

3rd Annual Asia Pro Bono Conference 2014

Final Report



The 3rd Annual Asia Pro Bono Conference was held in Singapore on 2 to 4 October 2014. The Conference brought together over 350 delegates from more than 25 countries from across the legal community including students, lawyers, legal educators, judges, government officials, and civil society professionals. It was an inspiring celebration of pro bono in the region and around the world. The theme of the Conference was “creating vibrant pro bono ecosystems to strengthen access to justice.”

The Conference was co-organized by Bridges Across Borders Southeast Asia Community Legal Education Initiative (BABSEA CLE), BABSEA CLE Singapore, the Law Society of Singapore, and the National University of Singapore (NUS). Delegates from around the world attended to build upon the successes and connections established by the previous two Conferences, in 2012 in Vientiane, Laos, and in 2013 in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. This year’s Conference took place in two locations: Days 1 and 2 took place at Joyden Hall in the heart of downtown Singapore, while the National University of Singapore, Faculty of Law hosted Day 3.



On the eve of the Conference, NGOs and partner organizations were invited to set up information booths to advertise the work that they do and network with other delegates. During this time, organizations, law firms, governmental entities and academic institutions were encouraged to exchange ideas on which pro bono services they could provide, and which pro bono services they sought. Everyone enjoyed networking opportunities during the opening dinner, sponsored by Freshfields, and the performance by the Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore (MINDS). The Conference then began with an inspirational

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speech from Josephus Tan, a celebrated Singaporean pro bono lawyer, and a touching video clip of his clients, highlighting the importance of pro bono service provision.

Senior Minister of State for Law and Education, Member of Parliament for Tanjong Pagar GRC, Ms Indranee Thurai Rajah delivered the keynote address, setting the ambitious and enthusiastic tone for the Conference to make great strides in pro bono. Simultaneous translation was available in Laos, Thai, Vietnamese, and Myanmar for all sessions held in the main hall. Following the keynote address, Day 1 featured plenary sessions on “The Role of Bar Associations in Supporting Pro Bono,” and “Pro Bono Developments and Opportunities in Southeast Asia.” Each session consisted of a panel of four to five speakers with a facilitator to encourage discussions and interactions between the panelists and the audience. Presentations incorporated many interactive clinical legal education (CLE) methodologies including power points, videos, questions and answers, role-plays and partner discussions. Day 1 closed with three breakout sessions, allowing delegates to converge in more intimate settings after choosing one of the following topics that applied most to their interests and needs: “Pro Bono Coordination 101,” “Clearing-House Systems,” and “Funding Pro Bono Initiatives and Measuring Impact.”

Day 2 began with opening remarks by Judicial Commissioner and Presiding Judge of the State Courts of Singapore, See Kee Oon. The Commissioner explored the potential of public-private-people partnerships (PPP) to bridge gaps in access to justice through pro bono. Plenary session 3 addressed the intersection between “In-House Counsel and Pro Bono,” further investigating the ties between the various components of PPP. The majority of the Conference’s breakout sessions took place on Day 2.



In the first set of breakout sessions, delegates could choose between attending sessions on “Innovation in Pro Bono,” “Pro Bono/ Legal Education Partnerships,” “ICT Strategy Workshop for NGOs,” and “Migration and Pro Bono: Developing Long-Term Strategic Engagement.” Delegates were later able to choose between sessions on “Public-Private-People Partnership Case Studies,” “DNA of Successful Pro Bono Partnerships,” “Law Student Pro Bono Clubs,” and “Community Education in Pro Bono: Focus on Migrant Workers.” This year’s Conference had a special focus on students’ capacity for involvement in pro bono, both during the course of their studies and following their careers in the field. As Ke Puthavy, a student at Paññāsāstra University of Cambodia, stated, “I am very happy because I have met a lot of new people. They all are very kind and friendly. Moreover, you motivate me to be a good person; and you have persuaded me to do more for my society to help the people who are in need.” Students are the pro

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bono lawyers of tomorrow, and their involvement in the Pro Bono Conference series is crucial to the success and sustainability of pro bono in the region and internationally.



