



### **The 12<sup>th</sup> Asia Pro Bono Conference**

The Asia Pro Bono Conference | 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> December, 2023  
Cebu City, the Philippines and virtually

“The Evolution of Empowering Pro Bono and Access to Justice”

Cebu City, the Philippines, 1-3 December 2023 – The 12<sup>th</sup> Asia Pro Bono Conference (12APBC), the largest annual gathering of persons supporting or engaged in access to justice, pro bono and public interest law in Asia, brought **over 400 participants, from 30 countries, together** to emphasize and celebrate pro bono and access to justice related work being conducted throughout Asia, and globally. Held from December 1-3, 2023, this annual gathering was organized by the Philippines **National Organizing Committee (NOC) and Local Organizing Committee (LOC)** in conjunction with the International **Asia Pro Bono Consortium**.

The 12th Asia Pro Bono Conference was honoured to feature a keynote address by Chief Justice Alexander G. Gesmundo of the Supreme Court of the Philippines. His insights and perspectives set the stage for meaningful discussions on the role of legal professionals in advancing access to justice.

The 12APBC offered a genuine opportunity to be an integral part of the Asia and Global Pro Bono Movement as well as to contribute to improving access to justice for the most vulnerable populations. It provided a key opportunity for stakeholders to develop, explore and share pro bono and access to justice initiatives and projects that strengthen justice and Rule of Law in Asia and internationally. The conference brought together a diverse collection of lawyers, paralegals, academics, law students, jurists, as well as governmental policy makers, civil society, non-profit and for-profit business representatives. The conference provided participants a unique platform to engage with each other, share and learn, inspire and be inspired by the positive impact of pro

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bono on the lives of some of the region's most disadvantaged individuals and marginalised communities.

In its commitment to fostering socially aware legal professionals, the conference supported the development of socially aware, legal service providers, who will actively participate, advocate and lead pro bono initiatives as a means to strengthen access to justice on behalf of people in fragile or vulnerable situations. Additionally, the conference instilled and strengthened in the participants their knowledge, shared experiences, skills and values, to achieve these goals. This year, the conference addressed a number of key thematic topics and areas of vital interest.

### **Sessions and Presenters**

It brought **114 presenters** and hosted a multitude of **33 diverse sessions**, interactive workshops and presentations, all led by experienced local, regional and international participants engaged in supporting and strengthening pro bono initiatives. This consisted of 31 hybrid sessions and 2 virtual sessions, in total **33 sessions** as follows:

1. The Evolution of Empowering Pro Bono
2. Progressing SDGs in Asia: Maximising Legal Pro Bono
3. From Inequality to Equality: The Importance of Pro Bono in Criminal Justice and Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare
4. How ESGs and Pro Bono Work Together
5. Pro Bono Cross Border Litigation for Migrant Workers' Cases: Issues and Challenges
6. Innovative Approaches and Emerging Areas of Refugee Rights Pro Bono
7. The Role of Fellowships in Promoting Pro Bono Lawyering in South Asia
8. Legal Empowerment and Pro Bono Synergy: Overcoming and Closing Access to Justice Gaps for Grassroots and Marginalized Communities
9. A Jam Session: Engagement of Pro Bono Initiatives with Youth and New Actors
10. 2023 Asia Pro Bono Roundtable Quarter 4 – Student Pro Bono
11. The Role of Bar Associations in Supporting Pro Bono
12. Public Interest Lawyering at the Regional Level: Knowledge Sharing and Network-Building
13. Combating SGBV through Pro Bono and Legal Aid and Paralegal Supports
14. Pro Bono Through Legal Clinic in Universities
15. How Law Firms Can Promote Pro Bono Initiatives and Access to Justice – A Case Study with White & Case
16. Organising a Pro Bono Week in Your Jurisdiction
17. How to Promote Asian Pro Bono Network of “Business and Human Rights” for Human Security in Asia: A New Approach to Protection (by Access to Remedy

