

THE NEW YORK CITY BAR ASSOCIATION CYRUS R. VANCE CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE

The Cyrus R. Vance Center for International Justice supports lawyers around the world working to promote democratic values, protect human rights and ensure access to justice. Established in 2003, the Vance Center is named in honor of Cyrus R. Vance, a past president of the New York City Bar Association and former U.S. Secretary of State, whose career exemplified the role of a lawyer in a democratic society.



GLOBAL PRO BONO CLEARINGHOUSE



The Global Pro Bono Clearinghouse matches non-government organizations (“NGOs”) with attorneys who provide free legal assistance, thus enabling the Vance Center to bring together public interest legal projects and volunteer lawyers to support social justice and economic development in Africa and Latin America. The Vance Center helps structure the projects and monitors the work as it proceeds. Initially the Clearinghouse recruited only U.S. firms to provide pro bono services to foreign NGOs and institutions, but over time our scope has expanded such that we now also develop projects for referral to local law firms in Africa and Latin America.

The Clearinghouse refers projects within several major categories: Amicus Network, Legal Research, Law Reform, and NGO Direct Assistance.

Amicus Network

The Amicus Network coordinates the filing of *amicus curiae* briefs in cutting edge public interest and human rights cases brought before both national courts and regional and international human rights tribunals. Amicus briefs referred through the Clearinghouse have addressed issues such as freedom of speech; freedom of the press; discrimination based on gender and sexual preference; domestic violence; and access to information. Amicus briefs filed by third parties provide valuable information to judges by giving them additional perspectives and analyses of international norms and standards that might not be provided by the litigants themselves.

Amicus briefs prepared by law firms pro bono have been filed to:

- Argue that termination of a female police officer for filing a domestic violence complaint violates international laws and emerging standards prohibiting sex discrimination (Chile);
- Promote the right of public access to information regarding food safety and genetically modified crops (Chile);
- Argue that the arbitrary government closure of two television stations constitutes a violation of free speech and due process (Venezuela);
- Protect the free speech rights of a police officer terminated for telling a political joke (Chile);
- Secure equal protection rights for gay, bisexual and transgender persons (Colombia); and
- Affirm the right of public access to state-held environmental information (Chile).



Legal Research

The Clearinghouse facilitates the preparation of innovative research in support of efforts to:

- Curtail “cooperation laws” designed to restrict the activities of human rights organizations and NGOs by harassing them with burdensome governmental requirements (Venezuela);
- Impose civil liability for crimes against humanity committed by non-state actors (Argentina);
- Protect the citizenship rights of children born to non-naturalized parents (Dominican Republic);
- Improve legal frameworks for sustainable agriculture, forestry and tourism (eight Latin American countries);
- Defeat a proposed law imposing the death penalty for homosexuality (Uganda);
- Provide a comparative analysis of counterintelligence laws with respect to curtailment of civil rights (Venezuela); and
- Provide comparative analysis of laws affecting the quality of care for children with cancer (Argentina, Colombia, Peru).



Law Reform

The Clearinghouse spearheads initiatives to produce legislation that strengthens democratic institutions. Examples include proposals for legislation to:

- Remove tax disincentives that discourage contributions to nonprofit organizations (Chile);
- Encourage individuals to commit private property to conservation protection (Chile);
- Combat gender-based violence (eight countries in Africa); and
- Implement the UN Convention on Disability Rights by proposing local legislation to bring countries that are signatories of the convention into compliance (in development).

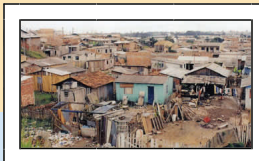
Partnerships and Signature Projects

The Clearinghouse is in the process of expanding its scope through the establishment of partnerships with human rights and public interest NGOs in Africa and Latin America to provide substantial support and assistance on impact litigation and complex projects. It also plans to initiate “signature projects” to create specialized practice groups consisting of U.S. lawyers with expertise in certain aspects of public interest law and their counterparts at NGOs in Africa and Latin America, which will enable them to work together on long term projects in such areas as: disability rights, environmental sustainability, economic development, women’s rights, access to information, and government accountability.

NGO Direct Assistance

The Clearinghouse assists NGOs to build capacity and to support their programs. Pro bono attorneys have assisted NGOs to:

- Incorporate as a nonprofit tax-exempt entity (United States);
- Protect proprietary information such as service marks and trademarks (Mexico);
- Qualify to engage in environmental activities (Namibia); and
- Analyze contracts relating to the donation of computers to rural schools (Argentina).



The South-South Network



As part of its effort to strengthen the Clearinghouse and to facilitate a dialogue between human rights advocates in Africa and Latin America, the Vance Center has assisted in the formation of a “South-South” human rights network. With the recent establishment of the new African Court for Human and People’s Rights, the regional human rights systems in Africa and Latin America have become substantially similar. On each continent there is now a region-wide human rights commission charged with promoting and protecting human rights and a human rights court with adjudicatory powers. Recognizing the similarities in the two systems, the Vance Center initiated a “South-South” dialogue to enable human rights advocates in the two regions to share information and ideas. To direct the work of the network, a steering committee of human rights activists from the two regions has been set up to exchange information and develop joint projects. *A Partnership Between Africa and Latin America to Promote Access to Justice*, published by the Vance Center in 2009 and available at our website,

www.VanceCenter.org, further describes our work in this area.

VanceNet: Global Network for Justice Advocates

To strengthen the work of the Clearinghouse, the Vance Center has launched VanceNet, an online community of lawyers and other advocates around the world seeking to share information and ideas regarding ways to expand access to justice. The site includes a blog, a directory and a library. It reports on recent news and legal developments, and allows groups to engage in discussion, share resources, and collaborate on projects. Register at www.VanceNet.org.

Invitation to Participate

Lawyers interested in taking on pro bono assignments through the Clearinghouse are encouraged to contact the Vance Center. Though our initiatives are international in nature, the majority of Clearinghouse work does not require travel. Lawyers will generally be working in conjunction with foreign firms that will be responsible for researching local law. Foreign language ability is not a prerequisite for Clearinghouse projects.