

Pro bono profile: Alianza Pro Bono

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Latin Lawyer's 12th annual charity awards ceremony is being held in aid of three of the region's pro bono clearing houses, including Alianza Pro Bono in Peru.



The alliance was founded in 2013 with a mandate to institutionalise pro bono in Peru. The clearing house works with public interest NGOs and has done work on environmental, human trafficking and educational projects.

2017 saw Alianza Pro Bono concentrate on natural disaster relief efforts after Peru suffered its worst flooding in decades, causing some US\$3 billion worth of damage. The clearing house and its member firms are now gearing up to launch a legal aid manual on disaster relief that will be distributed among the NGOs they work with across Peru, as well as state institutions and local government. The manual will also be available online. "Natural disasters aren't a one-off event for Peru, its geographical location means it is prone to such disasters," says Marina Lazarte Zabarburú, executive director of the alliance. "This manual will have all the answers to questions like, 'Where can I go? What rights do I have for my destroyed house?'"

The clearing house also concentrated on indigenous communities in 2017. Along with three of its member firms – Payet, Rey, Cauvi, Pérez Abogados, Lazo, De Romaña & CMB Abogados and Benites, Vargas & Ugaz Abogados – volunteers travelled to the Amazon rainforest to speak with the leaders of the Ashaninka and Nomatsiguenga indigenous communities. The taskforce contained criminal, civil rights and environmental lawyers, who spent a number of days in the jungle providing legal consultations. "They said this was the first time they had been informed of what their rights are," says Lazarte. The group plans to return to the Amazon rainforest to repeat the legal clinics this year.

A new criminal liability law aimed at battling corruption prompted several Peruvian law firms to hire criminal lawyers in 2017. Such hiring sprees had a knock-on effect on the alliance. Ending human trafficking has long been a priority for the clearing house and it is now better equipped to take on such cases. "We're now seeing more Peruvian firms taking on pro bono cases [on social issues such as human trafficking], since more of these firms are opening criminal law practice areas and they now have the expertise to represent clients on these matters," says Lazarte. Last year the clearing house held a workshop to discuss tackling human trafficking. It was attended by representatives from the US embassy in Lima, member firms' lawyers, judges and policemen.

Going into 2018, the subject remains high on Alianza Pro Bono's agenda. "We will continue adding to our efforts to eradicate human trafficking in Peru by assuming the defence of victims in emblematic cases on this subject and supporting the technical training of operators, judges, prosecutors, police and public defenders involved," says Lazarte.

There are other emerging issues that the alliance plans to confront, such as the Venezuelan refugee crisis. The clearing house plans to provide information and consultancy services in relation to the influx of Venezuelan refugees to Peru.

To achieve its goal of institutionalising pro bono in Peru, in 2014 the clearing house launched its Pro Bono Challenge, a competition to get law school students interested in and involved with pro bono work. Students are encouraged to enter and submit a social problem they think needs addressing. The alliance member firms then implement and finance the winning project. “It encourages students to understand the importance of pro bono work from a young age,” says Lazarte. “[It] aims to create a pro bono culture among law students and empower them to become attorneys who go on to do pro bono work in their professional careers.”

Funds raised from Latin Lawyer’s Deal of the Year Awards will fund the 2018 Pro Bono Challenge. Part of the donation will also go towards improving the efficiency of the alliance’s legal assistance, by encouraging more lawyers to join and take on pro bono cases.

Lazarte notes that the size of Peruvian law firms, which are not as big as their counterparts in Brazil, for example, can be a limiting factor for the clearing house. Fewer lawyers at smaller firms can mean less time for pro bono. While she notes a small drop in the percentage of lawyers from member firms doing pro bono work since 2016, she says this could be down to there being more workshops and legal clinics in 2017. These allow for a greater number of organisations to participate and serve more people in less time.

Tickets for [Latin Lawyer’s 12th annual charity awards ceremony](#) can be purchased [here](#). Money raised will support efforts to boost pro bono work in the region by funding clearing houses that link deserving charities and individuals to lawyers willing to provide free legal advice.

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