respectively on judicial integrity and anti-corruption efforts and on protecting and promoting independent journalism and advocacy.



AFRICA

The year saw the Vance Center expand and strengthen our networks in sub-Saharan Africa, building new connections and pursuing initiatives to promote pro bono practice and public interest law, increase access to justice and diversity in the profession, and strengthen civil society partnerships and the rule of law.

- The Advancing Women in the Workplace (AWW) program grew significantly throughout 2023, underscoring the need for the program's offerings and setting the stage for further development into 2024 and beyond.
 - Through AWW, the Vance Center and its South African Legal Fellows Alumni Network, with funding from the US Mission to South Africa, continued supporting women of color in South Africa's legal market in their efforts to access leadership positions.
 - AWW concluded its first cohort and welcomed a second cohort of 20 new mentors and mentees, doubling the program's reach. Participants applied the knowledge and skills gained through the program in diverse ways, including a free legal information clinic that four mentees designed and offered to the public.
 - The program hosted several events in August to mark Women's Month in South Africa, including: a hybrid event with women's empowerment nonprofit Basadi Ba Molao and law firm Nyapotse Inc, focused on supporting women practitioners in the male-dominated field of conveyancing; and an in-person event at law firm DLA Piper highlighting the potential of legal tech to uplift women's leadership within the rapidly changing sector of law and tech.

With local partners, we launched the third African chapter of the Vance Center's flagship Women in the Profession (WIP) program, in Ethiopia. More than 50 participants attended a launch event to welcome the group to WIP's global community of women attorneys, joining existing WIP chapters in Nigeria and Kenya and 19 chapters in Latin America. For more on this event, see the [WIP section of this report on page 33](#).





- We joined the West African Civil Society Forum and other partners to host a virtual conference on democracy and civic space in West Africa, and attended the annual Pan African Lawyers Union conference in Zambia to participate in discussions on Public Interest and Development Law, Legal Practice, and Business Law.
- During a flurry of UNGA Week side events, we partnered with the African Center of Excellence for Access to Justice and brought together legal professionals, community justice practitioners, and leaders for a discussion entitled “Strengthening Access to Justice: Bridging the Gap between Lawyers and Community Practitioners.” We also collaborated with Africa Policy Conversations to host a hybrid series of discussions with more than 100 international attendees at the New York City Bar Association.

LATIN AMERICA

In 2023, the Vance Center's focus in Latin America spanned from judicial independence to cryptocurrency legislation. This year, the program:

- Supported seven judges presenting on threats to judicial independence during the [86th Period of Sessions of the IACHR](#), held in Los Angeles in March. The judges represented six national judicial associations from Bolivia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Uruguay, and one regional association covering Latin America.



- Organized a [regional dialogue](#) on basic threats to independent judicial actors across Latin America, inspired by the IACHR hearing and in collaboration with judicial associations Federación Latinoamericana de Magistrados (FLAM) and the Comisión Nacional de Tribunales Superiores de Justicia de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos (CONATrib). More than 70 judges from 17 different countries, along with experts representing civil society organizations, international organizations, and academia, including UN Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers Professor Margaret Satterthwaite, participated in discussion sessions and working groups during the two-day event in Mexico City in October.

- Joined a [group of international observers](#) convened by the Asociación por una Sociedad Más Justa (ASJ), the Honduran chapter of Transparency International, to monitor the reappointment of Honduras' Supreme Court.

- Deepened support for independent judges' associations in Central America in their efforts to strengthen judicial independence and integrity. With the Federación Centroamericana de Jueces y Juezas por la Democracia (FECAJUD), we [organized a virtual workshop series](#) for judges on regional and international mechanisms to protect judicial independence in Latin America; an in-person [workshop](#) for judges from Central America and the Caribbean to exchange best practices and build networks; and published a ["Manual for International Protection of Judicial Independence for Judges."](#) Working closely with FLAM



and other national and regional partners, we produced country-level [assessments of judicial independence in seven countries.](#)

- Crafted a [joint publication](#) with Global Financial Integrity (GFI) analyzing the legal framework for virtual assets in El Salvador, assessing financial crime risks, and offering policy recommendations.
- Hosted a high-level roundtable discussion in Mexico on anti-corruption measures within the framework of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement.
- Launched an eight-month project to strengthen the role of women in Guatemala's legal profession, identify solutions to challenges affecting their work, and build capacity for long-term support of women lawyers in the country.



