

THE PHILIPPINE WOMEN JUDGES ASSOCIATION (PWJA)

The beginnings of PWJA

In 1987, Justice Sandra Day O'Connor of the United States Supreme Court suggested to Justice Ameurфина A. Melenco-Herrera, then a senior member of the Supreme Court of the Philippines, that she form an organization of women magistrates and judges in the Philippines to serve as a forum for the exchange of ideas, information, insights and perspectives.

Convinced of the merits of the suggestion, Justice Melencio-Herrera wasted no time in selling the idea to the Philippine delegates to the ASEAN Women Judges Conference. Justice Melencio-Herrera, envisaged an association that would work towards the appointment of more women judges, ensure their greater participation and representation in the activities and programs of the judiciary, and provide a venue for the exchange of ideas, fellowship and the promotion of closer relationship among them

Thus, on September 5, 1987, the Philippine Women Judges Association (PWJA) was born, with no less than Supreme Court Justice Ameurфина A. Melenco-Herrera as its first President. It was registered with the Philippine Securities and Exchange Commission on October 7, 1987. The PWJA's membership includes all incumbent women magistrates from the Municipal Trial Courts to the Supreme Court.

Objectives

The purposes and objectives of the PWJA are:

- To provide a venue for the exchange of views and information among women judges of the Philippines
- To identify specific problems affecting women judges and to propose solutions to them
- To promote the welfare of women judges throughout the Philippines
- To improve the administration of justice and to study ways and means of bringing about efficient management of the courts
- To provide continuing judicial education for its members
- To initiate and undertake necessary judicial reforms
- To maintain professional linkage with women judges of other countries

PWJA Creed

Aside from the objectives stated in the Articles of Incorporation, the PWJA adopted the “Credo for Women Judges” authored by Justice Melencio-Herrera. The creed reads as follows:

1. We believe it our sacred duty and our sworn pledge do justice to every man at all times for clear injustice to anyone is tantamount to injustice to everyone.
2. We believe in the independence of the Judiciary, the supremacy of the Constitution and the rule of law, and that said independence should be zealously safeguarded at all times.
3. We believe in security of tenure for all judges so that they may work in an atmosphere of freedom and dispense justice to rich and poor alike, with neither fear nor favor.
4. We believe that in the selection process for judicial positions, the guiding criteria should be competence, integrity, and independence of mind, regardless of gender or of political considerations.
5. We believe that, as members of the Bench, our conduct must not only be characterized by propriety but must always be above suspicion.
6. We believe in the necessity of effective Court management from the filing of a case up to its final disposition as a measure of administering justice efficiently, reducing unacceptable delays, and minimizing rising litigation costs.
7. We believe in the need to oversee Court personnel to ensure that notwithstanding temptation along their way, they do not stray from the narrow paths of righteousness.
8. We believe it improper for litigants or their counsel to approach judges in connection with cases pending before their Courts or for any group to try and exert pressure or influence on their judgments, so that the faith of our people in judges as the impartial dispensers of justice may be preserved inviolate.
9. We believe, despite diversity in legal and judicial cultures, in joining the universal search for innovative and alternative techniques of dispute resolutions cognizant that the underlying common objective is the speedy, inexpensive and just settlement of legal disputes.
10. We believe that in arriving at a just decision there is need to recognize the true facts, to clarify the legal issues, to understand the human and national problems, involved to apply the law correctly, and to be guided only by one’s conscience, for only then may we be worthy to be called “Judge”.

The PWJA should truly be proud of is the fact that the number of women judges continuously increased. In 1987, out of a total of 1,670 seats in the judicial levels, there were only 155 women or roughly nine percent (9%). At present, out of 1,859 seats in the judicial level, 788 are women. Indeed, the percentage of lady judges has tremendously increased to 42% percent as of November 2015. More importantly, out of 15 magistrates in the Highest Court of the land, three (3) of them are women, one of whom is the Chief Justice. The Court of Appeals has twenty-three (23) women justices, or one-third (1/3) of the total number of Court of Appeals Justices. The Court of Tax Appeals has five (5) out of nine (9) justices and the Sandiganbayan, the Anti-Graft Court, has five (5) lady justices which includes its Presiding Justice. Since its creation by law, the Sandiganbayan has been headed by four (4) women Presiding Justices out of the six (6) Presiding Justices. Two of them were Justice Minita Chico Nazario and Justice Teresita Leonardo De Castro, who have served successively as President of the PWJA when they were promoted to the Supreme Court.