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- through Grievance Mechanism) and Empowerment (by Access to Education and Work) of Refugees by Multi-stakeholders' Network
18. Integrating Pro Bono into the Law Curriculum: The University of Phayao School of Law's Street Law Clinic Experience
  19. Pro Bono and Access to Justice Partnerships: Public, Private, and People
  20. Re-Humanizing Victims of Sexual Exploitation Through Home Industry and Legal Literacy Activities
  21. Role of Clearing Houses in an Evolving Ecosystem
  22. Nurturing Future Public Interest Lawyers Through Competitions and Social Change Projects – Exploring its Regional Potential
  23. Righting The Wrongs of Unjust Drug Laws: The Need for Gender-Sensitive And Community-Led Approaches
  24. Breaking Barriers: Pro Bono Services for Access to Justice for People with Disabilities
  25. "Access to Justice" – A Film Inspired by True Stories
  26. Empowering Future Legal Professionals: Showcasing a Successful Collaborative Pro Bono Initiative in Justice Education
  27. Righting the Wrongs of Unjust Drug Laws: The Need for Gender-Sensitive and Community-Led Approaches
  28. Juvenile Justice Pro Bono: Enhancing Legal and Social Support for Youth and Families
  29. Pro Bono Lawyering and Access to Justice for Climate Displacement
  30. Strategic Pro Bono Program for Environmental Advocates in the Digital Age
  31. Ensuring Access to Justice in Climate-Impacted Riverine Chars of Bangladesh
  32. Representation at the Intersection of Culture and Trauma: Lessons from the Field
  33. Pro Bono and Access to Justice for Refugees and Forcefully Displaced Persons: A Special Focus on Afghan Refugees in UK and Pakistan

While the main working language of the Conference was English, the organizers continued their commitment to accessibility by providing partial or substantial interpretation in additional languages. This year, interpretation services were available for participants in languages such as Lao, Mongolian, and Vietnamese. The availability of interpretation services allowed participants who may not be fluent in English to fully engage in the conference, ensuring that diverse voices and perspectives were actively included in discussions. Additionally, it contributed to cultural sensitivity by acknowledging and accommodating linguistic differences, fostering an environment where participants felt heard and understood regardless of their native language. Moreover, interpretation fostered regional and global networking and the exchange of ideas. The availability of interpretation services

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promoted inclusive networking opportunities, breaking language barriers and encouraging participants to connect with a diverse range of professionals.

### **Silent Auction**

As in years past, the conference also held a Silent Auction, where participants donated items from their home countries for others to bid on and buy. This year, the fund-raised amount of 2,605 USD from the Silent Auction was donated to the Integrated Bar of the Philippines (IBP) Cebu City Chapter to support their work in ensuring access to justice for all.

### **Asia Pro Bono Conference Tradition: Snack Sharing**

Continuing the delightful tradition that has been a part of previous APBC gatherings, the participants were encouraged to bring a snack from their home countries to share with others during the refreshment breaks. These snacks were available during the entire three days of the conference.

This tradition provided a wonderful opportunity to introduce the diverse flavours of different cultures to participants from across the region and the world. Each snack was thoughtfully displayed with a small sign indicating its country of origin, allowing everyone to appreciate the rich tapestry of our global community.

The Snack Sharing area was vibrant with activities as participants engaged in discussion about the sessions, fostering networking opportunities while enjoying , and discussing, the snacks from various countries.

### **Pro Bono Bazaar**

One of the many successful parts of the APBC is what is known as the “**Pro Bono Bazaar**”. The Pro Bono Bazaar provided organizations, firms, social enterprises, businesses, and others a space to showcase their pro bono, access to justice, or community support-related work and share it with others.

The primary purpose of organizing the Pro Bono Bazaar is in line with the main aim of the Asia Pro Bono Conference, which is to create opportunities for pro bono partnership building and future pro bono collaborations, and also showcase other community support work.

### **Online Networking Opportunity**

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The Conference utilized an event app which offered a dynamic platform that enabled participants to connect and network, access real time information, receive timely reminders and notification. The app facilitated easy networking opportunities, allowing participants from diverse backgrounds and countries to connect virtually and build meaningful professional relationships. Additionally, for those attending virtually, the app provided a centralized space for virtual collaboration, enabling seamless communication and interaction among remote participants.

By incorporating the event app, the 12th Asia Pro Bono Conference aimed to create a more connected and accessible environment, fostering collaboration and engagement among participants, whether they were physically present in Cebu City or attending virtually.

### **Global Pro Bono Move**

As in years past, this Global Pro Bono Move informal gathering, walk-jog-run, was organized as part of the 12th Asia Pro Bono Conference to provide participants with an opportunity to engage in physical activity and combine the passion for pro bono work with a commitment to a healthy lifestyle. The walk-jog-run took place on Sunday, 3 December, at 6 am. Participants of all fitness levels were encouraged to join, ensuring that everyone could participate at their own pace, and more than 30 of them got up early and did. The event aimed to promote a healthy lifestyle and create a refreshing atmosphere for networking and socializing among conference fellows. The walk/jog/run started from the Waterfront Hotel to the IT City area, which is conveniently situated across the street from the conference venue. This early morning timing allowed participants to kickstart their day with a rejuvenating physical activity session before the conference activities commenced.

