

LATINLAWYER ONLINE

By Rosie Cresswell

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Members of Peru's law firms attended a conference on ethics, professional responsibility and pro bono in Lima yesterday, part of a three-day programme for the implementation of the Pro Bono Declaration of the Americas.

At the conference, speakers from US, Chilean and Colombian firms shared their experiences of drawing up a meaningful pro bono programme and highlighted the importance of a pro bono clearing house.

The team promoting the declaration include the Cyrus R Vance Center for International Justice, US firms Shearman & Sterling LLP, Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP, Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton LLP, Milbank, Tweed, Hadley & McCloy LLP and Mayer Brown LLP, and their counterparts from Colombia's Gómez-Pinzón Zuleta Abogados SA and Chile's Barros & Errázuriz Abogados and Morales & Besa.

"We hope that once we have a robust commitment among firms with international connections, more and more firms will sign up, as has been the case in Chile," says Shearman partner Antonia Stolper, who is president of the Vance Center.

Pablo Guerrero of Chile's Barros & Errázuriz, who was a member of the drafting committee for the declaration, believes collaboration within the legal community is key for pro bono to be an integral part of a firm's activities.

Another successful way of building commitment across the profession region-wide is "virally", by firms sharing experiences and promoting their achievements, says Simpson Thacher's Todd Crider, current vice president of the Vance Center.

Many Peruvian firms already offer pro bono services, a number of which participated in the conference. The purpose of the declaration, launched in 2008, is to encourage them to commit to 20 hours of pro bono work a year, per lawyer, and institutionalise the process. The local response has been largely enthusiastic - over 20 firms have signed up already with many more showing interest. The challenge now, is to ensure firms act follow up the commitment.

Peruvian NGO Ciudadanos al Día has collaborated with local firms to draw up a new code of ethics for the country's legal profession, and brought in general counsel, among others, to speak yesterday on the importance of professional and social responsibility. Topics included conflicts of interest and client fraud.

Teams spent Wednesday meeting some 20 firms to discuss how best to spread commitment through the firm and institutionalise pro bono activities. Today they are holding a round table with over 50 local associates.