

2023 NEWSLETTER

ASEAN LAW ASSOCIATION



THE 14TH ALA GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The 14th General Assembly (“the General Assembly”) of the ASEAN Law Association (“ALA”) and the ASEAN Law Conference 2023 (“the Conference”), held at Shangri-La Kuala Lumpur from 18th October to 21st October 2023, brought together distinguished legal professionals from across ASEAN to address regional challenges and promote the rule of law.

The 14th General Assembly, the first in five years following the 13th held in Singapore in 2018, was delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The gathering provided a crucial opportunity for member states to regroup, discuss pressing issues, collaborate on key post-pandemic recovery efforts, and share strategies for resilience in the face of future challenges.

On 19th October 2023, the General Assembly opened with a grand procession led by bagpipers from St John’s Institution, followed by the ALA President and the heads of delegation from nine ASEAN member states - Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.



Chief Justice Tun Tengku Maimun, Chairperson of ALA Malaysia at the time, opened the Assembly with a call for unity and resilience across ASEAN, emphasizing the importance of legal cooperation in navigating and addressing future challenges. Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon, the ALA President, followed with the introduction of the inaugural ALA Moot Competition, an exciting new platform established to nurture young legal talent and deepen engagement within ASEAN's legal fraternity



Guest of Honour at the Opening Ceremony, the Honourable Prime Minister of Malaysia, YAB Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim, delivered a powerful Keynote Address, lauding ALA's commitment to promoting justice. He emphasized that unwavering adherence to the rule of law is essential in overcoming shared challenges within ASEAN's legal systems.



The Opening Ceremony concluded with updates from the Chairs of the ALA national committees, spotlighting ongoing activities and initiatives, and fostering collaboration among member states to address emerging legal challenges.



THE ASEAN LAW CONFERENCE

The Conference was held on 19th and 20th October 2023, with the theme, “ASEAN Tapestry – Our Pride”.

In 1979, ALA was proudly conceptualized, marking a key moment in fostering regional cooperation. Today, the ten member countries of ALA stand united, committed to building a robust legal platform that reflects the strength and unity of ASEAN - one that will be recognized and respected globally.

The chosen theme, “ASEAN Tapestry - Our Pride”, symbolizes ALA as the loom, where legal experts from across the region wove their principles with the rule of law. This collaboration forms a tapestry rich in values, transcending borders and fostering a more resilient and harmonious ASEAN. This theme captures the essence of ASEAN’s unity and diversity, highlighting the importance of shared legal values in crafting a future-proof legal system for the region.



Throughout the two-day event, speakers from various ASEAN countries addressed critical issues such as women's and children's rights, environmental concerns, and the transformative role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in modern legal frameworks. More than 400 delegates from the ASEAN region, China, and Russia attended. The diverse lineup of topics, esteemed speakers, and moderators ensured that the Conference was both impactful and informative.

While the delegates were engaged in intense discussions, their accompanying persons enjoyed a well-curated programme showcasing the rich and cultural heritage of Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya. Highlights included a visit to the Palace of Justice and a scenic lake cruise along Putrajaya lake, offering a glimpse of Malaysia's beauty.

THE 44TH ALA GOVERNING COUNCIL MEETING

The 44th Governing Council Meeting ("GCM") of ALA was held at the Shangri-La Kuala Lumpur on 21st October 2023, chaired by the ALA President at the time, Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon.



As part of his opening address, the ALA President, Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon, delivered a comprehensive report on ALA's activities over the preceding 3 years and touched on the launching of the Virtual Training Marketplace and the key role of ALA Standing Committees in shaping ALA's future. The meeting concluded with ALA Philippines graciously agreeing to host the next GCM in 2024.



The General Assembly concluded with the historic election of Chief Justice Tun Tengku Maimun as ALA President and Ms. Bharti Seth as Secretary-General, marking the first time in ALA's history that a woman has been elected as its president.

