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It was a great honor and privilege to serve as the 58th President of the Philippine Bar Association.

The new year begun with uncertainty and hope, with the landscapes of law shifting and changing. Despite this, the PBA remained steadfast in its volunteerism and commitment to upholding the Rule of Law.

The PBA's commitment stretches beyond the confines of the legal profession. This year, we built significant bridges between the legal community and the Filipino people we serve.

On July 10, the PBA partnered with the Justice George Malcolm Foundation, and the IBP Journal to hold a forum on the Divorce Bill passed on 3rd Reading by the House of Representatives. The forum entitled, "A Right to Unmarry? Divorce and the Constitution" was held in the Malcolm Theater, University of the Philippines College of Law, Diliman. It featured insightful discussions from legal luminaries, former Chief Justice Hilario Davide Jr and Prof. Jaypee Calleja who both spoke for the Anti-Divorce side; and former Associate Justice and Ombudsman Conchita Carpio-Morales and Prof. Patty Sta. Maria who both spoke for the pro-Divorce side. Atty. Paolo Tamase skillfully guided the discussion by asking thought provoking questions to the panelists.

Significantly, the forum saw a passionate and insightful exchange among attendees. The event provided a platform for individuals to share their legal questions and personal experiences regarding divorce, fostering a sense of community and understanding. It also drew more than 600 registrants and was live streamed on several platforms.

On July 26, the PBA in cooperation with the Integrated Bar of the Philippines held a legal forum that focused on Artificial Intelligence (AI). The forum entitled “AI and The Law” was held in the University of the Philippines Bonifacio Global City Auditorium. Prof. Senando Angelo R. Santiago delivered an enlightening introductory lecture entitled “Artificial Intelligence Essentials for Lawyers” that allowed the more than 100 lawyers in attendance to grasp the “Ethical and Legal Considerations of Generative AI Creations on the Philippine Copyright Landscape” lecture of Prof. Darwin P. Angeles. Atty. Christopher Louie D. Ocampo hosted the event and facilitated the open forum.

The participants from the private and public sector earned Mandatory Continuing Legal Education units by attending the legal forum without any fee for registration. Similarly, the forum was live streamed on several platforms.

On September 19, the PBA celebrated its 132nd Foundation Day and Law Day Celebration. The event was held at the Kamagong Room, Manila Golf and Country Club in Makati City with more than 250 of members and guests attended. I am delighted to report that eighteen (18) lawyers were inducted as members of the PBA during the event.

The Board of Trustees and I invited Department of National Defense Secretary Gilberto C. Teodoro, Jr. to deliver the keynote speech. Secretary Teodoro emphasized the role of lawyers in defending the Philippines’ maritime claims. In response to the question of whether the rule of law can overcome a bully, Secretary Teodoro stated that it must, emphasizing that a greater force that prevails without any legal foundation, becomes a bigger bully.

Sec. Teodoro presented a compelling and well-supported speech, demonstrating a thorough command of the subject matter. His delivery was

both engaging and professional, punctuated by well-timed humor that captivated the audience.

The speech urged lawyers of the private and public sector to actively coordinate and cooperate to defend our sovereignty as Filipino people.

On November 11, media powerhouse GMA Network launched the Eleksyon 2025 Partnerships at the GMA Network Center in Quezon City. The alliance aims to unite leading organizations in the fields of telecommunications, media, technology, education, business, law, and public service to provide Filipinos with comprehensive, timely, and accurate information regarding the coming midterm elections. I am pleased to report that the PBA is part of this powerful alliance.

On November 15 to 16, the PBA Legal Aid Committee held a Clinic at the Barangay Hall of Barangay Bagalangit, Mabini, Batangas. PBA trustees and members generously volunteered their time and expertise to provide free legal advice on child custody and support, family relations, correction of entries in public records, and land issues despite the onslaught of Severe Tropical Storm OFEL and Typhoon PEPITO. Truly, distance and circumstance shall not be barriers to the PBA's commitment to volunteerism and professionalism.

In addition to providing legal aid to the residents of Barangay Bagalangit, the volunteers also collectively cleaned up the beach and rocky coastline adjacent to the Asri Dive & Leisure Resort where they were staying.

This year, we successfully fostered stronger connections not only between the legal profession and the Filipino public, but also among our own members.

On May 11, the PBA was invited by Padel Pilipinas, the official Philippine Padel Federation, headed by Senator Pia S. Cayetano, to an introductory session of padel. The session was held at Play Padel in Greenfield District,

Mandaluyong and allowed PBA members to enjoy a fun afternoon with their peers.

On June 20, the PBA held the 2024 PBA President's Cup at the Wack Wack Golf and Country Club. About 50 PBA members and guests played at the West Course, one of two championship courses of said golf club. Through this annual golf tournament, the PBA raises funds for its legal aid projects.

All these projects would not have been possible without the support of our trustees, members and sponsors.

With all the activities conducted this year, we strived to bridge the gaps among different ideologies, generations, professions, while staying true to our commitment. It was a challenge I faced as your president, and I am confident that my successor will continue to steer the PBA as guardians of the truth and champions of the rule of law.

It has been a pleasure to serve the PBA.

Thank you.