A N N I V E R S A R Y C E L E B R A T I O N

March & October 2023

VANCE CENTER

In October 2022, we kicked off a yearlong series of anniversary events with a two-day program at the New York City Bar Association. These events were, above all, a chance to acknowledge the connections we've made, the networks we've built, and the growth we've seen since the Vance Center started with modest dreams of supporting a culture of pro bono in the Americas and making law careers more accessible for Black lawyers in newly democratic South Africa.

This year, we revisited some of the places where these dreams began.

In March 2023, we touched down in Bogotá, Colombia, where we convened leading pro bono practitioners from across the Americas to assess the state of pro bono engagement in the region, celebrate how far we've come, and look ahead to what's next. More than 100 attendees heard reflections from longtime Vance Center Committee member Antonia Stolper and Laura Victoria García, dean of the Universidad del Rosario law school in Bogotá, followed by two in-depth discussion panels.

Panelists representing the judiciary, international organizations, private practice law, academia, and Vance Center staff – including Pro Bono Network of the Americas co-coordinator Constanza Alvial; FLAM President Judge Adriana Orocú; and Diego García-Sayán, former United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers and former president of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights – explored how the legal community can expand pro bono work and continue mobilizing on behalf of critical issues, including access to justice and the right to a safe, healthy and sustainable environment. Vance Center Committee Executive Chair Ted Maynard also presented Fundación ProBono Colombia board president Paula Samper Salazar with a special recognition for her years of efforts to develop pro bono work in Colombia.



Bogotá, Colombia





Bogotá, Colombia

The Bogotá gathering also afforded an opportunity to connect in person with the nearly 20 organizations that make up the Pro Bono Network of the Americas – a visible indicator of the Vance Center's impact in the pro bono world. Just over a decade ago, few Latin American firms had dedicated pro bono program or staff, and national clearinghouses were even rarer.

With support from the Vance Center, Fundación Pro Bono Chile, other regional partners, and trailblazing lawyers like Paula Samper Salazar who believe deeply in the value of pro bono work, the Network helped nurture clearinghouses in more than a dozen countries, connect hundreds of lawyers and firms with civil society organizations and



other clients that need their services. We are deeply gratified to see how the Network has grown since its creation in 2011, and excited to continue working together to shape the future of pro bono practice in the Americas.

Just as the Colombia event invited reflection on the flourishing pro bono culture in Latin America, our third anniversary celebration had us take a step back to appreciate the life-changing impact of our flagship African Legal Fellows Program and acknowledge our developing work in sub-Saharan Africa.



Johannesburg, South Africa



In October, a delegation of more than a dozen past and present Vance Center supporters – including current Committee members, former New York City Bar president Sheila Boston, and former U.S. Attorney General and Vance Center Committee member Hon. Loretta E. Lynch – traveled to Johannesburg for three action-packed days.

The event, “The Lawyer as Rule-of-Law Activist: Activating the Next Generation,” brought together more than 200 leading legal practitioners, African Legal Fellows Program alumni, advocates, academics, and others from across the continent for a celebration of the Vance Center’s anniversary and 20 years of the African Legal Fellows (ALF) Program.





Johannesburg, South Africa



Motivated by a visit to South Africa by emeritus Vance Center Committee member Evan A. Davis, then President of the New York City Bar Association, the Vance Center launched the Legal Fellows Program in 2002 to create an opportunity for South African lawyers from historically disadvantaged backgrounds to work at New York law firms and companies for up to one year to gain international experience and contacts. Since then, more than 60 fellows from South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria, and Ethiopia have participated in the program as an important step in their legal development and careers.

