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IPBA Scholar, 2013

Philippines (currently in Tokyo, Japan)

I had never attended an IPBA conference before, so my expectations were set by interacting with people whom I had met throughout my career. Delegates to previous conferences unanimously said that the conference was an invaluable networking opportunity, and the IPBA Secretariat recommended that we bring at least five hundred business cards to exchange with others. In an event for lawyers in Tokyo, I met Tatsuki Nakayama, and it turned out that he was part of the IPBA Scholarship Committee. We talked about what the upcoming conference would be like and to say that I became excited about attending is an understatement.

On the first day of the conference, Amit Acco, Vice-Chair of the Scholarship Committee, accompanied us to the Seoul High Court. Judge Jun Hwa Jeong took us to a court to watch a civil proceeding, and I was impressed at how technology has permeated itself into the practice of law. The documentary evidence for the case was being projected on a screen, so that everybody in the court could see exactly which part of the document was being discussed. It was a welcome reminder that the legal profession adapts to the times and embraces progress. Next, we headed to Gangnam-gu for lunch at the Yoon and Yang law office.

The warm welcome reception for scholars, new members and women business lawyers was a great introduction to the IPBA. Suresh Divyanathan, Membership Committee Chair, gave tips for new members (contribute to the IPBA journal, go to as many committee sessions as possible during the annual conference, etc.) I met many lawyers from Taiwan, India and a host of other countries, and reconnected with familiar faces from the Philippines and Japan.

The next day, I attended the plenary session where managing partners shared their insights about the Asia-Pacific legal market. It was encouraging to hear the forecast that in seven years' time, the share of Asia-Pacific in the global legal market would double. I take this as a sign that not only is the region

becoming more prosperous, but also with this prosperity would come a greater awareness about the importance of law in society. It truly is a good time to be in the region.

For the rest of the conference, I made it a point to attend not only committee sessions related to my work (cross-border investment and competition law), but also sessions on areas such as arbitration and taxation so I could enhance my knowledge of these areas. In the talk about Unusual Cross-Border Contracts, I learned that if a foreign investor enters into a legal stability agreement with the Peruvian government, the legal regime at that time would be frozen, and the contract could no longer be amended even by subsequent legislation. This was a very new concept for me, because I had always thought that the principle that future laws can affect already-existing contracts was a universal principle (much like perhaps, the concept of good faith and fair dealing). I also learned that in football contracts, a third party can invest in the training of a promising new player, and thereafter, when such player is bought out by a wealthier club, the third party can get a share of the transfer fee paid by the wealthier club for the player. I wondered out loud to my seatmate if the same concept could be applied for other employment contracts where the first employer spends a great deal on training an employee who is subsequently pirated.

Aside from the legal conferences, I made sure to attend the breakfast session on inter-Korean relations. At the time of the conference, tensions between North and South Korea were very high, so the talk was very thought-provoking and comforting (in the sense that we could understand the context of the recent events). The Gala Night, Dramia event dinner and Young Lawyers' Night provided additional opportunities to sample traditional food, play Korean games, check out the Seoul nightclub scene and meet more people in casual settings.

On the last morning of the conference, the scholars gave short presentations on business etiquette in our home countries. A few days before that, we practiced our speeches with the members of the Scholarship Committee led by Varya Simpson, and they gave very helpful feedback. The talks by my fellow scholars

were all very informative, and it was interesting to see how certain practices in some countries (like small gifts) could be viewed very differently in other jurisdictions.

After the annual general meeting, we greeted Lalit Bhasin, the immediate Past President. He advised us, the young scholars, to grow as lawyers. I was quite puzzled, so I added that we also hope to grow in the IPBA. He smiled and explained that we should first grow as lawyers, because it is only by being good lawyers that we can grow in the IPBA.

I went back to Tokyo after the conference, refreshed and feeling extra inspired to take on new challenges at work. Armed with newfound knowledge from the conference sessions and with insights gained from new contacts, I hope to continue growing as an international business lawyer through my work and through involvement in the IPBA. After attending my first IPBA conference, I now understand what people mean when they say that it is an invaluable networking opportunity: the best part of the association is its members and there is no better place to see this than in the conference.