The Closing Dinner on Day 2, sponsored by Herbert Smith Freehills, saw the handover of the Conference flag to the Myanmar delegation, boasting 46 participants including students, university faculty, government officials, civil society, and legal professionals from Myanmar. Lok Vi Ming, SC, President of the Law Society of Singapore, handed the “Viva Pro Bono” flag to U Hla Ko, Chairman of the Mandalay Bar Association during the ceremony. U Hla Ko assured the audience that he would continue to “drink the pro bono tonic to ensure a long life.” The

atmosphere was jubilant in anticipation of the 4th Annual Asia Pro Bono Conference & Legal Ethics Forum, which will take place from 4 to 7 September, 2014 in Mandalay, Myanmar. MINDS gave another wonderful performance, followed by traditional dances from the Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam delegations.

The Conference’s focus on students continued into Day 3, which was held at the National University of Singapore’s Faculty of Law. Day 3 included three morning sessions, “Pro Bono and Legal Education Symposium/ Southeast Asia Clinical Legal Education Association Conference at NUS,” “Variations: Pro Bono in the Life of the Law School,” and “Transitions: From Pro Bono Student to Pro Bono Lawyer.” Students took centre stage for these sessions, presenting, asking questions and providing input on the state of clinical legal education in their universities and home countries. After a lunch hosted by NUS, the afternoon progressed into several “bonus sessions,” designed to provide a forum for in-depth collaboration among student representatives, law lecturers, and legal professionals. Sessions were comprised of the following practical topics: “What Are You Doing Now? Mapping Student Pro Bono Activities,” “What Could You Do? Case Studies,” “What Ethical Rules Apply? Legal Ethics and Professional Responsibility Training for Students,” and “Beyond Singapore: Actions to Grow Student Pro Bono.”



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These engaging sessions, geared toward students, mirrored many of the breakout sessions in Days 1 and 2, focusing on both the current state of pro bono in the region and the way forward for expanding and maximizing access to justice. Annisa Furqanina, a student at Pasundan University, Indonesia, asserted that “experiencing an Annual Asia Pro Bono Conference could make students learn how to share something priceless with others and turn our ‘can’ts’ into ‘cans’ . . .



Everyone has something to be done in a great way. Great things never come from comfort zone.”