The festivities officially kicked off with a reception at the Johannesburg offices of Webber Wentzel. In opening remarks, Hon. George Daniels, senior U.S. Federal Judge and Vance Center Committee member, reflected on a previous visit to South Africa for the ALF Program's 10th anniversary and highlighted the program's impact on the participating lawyers, firms and the profession. We





We next delved deeply into timely issues for our legal communities, in a full-day programmatic event featuring distinguished members of the judiciary, advocates, international law firm partners representing more than a dozen firms, and many others from across the African continent. In an inspiring keynote address, Justice Bernard Makgabo Ngoepe, Tax Ombudsman of South Africa and former Judge President of the Gauteng Division of the High Court, addressed the stark challenges still preventing the growth of pro bono work in South Africa and around the world, and the moral obligation of legal professionals to use their skills and expertise to confront injustice. A series of discussion panels, moderated by Vance

also heard from Judge Taswell Papier of the Western Cape Division of the High Court, and ALF alumni in a series of videos showcasing the program's impact.

The evening's keynote conversation between Justice Dunstan Mlambo, Judge President of the Gauteng Division of the High Court of South Africa, and Hon. Loretta Lynch, who has provided key support and guidance to the ALF Program since its inception, offered powerful insights. The speakers contextualized the historic challenges and opportunities for Black legal professionals and the path toward access to justice in South Africa, the roadblocks and successes of the ALF program, and parallels for Black legal professionals in other countries, including the U.S.



Center Committee members and ALF program alumni, explored essential topics, including the role of the private sector and legal profession in fighting corruption, the landscape and future of pro bono practice in Africa, challenges and opportunities for African women in the legal profession, and the role of bar associations in upholding democratic norms and the rule of law.

On top of these events, the Johannesburg agenda included meetings with South African and regional civil society organizations, law firms and individuals, including several firms founded or led by ALF program alumni. We wrapped up the festivities with a reception at the residence of the U.S. Ambassador to South Africa.

The full days in Johannesburg provided many chances to connect with ALF program alumni, as well as dozens of legal professionals participating in our Advancing Women in the Workplace program, which has to date paired 80 mentors and mentees at different points in their legal careers. These conversations illuminated the impact of these programs, which often might not become clear until years or even decades later: the networks that helped a new generation of South African lawyers excel and create their own paths, the mentoring relationships that have opened new opportunities for young legal practitioners, the support systems that convinced women lawyers practicing in male-dominated fields to establish their own firms, and so much more.

These connections – between individuals, firms, civil society groups, leaders, and future leaders – are what inspired the Vance Center's founders, and they are the engine that continues driving our work. More than just a celebration, these events gave us a means to look back and then forward, envisioning what may come next and thinking about how we can rise to the challenge to create a more inclusive, participatory, and equitable legal profession, wherever we are in the world.







Special thanks
to the contributors who
generously supported our
20th Anniversary celebration
in South Africa

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LAWYERS FOR REPORTERS

The program's active client list grew over 60 percent in just the last year, reflecting the significant need among local and mission-driven news outlets across the country for the program's counsel and expertise. Together with co-counsel at major law firms nationwide, LFR has represented clients on issues of corporate governance, tax, employment, intellectual property, newsgathering, and claim management. To meet the growing demand, Lawyers for Reporters added two new staff positions this year.

- Since its formation in early 2020, LFR has helped nearly 200 clients from 35 states, adding more than 55 in 2023 alone. Matters include pre-publication review, access to public records, defamation defense, insurance, licensing, joint publishing, contract review, trademark registration, copyright issues, company formation, application for tax-exempt status, fiscal sponsorship, nonprofit mergers, and other legal issues.
- More than 200 lawyers from over 30 firms have joined as co-counsel in representing clients, donating millions of dollars in pro bono service. As demand and our staff have grown, we have developed in-house expertise and increasingly handled matters with our own lawyers.



**Lawyers *for*
Reporters**

- This year, Lawyers for Reporters received renewed funding from the [Democracy Fund](#) and [First Look Institute](#), as well as new funding from the [Knight Foundation](#).