Our women judges in the Regional Trial Court are serving with dedication, excellence and integrity as Family Court Judges pursuant to their designation by the Supreme Court. There are 59 women Family Court Judges or 50% of the 118 Family Court Judges.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE PHILIPPINE LEGAL SYSTEM:

- ❖ On August 12, 1988, the PWJA submitted its recommendation to the Supreme Court for the adoption of mandatory continuous trials to ensure the speedy disposition of cases. The Supreme Court commended the PWJA in a Resolution dated November 3, 1988. On December 10, 1990, the recommendation was approved for implementation.
- ❖ The PWJA also pioneered the recommendation to computerize all courts, upgrade office equipment and court structures, provide for steady and adequate office supplies and increase the pay and benefits of court personnel. The Supreme Court has institutionalized these recommendations.
- ❖ Before 1989, Philippine judges were only required to wear business suits during the conduct of court trials. On February 10, 1989, the PWJA passed a resolution requiring women judges to wear black robes during court hearings as befits the dignity and solemnity of court proceedings. Since that time, the wearing of black robes during court hearings has become mandatory for all Philippine judges. Newly-appointed judges are each supplied, not only with the hammer and gavel, but with black robes, as well.

- ❖ The Supreme Court Committee on Gender Responsiveness in the Judiciary or the CGRJ was created on March 27, 2003, under then Chief Justice Hilario G. Davide, Jr., to ensure that Gender and Development principles are integrated in the Judiciary's policies, programs, and structures. It is presently chaired by PWJA President, Supreme Court Associate Justice Teresita J. Leonardo-De Castro. The Members of the PWJA take an active part in the training of the Judges and court officials and personnel on gender sensitivity which are being held under the supervision of the said Committee.
- ❖ The Supreme Committee on Family Courts and Juvenile Concerns constituted on August 13, 2014 is also headed by the PWJA President, assisted by four (4) members of the PWJA, aside from other court officials. The Committee is tasked, among others, to assess the needs of all actors in the family and juvenile justice sector and recommend to the Supreme Court the piloting of Family Courts with ideal guidelines, resources, environment, facilities and staff.
- ❖ To disseminate information among the members of the bench and the legal community and to provide an active medium for expressing views and opinions, the maiden issue of the PWJA Newsette which is an official publication of the association was launched in December 1987.
- ❖ The PWJA convenes at least once a year principally to discuss judicial trends, exchange best practices, and promote fellowship and camaraderie among its members. Every convention has a theme that is geared towards meeting current demands of the profession. The PWJA has conducted eighteen (18) national conventions and seminars. The last six years reflected the pressing issues women magistrates regarded as needing their attention, to wit:

2010 – The Role of Lady Magistrates in the Protection of the Environment

2011 – Stopping the Abuse of Power for the Purposes of Sexual Exploitation

2012 – Women Judges: 25 Years of Upholding Judicial Independence, the Rule of Law and Women's Rights

2013 – Kababaihan Para sa Katarungan at Kalikasan
(Women for Justice and Environment)

2014 – Women Judges Keeping Up with Information Technology and Issues in International Law

2015 – Protecting the Rights of Women and Children Across the Asia Pacific Region

The PWJA has chosen the theme: “Women Judges: Judging with Gender Perspective” for its 2016 Annual Convention and Seminar

- ❖ PWJA concerns extend to lending assistance to those in need. The PWJA yearly sets aside a fund for its special charitable projects. The fund has been used to help victims of calamities like those adversely affected by the eruption of Mount Pinatubo, the storm surge in the Visayas, and the heavy flooding caused by typhoon “Ondoy.” The association distributed floor mats (*banig*) to the female inmates in jails nationwide. The women judges within their respective areas of jurisdiction conducted jail visits. In the year 2006, the association donated a refrigerator and a television set to the inmates of the Manila City Jail. Cash donations equivalent to two (2) houses were given to the GAWAD KALINGA housing projects for indigent families in the year 2007 and 2008.

CROSSING BORDERS and EXPANDING HORIZONS

The PWJA achieved another milestone when it joined the International Association of Women Judges (IAWJ). The 3rd Biennial Conference of the IAWJ was held in the Philippines on February 22-24, 1996 during the incumbency of PWJA President, then Supreme Court Associate Justice Florida Ruth Pineda-Romero. There were 79 Judges from 29 foreign countries in addition to the 212 judges from the Philippines who participated in the conference. The conference was then officially opened by our very own Justice Pacita Cañizares-Nye, then President of the IAWJ. Later, Judge Rosalina Pison of PWJA became the Vice-President of the IAWJ.

The association has made its presence felt in international legal circles by attending conferences of the International Association of Women Judges’ Convention such as those held in Ottawa, Canada on May 21-24, 1998, the Biennial Convention in Seoul, Korea in 2010, in London, United Kingdom in 2012, and in 2014 in Arusha, Tanzania as well as the Regional Convention of the Asia-Pacific in New Zealand in 2013.