In her welcome address, Chief Justice Maimun emphasized ASEAN's strength in legal cooperation and highlighted the harmonization of laws while respecting national legal traditions. She also acknowledged the significant impact of initiatives like the Asean Law Institute and the newly launched Virtual Training Marketplace, and called for continued efforts to strengthen the region's legal frameworks.



The culmination of the 14th ALA General Assembly, ASEAN Law Conference, 44th Governing Council Meeting, ASEAN Moot Competition 2023, and 18th ALA Golf Tournament was celebrated in style with a Gala Dinner, held in conjunction with the Council of ASEAN Chief Justices (CACJ) Retreat 2023.

Hosted by ALA Malaysia in collaboration with the Malaysian Judiciary, the Gala Dinner was a resounding success. The evening's program included speeches from the ALA President, Chief Justice Tun Tengku Maimun, and Chairperson of the Organizing Committee, Dato' Mah Weng Kwai,. The event also featured the presentation of prizes to the winners of the inaugural ASEAN Moot Competition 2023 and the ALA Golf Tournament. Guests were treated to live entertainment and delegates from ASEAN member states kept the tradition alive with captivating cultural performances.

The Gala Dinner was more than just a celebration - it provided an opportunity for delegates and participants to network, forge stronger ties, and celebrate the shared success of ALA's various events, fostering closer camaraderie among the ALA member states.



PRESIDENT'S REPORT 44TH ALA GOVERNING COUNCIL MEETING 21ST OCTOBER 2023

ALA PRESIDENT THE HONOURABLE CHIEF JUSTICE SUNDARESH MENON

A very good afternoon. In my brief address on Thursday, I had mentioned that I wanted to offer my perspectives and reflections on the course of the last five years in two parts. I presented the first part in my opening address on Thursday, and I will present the second part in this address, as I look back on the term of my presidency through four lenses: namely, resilience, relevance, renewal and rejuvenation.



Resilience

First, let me outline how I suggest ALA has demonstrated its resilience over the past five years. As we enjoyed ourselves in a very successful meeting in Phuket towards the end of 2019, we were blissfully unaware of what was very shortly to come. When the pandemic hit us, there was much confusion all around. But as a family, I think we have stood our ground with resilience. We knew that our first priority had to be getting our respective affairs back home in order, before we could return to pursuing our regional engagements in ALA. We therefore decided to bide our time and ALA went on a one-year hiatus.

By 2021, we emerged as a family stronger than before, after the worst of the pandemic, with ALA Cambodia, our youngest member, gamely taking on the task of hosting ALA's first virtual Governing Council meeting. This was a resounding success. And, in 2022, ALA Indonesia broke new ground again when it hosted ALA's first hybrid Governing Council meeting in Bandung. At the same time, we decided that we wouldn't take unnecessary risks. We were all clear that we wanted to avoid the General Assembly being held remotely. A large part of the magic of the ALA family is our opportunity to be together. Recognising the complexities of organising an in-person General Assembly while the pandemic was still very much in our communities, we stood behind ALA Malaysia and collectively decided to reschedule this large-scale event until things became clearer in terms of both safety and funding. Indeed, we have seen the wisdom of this decision in the overwhelming success of all the events that we have seen and participated in over the past few days. It is indeed satisfying that our collective resilience has helped draw us closer as an ALA family, strengthened the ties that bind us, and helped us participate in this wonderful and successful celebration organised so well by our Malaysian hosts and colleagues.

Relevance

We did some of our best work during the pandemic, and crucially also maintained and enhanced ALA's relevance within the wider ASEAN community. It is to this point on relevance that I now turn. In our efforts to strengthen ALA's links with other ASEAN institutions, I called on the then Secretary-General of ASEAN, Dato' Lim Jock Hoi, in 2019, and we had a very fruitful discussion on how ALA could assist the ASEAN Secretariat (or "ASEC") in helping to promote the effective implementation of ASEAN instruments by ASEAN Member States, an idea that had been actually mooted by then Deputy Secretary-General Dr AKP Mochtan at our last General Assembly in Singapore in 2018.