REPORTERS SHIELD

In May, the Vance Center and the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) launched Reporters Shield, a membership program to defend investigative journalism against the growing threat of vexatious lawsuits intended to harass and silence independent media worldwide. A launch event at the New York City Bar Association on May 3, World Press Freedom Day, introduced Reporters Shield and opened the call for membership applications.

- Since then, the program has opened to applicants from several regions and admitted its first group of members at the end of 2023.
- The Vance Center added a Reporters Shield Program Director and built out Reporters Shield's network of regional legal coordinators.
- We joined OCCRP in presenting the program at the International Journalism Festival in Perugia, Italy; an American Bar Association human rights conference in New York City; the biennial [Global Investigative Journalism Conference](#), in Gothenburg, Sweden; and a [panel discussing SLAPPs](#), as part of UNESCO's commemoration of the 2023 Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists, at the Organization of American States.



PRO BONO PROMOTION

In 2023, we explored new avenues to promote and support pro bono practice among our network partners around the world. Highlights included:

- With Strathmore Law School and Kenyatta University School of Law, we launched the Pro Bono Institute of Kenya, the country's first clearinghouse.
- At our eighth annual Celebration of International Pro Bono Excellence, we recognized the pro bono achievements of six Vance Center Committee law firms and gave special recognition to Committee member Janet Whittaker of Clifford Chance for her outstanding contributions to projects with the Environment Program.
- With the Pro Bono Network of the Americas, we co-hosted an interactive discussion with representatives of 15 countries, exploring common challenges to the rule of law in Latin America and Africa and ways for the legal community to uphold the rule of law through pro bono work. Vance Center Committee Latin America Vice-Chair Antonia Stolper joined a two-day roundtable in Costa Rica, organized by the Pro Bono Network of the Americas for Network members and CSOs, on the role of pro bono work in strengthening civic space in Central America.
- In July, the New York City Bar Association hosted the 28th annual World Law Congress organized by the World Jurist Association. More than 300 judges, lawyers, policymakers, civil society representatives, students, public officials, and others, including current and former heads of state and prominent activists, participated. Vance Center staff and Committee members spoke on several panels and moderated one on international pro bono practice.





LATIN LAWYER AND THE VANCE CENTER'S PRO BONO SURVEY

- Vance Center staff also participated in a weeklong pro bono celebration held by the Pro Bono Commission of the Bar Association of the City of Buenos Aires; the Pro Bono Mexico Standards with Centro Mexicano Pro Bono, Appleseed, Fundación Barra Mexicana de Abogados, and others; and the 2023 PILnet global forum on clearinghouses and pro bono practice.
- In its 16th year, the annual Vance Center-Latin Lawyer survey continued attracting more participation, with 209 firms from 18 countries responding for this edition. The Vance Center and Latin Lawyer recognized 64 of the respondents as "Leading Lights," firms making a noteworthy contribution to strengthening a culture of pro bono in Latin America.

WOMEN IN THE PROFESSION

A flagship Vance Center initiative, WIP promotes the advancement of women in the legal profession, emphasizing both individual and institutional leadership. This year, the WIP network grew to include nearly two dozen chapters in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa. WIP chapters offer opportunities for professional and personal growth and strengthen bonds between and among women lawyers through events, professional development programs, pro bono projects, mentoring, and other initiatives.

- In March, the Colombian WIP chapter officially [relaunched](#) with an event in Bogotá that drew more than 100 attendees. A breakfast event with WIP Colombia members later that month during the Biennial IBA Latin American Regional Forum conference in Cartagena built on this momentum.
- More than 50 lawyers attended the WIP Ethiopia launch [event](#) on June 30 in Addis Ababa, featuring a panel discussion, networking, and a shared commitment to advancing the role of women in Ethiopia's legal sector. Ethiopia is now the third African country with an active WIP chapter, joining Nigeria and Kenya.
- Events highlighting [women's leadership](#): In November, Mexican WIP chapter AbogadasMX held its annual leadership and professional development workshop for nearly 600 people. Later that month, Peruvian chapter WIP Perú presented the results of its "2023 Survey on the Presence and Professional Growth of Female Lawyers in Leading Legal Firms," which analyzed data from 45 high-profile law firms in Peru.