As a major activity on its twenty-second year, in conjunction with the Supreme Court of the Philippines and the Philippine Judicial Academy, the PWJA hosted the Asia-Pacific Conference/Symposium of the International Association of Women Judges (IAWJ) on March 4-6, 2009 at the Manila Hotel, Manila, Philippines with the theme: “WOMEN JUDGES UPHOLDING HUMAN AND FAMILY RIGHTS”. The conference was participated in by foreign delegates from Australia, Korea, India, Taiwan and the PWJA members.

The PWJA welcomed the great opportunity given to it to participate in the project “Stopping the Abuse of Power through Sexual Exploitation: Naming, Shaming, and Ending Sextortion” sponsored by the IAWJ with the support of the MDG3 Funds of the Government of the Netherlands which started in March 2009, and which was successfully concluded last December 31, 2011. Tanzania and Bosnia Herzegovina were the other two countries tapped in the said project. The PWJA received wholehearted commendations from the IAWJ for its part in the project implementation which was accomplished efficiently and expeditiously over and beyond the deliverables of the project. The PWJA did not only provide a model toolkit, which was a step by step guide to help victims of sextortion seek redress, but also translated the English version of the toolkit into the different local dialects in the Philippines. It also developed a training manual and module and conducted 3 consultation workshops aside from the seminars held in the smallest political unit, the “barangays,” at the grassroots of the Philippine society.

The PWJA considered as an outstanding accomplishment, the hosting of the triple events: the meeting of the 2014-2016 IAWJ Executive Council and Board of Directors, the 2015 IAWJ’s Asia-Pacific Regional Conference, and PWJA Annual Seminar-Convention on the theme: Protecting the Rights of Women and Children Across the Asia-Pacific Region. The holding of these events in Tagaytay City, Philippines was a great honor for the PWJA. The latter acknowledged the unqualified support and cooperation of the Officers and Regional Directors of the IAWJ Board and the various IAWJ Chapters in the Asia-Pacific Region and the other Regions. Our colleagues from Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, India, Jordan, London, Netherlands, New Zealand, New South Wales, Nigeria, Palau, Surinam, Taiwan, Trinidad and Tobago, United States, and Zambia participated in these events. The judges from Singapore and Cambodia for the first time participated in the Regional Conference. The Regional Conference was very successful because of the robust and active participation of 42 foreign delegates and 455 Judges from the National Capital Region and the Regions I to XII of the Philippines. The Asia-Pacific Region was represented by Regional Directors Justice Susan Glazebrook of the Supreme Court of New Zealand and Senior Justice Pi-Hu (Peggy) Hsu of the Constitutional Court, Chinese Taipei. Soon to retire IAWJ Executive Director Joan Winship and Director of Finance and Administration Jeff Groton who helped organize the events actively participated in the activities. The theme of the Regional Conference and the PWJA Convention-Seminar was “Protecting the Rights of Women and Children Across the Asia-Pacific Region.” The events gave the PWJA the honor of providing a venue for knowledge-sharing and the pleasure of showing the rich Philippine culture and hospitality. To demonstrate PWJA’s unstinting support for the IAWJ, its officers and members make it a point to contribute to the silent auctions at the conventions sponsored by IAWJ and its Regional Chapters that they attend.

The PWJA is eagerly preparing for its participation in the May 26-29, 2016 IAWJ’s Biennial Conference to be held in Washington DC, USA which will coincide with the celebration of the 25th Anniversary of the IAWJ. These events will take place within the incumbency of the PWJA President Justice Teresita

Leonardo De Castro as concurrent President of the IAWJ. She was elected in Arusha, Tanzania to serve during the term 2014-2016.

The PWJA Today

Truly, the PWJA takes pride that it has created its own significant niche in the Judiciary and the legal community. Its metamorphosis and evolution into its present commendable status would not have been made possible without the strong leadership and dedication of the Officers, Regional Directors and Assistant Regional Directors of the PWJA who represent the entire Judicial hierarchy from Municipal Trial Courts, the Regional Trial Courts, the Appellate Courts and the Supreme Court and whose jurisdictions cover all the Judicial Regions of the country. This excellent organizational structure contributes immensely to the success of the PWJA. Credit must be given also to the unqualified support of the Supreme Court, the Philippine Judicial Academy and the local governments in the Philippines to every project and activity of the PWJA, and to the IAWJ for providing the PWJA the opportunity to take part in IAWJ undertakings and for the trust and confidence it has accorded the PWJA which encourage it to be an active member of the said prestigious international association. In the process, the IAWJ has broadened PWJA's vision and perspective regarding law and justice which transcend national boundaries. As the IAWJ celebrates its Silver Jubilee, the PWJA renews its solemn pledge to always strive to be a worthy Chapter of the great international organization that is the IAWJ.

Consultation Workshop in Different Regions in the Philippines between 2009-2011





Asia-Pacific Regional Conference of the IAWJ , Tagaytay City, Philippines
May 12-15, 2015

