

Inter-Pacific Bar Association 19th Annual Conference
Participating Scholar's Report

“Looking Back From Within- My Reflection on Attending
the 19th Annual IPBA Conference”

by
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Upon knowing that I was chosen as one of the five scholars who will be attending the IPBA Conference in Manila, I had mixed emotions. Of course I was more than happy and honoured as it was a chance for me to attend such a prestigious conference of such a highly regarded association of international lawyers. But at the same time, it did beckon upon me that I am a lawyer coming from a jurisdiction that it is still categorized as a developing country. Finishing my law studies at the University of the Philippines, having worked as a junior associate lawyer in one of the most prestigious law firms in the Philippines and as the legal officer of the The Philippine Stock Exchange, Inc., and now currently taking my post-graduate studies in Japan, my fellow Filipinos would say that I am part of the country's elite. But looking back once again, at the international level, I am a citizen of a country that has still a whole lot of work to do when it comes to economic development and uplifting the status of its poor.

Filipino lawyers and the practice of law in the Philippines is said to be one of the best in the world. We write our pleadings, memos and opinions in perfect English; argue before judges using the most sophisticated legalistic words that a lawyer can use; most of our commercial laws are patterned after the American jurisdiction; and our cross-border practice is at par with the best law firms world-wide, a reason why well-known foreign law firms seek the services of our local law firms to work in collaboration with them. But at the same time, lawyers practicing in a developing country, have to deal with this important question: did my day's work made a difference in making better the life of my fellow countrymen?

However, with regards to the conference itself, I did like the theme “Coping With Diversity and Change”. It is very timely indeed in a time when the world has been badly hit by an economic crisis whose effects are felt in all industries however big or small, resulting to the mass lay-off of employees, including lawyers, and creating an air of uncertainty on what the future might bring. Although my politics may not be in agreement with that of our current President, I am pleased to hear that she appears to be well liked and leaves a good, strong impression to the foreigners with whom I have met and asked. She did mention one thing that I would have to agree very much and that is that lawyers in the conduct of their profession do have the personal responsibility in preventing the commission of fraud and misdoings of their clients. Especially when such wrongful behaviour is often the cause of the financial collapse and the public's loss of trust in the institutions that are suppose to regulate and prevent such acts. Instead of blindly doing what our principals would want us to do, without regard as to its appropriateness and legality, us lawyers have that responsibility to uphold propriety and

obedience to the proper standards and regulations, and ensure that our clients understand and abide to them at the same time.

Also, one of the best opportunities that were given to me as one of the scholars of this year's conference was the chance to serve as both host and ambassador of the Philippines to the foreign guests. The former is natural to me as a Filipino. I do believe that the Filipino is the friendliest, warmest and most hospitable person in the world. As many may have noticed during their interactions with their Filipino colleagues, us, Filipinos, taking into consideration our Asian background, have no qualms in speaking to strangers, and are open in explaining why something happens to be so, even if talking about it might be awkward or even embarrassing for a person of a different nationality. The latter, on the other hand, does not come so easy for me, since up to know I still have my share of dissatisfaction of how some things have not changed in my country and how it could be so frustrating to have such things changed. According to my sister, who is also a lawyer and now stationed as a Foreign Service officer to Germany, to become your country's ambassador, you have to showcase your country's best to the world. In my case, not only am I proud of my country's good points, unfortunately, I have no qualms in discussing my country's weak points to foreigners as well. This stems from my believe that to truly change, it is important to not only know how the person from the outside sees you, but also to assure to that person that you are aware of your weaknesses and are open in discussing such issues with them.

On another note, speaking of cultural diplomacy, after being away from my country for more than two years, I was very, very proud in knowing that through the presentations, dance, and singing of our local performing groups, we were able to showcase to the attending members of the IPBA the unique and beautiful Filipino culture of my country.

Lastly, I was very impressed with the sessions that were prepared by the committee members, and would like to congratulate them once again for their great work. It was obvious to all of us that they took time off from their very busy schedules to produce well-planned and informative sessions on various aspects of international law practice. Every minute that I spent in attending the sessions was worth it. The materials were very informative, and the well-chosen speakers are indeed very knowledgeable and respected in their fields. It also allowed me to make new friends among the sessions' attendees and catch up with old friends who came to attend as well. As an added bonus, and something I am personally extra grateful for, though my attendance in this year's conference, I was able to acquire substantial Mandatory Continuing Legal Education credits, which is required in the continuing practice of law in the Philippines. Also, I was fortunate to have been able to attend sessions where the topic focused on arbitration and dispute resolution, a topic that is related to my master's graduation thesis that I am currently writing about.

Also, I would like to take this opportunity to thank once again the IPBA for giving me this wonderful experience that I am sure to never forget. To all who made our experience and stay enjoyable and fruitful, we will forever be beholden and grateful and I

hope that I will be able to repay your kindness and generosity in the future. I am also very proud to say that I was once a student of President Rafael A. Morales, from whom I have learned a lot. I am also very lucky to have met and become friends with the other scholars coming from Sri Lanka, Cambodia and Myanmar, people whose countries I very much admire and would like to work more closely with in my future career.