

The Cyrus R. Vance Center for International Justice Initiatives

“A Profession Supportive of Democracy”

Strategy Summit for the Americas

New York, March 3-5, 2005

Objectives of the Summit

This conference seeks to address the role of our profession in support of a democracy by focusing on areas in which our profession is uniquely situated to contribute to civic society. Much is occurring across the Americas in the areas of pro bono legal assistance, access to justice, legal education and the judicial reform. Many of you have been leaders in efforts to deepen the involvement of our profession in these areas that we believe are of critical importance to democratic societies.

Pro Bono Conferences held in Argentina, Chile and Brazil since 2001 brought many of us together to discuss pro bono as one means of enhancing access to justice. At these Pro Bono Conferences, it became apparent to a number of us that pro bono could not be considered in isolation. Pro bono is part of a strategy to improve access to justice for the poor. Access to justice, however, is broader than simply having the services of a lawyer. It should also incorporate public confidence in the fairness, transparency and efficiency of the judicial system and the legal profession; in government policies that address societal needs; and in a developed public understanding of legal rights.

From this, we at the Vance Center have identified what we call the "four pillars" of a legal system:

- Access to justice;
- A fair and equitable judicial system;
- Fair and equitable government policies; and
- Legal ethics.

These pillars support the legal superstructure of a democratic society. Like a building supported by four pillars, weakness in any of these weakens the whole.

This Summit brings together leaders of the legal profession from bar associations, private firms, law schools and legal NGOs from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico and the United States, along with participants from Spain, South Africa and the World Bank. We are persuaded that there is much to be learned through our exchange of ideas and experiences. Specifically, among the potential benefits and, consequently, among the objectives of this Strategy Summit are:

- Identifying initiatives that can be adapted to specific countries and implemented locally;
- Learning from practices in other countries as to similar challenges;

Focusing upon the pro bono chain, that is the mutually dependent relationship of bar associations, law firms, law schools and NGOs in providing legal services to the poor;
Identifying mechanisms for greater collaboration between bar associations in different jurisdictions.

In particular we hope that the Summit will serve to obtain the commitment of the leaders of the profession here gathered to advance the drafting and consideration of a statement of principles regarding our profession's ethical obligations to the poor: a Pro Bono Declaration of the Americas. We hope that this effort might begin at this Summit in order to negotiate a draft to be presented at the next regional Pro Bono Conference to take place in 2006.

It is a lawyer's privilege to enjoy an intellectually varied and challenging profession in which reason, words and the law are our tools; it is a lawyer's responsibility to recognize that with that privilege and with the mastery of those tools come responsibilities to society. With you, leaders in our profession from across this hemisphere, we look forward to discussing the nature of these responsibilities and learning from each other how they may better be discharged.