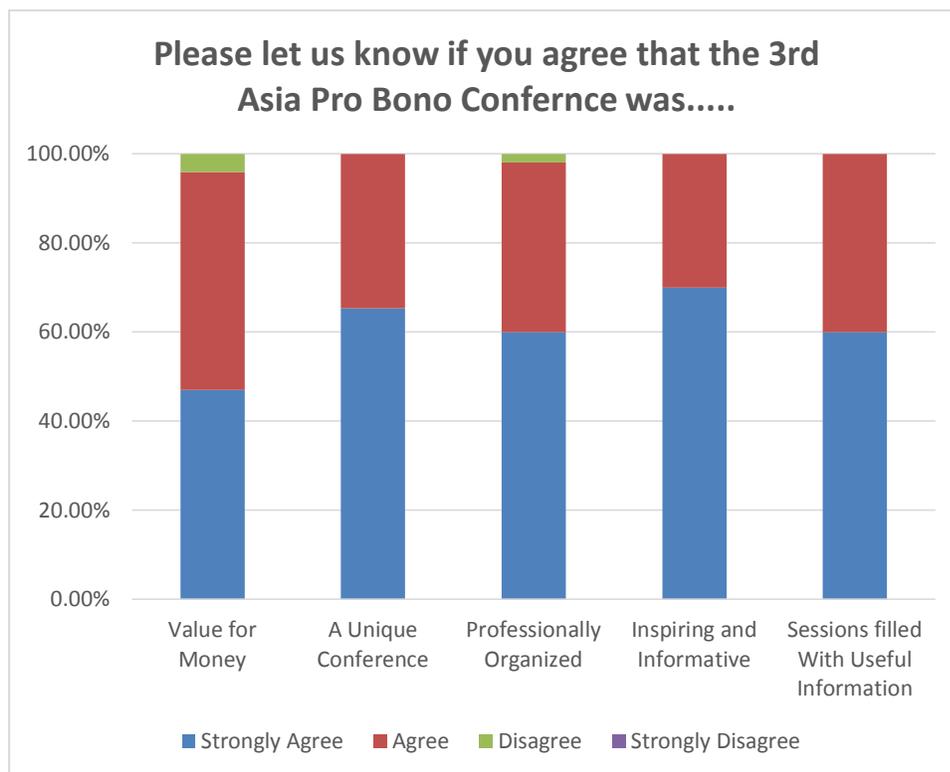
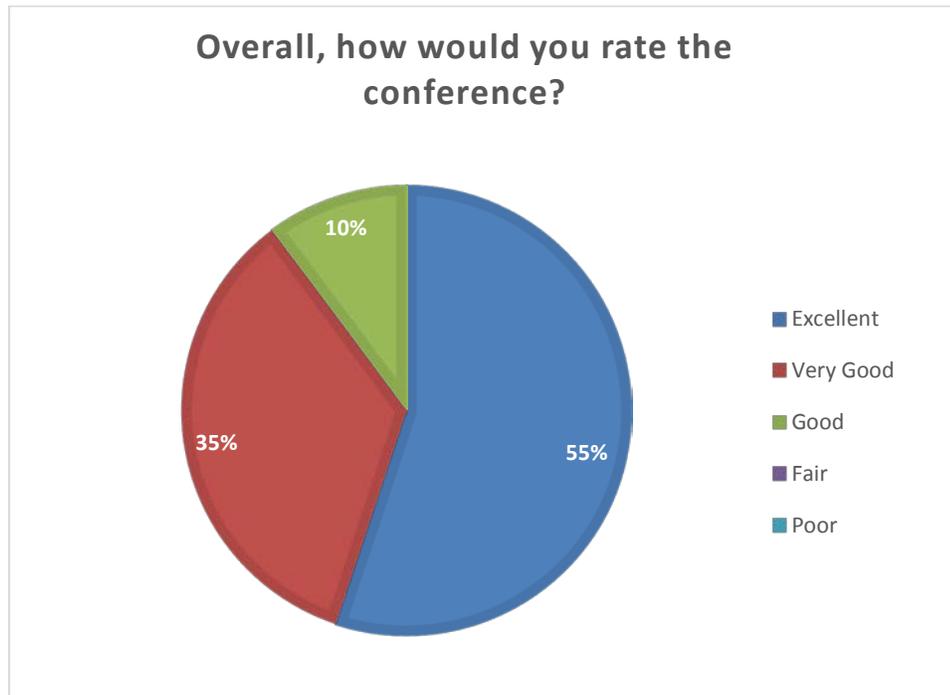
The 3rd Asia Pro Bono Conference was hugely successful, and will have a resounding effect. Alnie Foja, of the National Union for Peoples’ Lawyers of the Philippines and panelist on breakout session 7 on migrant workers, said, “I was greatly encouraged and fired up to learn that many colleagues in Asia and in the world are also engaged in pro bono lawyering and are giving their best efforts to create opportunities for pro bono practice. I am most glad to hear about the developments of pro bono practice in host country

Singapore and was amazed at the examples of the successes of the private-public-people partnership pro bono practice and how, for example, the Conference organizers, The Law Society of Singapore, BABSEA CLE and BABSEA CLE Singapore are helping pro bono practice become an attractive and viable alternative or enhancement or addition to the traditional law practice.”

Also, remember to register for the 4th Annual Asia Pro Bono Conference, to be held in Mandalay, Myanmar from 4 to 7 September 2015. The 4th Annual Asia Pro Bono Conference will include an additional day focusing on legal ethics and responsibility, and will also focus on pro bono opportunities in Myanmar. Register today at <https://www.probonoconference.org/register/> to be a part of the growing pro bono movement across the region and around the world!

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Source: Survey Monkey survey circulated by BABSEA CLE following 3rd Asia Pro Bono Conference



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