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President's Report, Annual Membership Meeting 8 December 2023

2023 Theme: Continuing education and expanding frontiers.

Thank you for the privilege of being the 57th President of the Philippine Bar Association & its Sixth Female President. I became a member of the PBA in the 1990s & first answered the call to serve that same decade. We worked even then to uphold the Rule of Law with PBA lawyers who risked threats to careers in order to extract & protect the Truth.

The story of the PBA is a story of COURAGE. The PBA is the oldest voluntary national association of lawyers in the Philippines. It traces its roots to the Colegio de Abogados de Filipinas organized on 8 April 1891 and the Bar Association organized by American lawyers in the Philippines in 1900. Since then, the country of its residence has gone through tumult & calm. Anger & peace. Rage & joy.

Through it all, the PBA has been an independent advocate of the Rule of Law. It is a Beacon of Hope that eventually where we are now WILL be the greener pasture where Truth and Kindness prevail.

The story of the PBA is also a story of RELEVANCE. As committed at the start of this term & at the Induction in the Supreme Court of the Board & Advisers by the Honorable Chief Justice Alexander G. Gesmundo, we worked towards continuing legal & professional education & opening & expanding regional & international frontiers.

These opportunities remain diverse, as we worked with our local and global linkages for advancement. In March this year, the PBA hosted the international Landmark webinar "Localization and Cross-Border Data Transfers: Asia Update". Professor Laarni Viñas, Co-Chair of PBA's Intellectual Property Committee brought together her colleagues and foremost experts and private practitioners in data privacy from seven jurisdictions – Indonesia, Singapore, Japan, Australia, China, Sri Lanka, the Philippines & LawAsia.

We also liaised from January to December with international bodies including the HCCH (Hague Conference on Private International Law/ Conference de la Haye de Droit International Prive), Unidroit (International Institute for the Unification of Private Law), the Italian Embassy, the College of Consuls, other Embassies and Committees of the United Nations.

In April, PBA practitioners flew to Iloilo to speak with students from law schools in Western Visayas in the seminar "Philippine Law Practice Amidst ASEAN Integration: Challenges & Opportunities". Participants included lawyers and faculty from the region and law students from the Colleges of Law of Central Philippines University, University of San Agustin, University of the Philippines and West Visayas State University. Strong in attendance were the law students from Central Philippines University with their Chairman PBA Vice President Peter Corvera. In November, PBA again provided support to students through the UP Law extension in UP Visayas, Iloilo City.

The PBA also supported the Junior Scholars Symposium on Public International Law with participants from Bicol University and UP Law BGC. This December, it continues to support the Junior Scholars Symposium on International Law involving students from Colleges of Law of Central Philippine University, University of San Agustin, University of the Philippines and West Visayas State University and LL.M. Students from UP College of Law.

In May, the PBA revived the President's Cup, a golf tournament held in the Wack Wack Golf and Country Club. It was a heartwarming reunion of colleagues in friendly competition for good scores on the green, generous raffle prizes and witty contests for legal duffers. News on the event was shared in various media including newspapers, radio, television, social media and live interviews through the kindness of Trustee Abdiel S. Fajardo, among others. Many thanks also to PP Rodelle Bolante, Trustee Chryse Bautista, Professor Dot Balasbas-Gancayco, Past Trustee Ian Malilong, Office Manager Jing Osias and the generosity of the Board, Officers, Advisers, Members, Family and Friends for ensuring a joyful and prize-filled event!

The PBA continued to support the Supreme Court in a number of projects such as promoting the Code of Professional Responsibility and Accountability (CPRA). It signed the CPRA Memorandum of Agreement at its launch by the Supreme Court. The PBA Legislation and Law Reforms Committee also ensured that the PBA Position on Constitutional Amendments was duly submitted to Congress. The PBA participated as private sector convenor in Go Digital Philippines through PP Jose Luis Agcaoili and the Business Law Committee. It also participated in various Technical Working Groups and Industry discussions through Vice Presidents Joel Ayson and Joseph Rebano, Trustee Alfred John Molo, PP Rodel A. Cruz, PP Ruben O. Fruto, PP Rita Linda Jimeno, PP Rico Agcaoili, PP Rico Domingo, PP Maritess Sison Go and Professor Cecile Roque-Quintos. In line with expanding international linkages, the PBA was invited to a number of international conferences and meetings. It attended, among others, the International Conference on New Challenges in Private Law Competition and Financial Law at the Malcolm Theater, UP College of Law.

In October, PBA through PP Fina Dela Cuesta-Tantuico gave a talk to the street children of ChildHope on Children's rights.

In November, Professor Cecile Roque-Quintos, PBA Co-Chair for the PBA Legal Education and Family Law Committee represented PBA and spoke at the Philippines-Japan Law Conference on Marriage Dissolution and Inheritance. Notable also was the continuing participation of PBA in events involving education be these content or structural as in speaking with Members and Industry Partners on the Anti-Money Laundering Act (AMLA), Intellectual Property, Data Transfers, Legal Education, Gender Law, the Rights of Women, Minors, Journalists, Social Media, various regulations and International Linkages.

November also found the PBA invited to and attending the turnover of the Study by the Honorable Associate Justice of the Supreme Court Jhosep Lopez and the lecture of the Honorable Associate Justice of the Supreme Court Maria Filomena D. Singh on Legal Feminism in the Philippine Gender Jurisprudence at the UP College of Law. Later the same day, officers of the PBA attended the launch of the Revised Book of Judicial Forms and Collation of Supreme Court Issuances at the Supreme Court Session Hall.

The Committee on Legal Aid also continued its initiatives as did the Environmental Committee, the International Law Committee and the other Committees of the PBA. The PBA likewise addressed female/ gender linkages and participated in Women's & Family initiatives. This commitment prevailed in the choice of the 131st Foundation Day and Law Day Guest

Speaker, a Female known for her Courage, Leadership & Wisdom, the Fourteenth Vice President of the Republic of the Philippines, Atty. Maria Leonor Santo Tomas Gerona-Robredo.

It is hoped that the PBA shall continue with its dynamic, relevant and versatile multidisciplinary approach to upholding the Rule of Law and- in doing so- continue helping, enlightening & educating its Members, Associates, Communities & Countrymen through these blended opportunities. The theme of continuing education and expanding frontiers has been taken to heart this year. It is hoped that this too shall endure.

Furthermore, the Courage & the Relevance of the Philippine Bar Association will continue to ensure that marks of threats to the Rule of Law are raised to the public consciousness and duly addressed.

We trust and hope in your constancy. Maraming salamat po.