

## **Diversity and Opportunity: Scholar's Report on the 19<sup>th</sup> IPBA Annual Conference in Manila**

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Since the IPBA members who attended the recent 19th Annual Conference held in Manila probably know every significant detail of the dozens of intellectually stimulating study sessions and the glitzy social activities held during the three-day conference proper, I have chosen to dedicate this report in describing some of the wonderful persons that I met at the Conference, in particular, my fellow IPBA scholars (hereafter also affectionately referred to as "mates").

I had the good fortune of exchanging professional and personal experiences with four bright and talented young lawyers whose skills I'm sure will take them on a skyrocketing trajectory in the near future.

Rethy Seng, a "Rule of Law Specialist" from the USAID-Cambodia Office, arrived at our hotel without his luggage. He was told that they got "lost" in transit at some point during the Phnom Penh-Bangkok leg of his flight to Manila. Despite this unfortunate happenstance, Rethy was upbeat the first time I met him in the morning of our first day together, April 29. We exchanged business cards and I learned right away about the case of the lost baggage. Tort cases involving airline passengers immediately came to mind. So I assured him that I and our fellow scholars will help him draft a solid Complaint that will fetch thousands of dollars in judgment award. For good measure, you can throw in a line claiming moral damages for the serious mental anguish that you suffered by showing up for the first day of the conference without a change of clothes, I added.

On our way to the Makati Regional Trial Court for the Court Observation prepared by the IPBA Manila Host Committee, Rethy and I swapped stories about non-profit work having previously worked myself in a USAID-funded study for a minority group and internally displaced persons. Rethy, happily married with kids, travels most of the time due to the demands of his work, yet you don't find any hint of weariness in his demeanor. In fact, he was running a

fever during the first two days of the conference and yet actively participated in all the activities. He listens to you attentively and happily offers a carefully thought out idea or funny but relevant anecdote based on his treasure trove of experiences.

Win Naing, who is running the show in his own firm based in Yangon, Myanmar, is a thoughtful and very practical person. An early riser, he was always done with his breakfast by the time the rest of us settle in at the breakfast table at half past seven in the morning during our four days together at the hotel.

You can tell that Win is always on the lookout for opportunities to learn new things. During the half day Court Observation, for instance, the Hon. Alaraz, Presiding Judge of Makati RTC's Branch 62, received a good deal of questions from Win. He memorialized the interesting stuff that he witnessed by diligently taking digital snapshots throughout our half-day court visit. Win, a vegetarian for more than a decade now, gave me (and I assume my three other mates) a beautiful souvenir from Myanmar.

One cannot help but notice the admirable qualities of Nadia Ishaq the moment you meet her: intelligence, eloquence and wit. Nadia is a UK- and US-educated young lawyer currently based in Sri Lanka. She's contemplating on relocating to Singapore and I suspect that it's partly because she wants to avail of the early bird package for the 2010 IPBA Singapore Conference. Nadia got along well quickly with the rest of us despite being the only fair lady in the group. A Sri Lankan through and through who can describe to you in vivid detail the party scene in her beloved Colombo, she never threatened to remove my name from her Christmas list when I mistakenly thought that she was from India.

I attended a number of study sessions with Nadia, including the Regulation of Hedge Funds session and the one on Trade Law Risk in International M&As, and also joined her at the dinner table during several Conference galas, which gave me lots of chances to pick her brains. Thanks to her, I now know a living person who's actually tone deaf. Interestingly, despite her confession that she's tone deaf, she loves to hit the dance floor and sway to whatever music's

playing. She also likes shoes very much. Hours before the Welcome Reception held on the 29<sup>th</sup> of April, she broke the heel of her shoes. When the good lawyers of JG Law kindly took her to the Mall of Asia to buy a replacement, she grabbed three pairs in a jiffy.

Finally, there is Ronald De Vera, whose reputation precedes him. He ranked second in the 2004 Philippine bar examinations so one can just imagine the scores of ladies wishing to get his attention at social gatherings. He was a sophomore law student when I first stepped into the notoriously scary halls of law school as a freshman. We became classmates in Transportation Law. Three years after that, he was headline news.

Ron and I crossed paths again here in Kyushu University. One day, while we were working in the common computer room at the University, we found out that we were both granted an IPBA scholarship. So naturally, we took the same flight to Manila—which turned out to be a very memorable one as the plane was minutes away from taking off without him after a brief stop-over in Taiwan. I pleaded with the airline staff and Taiwanese immigration officer who went onboard when told about a missing passenger. Moments later, airport personnel said they “found” him. Ron *senpai* is a very affable and articulate person. It’s amazing how he can strike a meaningful conversation even with complete strangers and consequently elicit fresh information from them. He is fluent in Japanese and in dance moves from various genres.

The IPBA Conference did not only provide a chance to widen my professional network, update my knowledge of the areas of law that interest me and make me aware of the current issues facing lawyers of various practice areas and jurisdictions during these turbulent times. It was also an occasion to meet familiar faces, strike new friendships and rekindle past relations. For instance, at the Conference, I ran into a lawyer based in Singapore, whom I first met as a law student at the 2006 Jean Pictet International Humanitarian Law Competition in Serbia. Every night, I had the rare chance of sharing the dinner table and exchanging thoughts with leading legal professionals from different jurisdictions such as Vietnam, Brazil, Hong Kong, Australia, China, Philippines, Japan, Singapore, India, US, UK, Taiwan, Indonesia and Malaysia, to name a few. I also became friends with and enjoyed the company of our colleagues

from India. We showed them around the Philippine's financial district and there took pleasure in discussing with some of them special economic zones, intellectual property practice in India and Indian food.

There are of course many other equally wonderful persons worth mentioning in this piece, including: Ms. Noor Meurling and Ms. Varya Simpson of the Scholarship Committee, who warmly welcomed us and made us feel comfortable despite drowning in a sea of highly accomplished lawyers from all over the world; Ms. Midori Hirano, who helped make things easier for the visiting scholars; Atty. Jose Jimenez and the lawyers from his firm, who accompanied us during the Court Observation and hosted a hearty lunch for the scholars; and brilliant resource persons like Mr. Lawrence Schaner, whom I met during the Electronic Discovery study session and who was kind enough to answer my queries despite the fact that he was not a speaker during that session, and Mr. Joseph Murphy, who entertained my questions even after the session on Corruption and Cross-Border Investment.

The diversity of lawyers, jurisdictions, experiences and expertise at the recent 19<sup>th</sup> IPBA Conference truly gave us scholars a rich and memorable experience. For that, I extend once more my sincere thanks to the IPBA leadership, the Scholarship Committee and Secretariat, and the entire membership of the IPBA.