ACCESS TO JUSTICE PRACTICUM


In early 2023, the first cohort of Practitioners completed a one-week immersive training session capping the yearlong program, which supports outstanding recent law graduates to work on one-year projects tackling systemic problems that hinder access to justice in their home countries.

In September, we welcomed the three new young lawyers to the second cohort. The three practitioners will work for one year at the Alianza Pro Bono Perú, Fundación Pro Bono Chile, and Women in Law Mentoring Brazil, respectively.

The initiative received renewed financial support from GE, through its Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Council of the Global Law & Policy function, and from law firms.



FINANCIAL REPORT

	FY 2022-23	FY 2023-24
➔ REVENUE:	\$1,750,319	\$3,096,687
➔ EXPENSES:	\$1,936,352	\$2,817,989
 PRO BONO CONTRIBUTIONS:	\$10,546,900	\$14,746,315



119

Clients
Served

BY THE
NUMBERS



17

Our Team



13

Lawyers



4

Staff



175

Pro Bono
Projects



636

Pro Bono
Lawyers



161

Pro Bono
Firms



36

US



125

Non-US



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VANCE VA

The Vance Center wishes to thank all our donors for their generous support of our work. We are pleased to recognize these philanthropic contributions during our last fiscal year (May 1, 2023, to April 30, 2024).

Grants

- Anonymous Fund
- Chubb Rule of Law Fund
- Democracy Fund
- First Look Institute
- John S. and James L. Knight Foundation
- John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation
- National Endowment for Democracy
- Oak Foundation
- Open Society Foundations
- Tinker Foundation
- U.S. Mission to South Africa
- U.S. Department of State, Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) through the U.S. Embassy in Guatemala
- U.S. Agency for International Development as a subgrantee of Reporters Shield

**\$20,000+**

- Tatyana and Werner Federico Ahlers
- Baker McKenzie LLP
- S. Todd Crider
- Davis Polk & Wardwell LLP
- Mayer Brown LLP
- Edwin S. Maynard and Robin L. Dahlberg
- Milbank LLP
- Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP
- Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP
- Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP
- Antonia E. Stolper
- Michael J. Volkovitsch
- Weil, Gotshal & Manges LLP
- White & Case LLP

\$15,000 - \$19,999

- Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton LLP
- Michael L. Fitzgerald
- Lorraine S. McGowen

- Marcelo A. Mottes
- Paul Hastings LLP
- Proskauer Rose LLP
- Shearman & Sterling LLP
- Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP
- Sullivan & Cromwell LLP

\$10,000 - \$14,999

- Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP
- Allen & Overy LLP
- ArentFox Schiff LLP
- Maurice Blanco
- Clifford Chance US LLP
- Covington & Burling LLP
- Debevoise & Plimpton LLP
- Eversheds Sutherland LLP
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- Nicholas A. Kronfeld
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- Patricia Menéndez-Cambó

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- Ruti Smithline
- David J. Sorkin
- Jaime Trujillo
- Winston & Strawn LLP

\$5,000 - \$9,999

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- David H. Flechner
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- Kelly Librera
- Marcia T. Maack
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- Inosi M. Nyatta
- Dennis P. Pereira
- Tom Plotkin



- Dietmar W. Prager
- Melissa Y. Raciti-Knapp
- Veronica Rodriguez
- Paul T. Schnell
- Sabrena Silver
- Elsie Vance
- Liza M. Velazquez
- Elizabeth Vicens
- Janet M. Whittaker
- Dorina Yessios

Under \$5,000

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- Hunter T. Carter
- Kim Colando
- Carey Dunne
- Donald T. Fox
- Adam Givertz
- Conrad K. Harper
- Joseph Kaufman and Janet Korins

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Vance Center Committee and Vance Center Staff

VANCE CENTER.ORG
42 West 44th Street
New York, NY 10036
(212) 382.6600
vance@nycbar.org



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