### **Justice Cultural Performance**

The Justice Cultural Performance is another core tradition of the Asia Pro Bono Conference, where the participants from each country gathered to perform justice cultural performances. The performances lasting about 2-3 minutes involved participants from many of the countries attending the conference getting together and preparing a song/dance/poem or something else that symbolises a part of their country's culture and linked to access to justice or fairness/ethics, and/or supporting others. This year, there were performances from participants from 25 countries.

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The Justice Cultural Performance was part of the Conference Dinner on 1 December 2023. Participants dressed up with their cultural dresses and enjoyed participating in the performances of different countries. Beyond the entertainment, the Justice Cultural Performance served as a platform for justice and cultural networking, fostering a sense of friendship and collaboration, and positive energy among participants.

This has always been one of the greatest connective ties of the APBC and we are very pleased to have this continue this year.

In addition, the relaxed and sociable atmosphere provided by these Asia Pro Bono Conference traditions allowed participants to connect on a more personal level, fostering relationships that extend beyond the conference setting.

On the cultural side, the 12APBC also included a complete array of Philippines and local Cebu performances throughout. These magnificent musical and dancing shows provided an incredibly warm and heartfelt welcoming element for all of the participants.

### **Conference Dinners**

With generous supports from the Province of Cebu and the Cebu City Government, the Conference treated participants to two dinners on the first day and second day of the Conference (1-2 December 2023). The Conference Justice Cultural Dinner on 1 December was sponsored by the Gov. Garcia of the Province of Cebu, and took place at the Waterfront Hotel. The second Conference Dinner on 2 December was sponsored by the Cebu City Government, and it was held at the NUSTAR Resort.

These supports enhanced the networking opportunities for the participants. Such support not only contributed to the participants' overall conference experience but also added a layer of depth to the Asia Pro Bono Conference, providing a platform for meaningful connections and collaborative initiatives. We are grateful for the supports from the Province of Cebu and the Cebu City Government.

### **Conclusion and Next-Steps (2024 & 2025)**

On behalf of all of the organizers of the 12APBC, the Secretariat (BABSEACLE) extends our gratitude to all participants, presenters, supporters, and sponsors for making the 12th Asia Pro Bono Conference a resounding success in promoting access to justice and pro bono work throughout Asia and beyond.

As to next steps, after the resounding success of the 12th Asia Pro Bono Conference (and A2JX), we are thrilled to announce that in 2024, we are taking a strategic pause

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to make room for an even more impactful initiative. While the Asia Pro Bono Conference (APBC) will be on a brief break, we are excited to present the **Access to Justice Exchange (A2JX)** in **November 2024** in **Bangkok, Thailand**.

In 2024, the Asia Pro Bono Consortium has made a strategic decision to allow room for an even more impactful initiative. This pause aligns with our commitment to pro bono principles and allows us to focus on a singular event, maximizing the depth of our engagement.

Our commitment to fostering pro bono collaboration remains unwavering! The APBC & A2JX Secretariat will play a pivotal role in facilitating the Pro Bono Community gathering in Bangkok, Thailand.

The Access to Justice Exchange (A2JX) will take place in conjunction with the [Global Forum](#) during the week of November 11, 2024, hosted by PILnet, a member of the Asia Pro Bono Consortium. The Global Forum spans three days of engaging workshops, networking opportunities, and discussions with our partners on how the law can bolster civil society. Join us at the Access to Justice Exchange, scheduled just before and after the Forum.

**Mark Your Calendar for 2025:** The 13th Asia Pro Bono Conference & Access to Justice Exchange in Mongolia! As we gear up for a brief pause in 2024, we're already looking forward to the future. Save the date for the 13th Asia Pro Bono Conference & Access to Justice Exchange in 2025 in Mongolia (most likely in September or October). Get ready for another round of enriching discussions, meaningful connections, and pro bono collaboration!

Thank you for being an integral part of the Asia Pro Bono community. Together, let's continue making a positive impact and advancing access to justice globally.

Stay tuned for more updates and details. We can't wait to see you in Bangkok in 2024 and Mongolia in 2025!