Dato' Lim not only welcomed ALA's offer but also requested ALA's assistance in three other areas, and this precipitated the drafting of four concept notes, respectively, on promoting legal convergence in the enforcement of foreign arbitral awards and international settlement agreements; working with ASEC to support compliance with ASEAN instruments by ASEAN Member States; establishing a panel of experts that ASEC may consult in specific areas; and promoting and raising awareness of ASEAN legal instruments and their implementation within ASEAN member states. That outlined the possible parameters for collaboration between ASEC and ALA. The Governing Council broadly endorsed the concept notes at its meeting in Phuket and ASEC also confirmed that it would work with ALA on the activities envisaged by the concept notes. Four ALA Working Groups were constituted to study the concept notes further, and they built on what we had achieved with ASEC before the pandemic. These Working Groups continued their painstaking work throughout the pandemic. This eventually led to a revised set of concept notes, and this was subsequently endorsed formally by the Governing Council for submission to ASEC earlier this year, in time for my call on Dr Kao Kim Hourn, the incumbent ASEAN Secretary-General, in March.

When I apprised Dr Kao of the concept notes, he identified specific priorities and areas for further collaboration with ALA aimed at building the capacity of ASEAN Member States and ASEC, as well as promoting awareness of ASEAN legal instruments. On this positive note, ASEC is already looking at running a series of capacity-building programmes with ALA. The inaugural event will take place next year, and is expected to cover investor-state dispute resolution as well as the ASEAN Protocol on the Enhanced Dispute Settlement Mechanism. This is most encouraging. At the same time, ASEC's dialogue with the ASEAN Senior Law Officials Meeting (or "ASLOM") continues, arising from some comments that ASLOM had provided on an initial set of draft concept notes that had been prepared for ASEC's consideration.

In our efforts to maintain ALA's relevance to other stakeholders in the legal industry, the ASEAN Law Institute organised four virtual Roundtables during the pandemic with the ALA National Committees of Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines and Singapore. These events fostered greater cooperation between ALA and other key industry stakeholders by creating spaces for discussions to take place on the ASEAN Comprehensive Investment Agreement.

Rejuvenation

I turn now to the important subject of rejuvenation. I called on the Honourable Chief Justice of the Lao PDR, Chief Justice Viengthong Siphandone, last month, where I also met the officials involved in the establishment of ALA Lao PDR. In my discussions with her, Chief Justice Siphandone spoke about the encouraging progress that Laos is making towards the establishment of an ALA National Committee. You heard Justice Phasouk speak to us earlier today and we all hope that ALA Laos will be a reality and firmly established before long. This will be an important part of our efforts to strengthen and rejuvenate ALA.

Another aspect of rejuvenation relates to the future role of the ALA Standing Committees. We had a long discussion on this at the Governing Council meeting earlier today and we have agreed to establish a Working Group, under the lead of the incoming Secretary-General, on an exercise to re-envision the role of the ALA Standing Committees alongside the ASEAN Law Institute. We look forward to the presentation of their report and proposals at the next Governing Council meeting. I do not wish to pre-empt the work that will be undertaken, but I would imagine that this would entail looking at aligning and refining the various portfolios of the Standing Committees, identifying where perhaps new Standing Committees may be required, and more broadly at how the ALA Standing Committees might complement the work done by

the ASEAN Law Institute in fulfilling its mandate and performing its role as ALA's implementation arm. This will likely also extend to considering the reorganisation of the Standing Committees to ensure that they are fit for purpose as we move into the future.

Renewal

I turn finally to what is perhaps the most important of the four "Rs": renewal. It is essential for the continuing success and growth for any organisation that there be young blood among its ranks, to supply its future leaders who will be able to meet the new challenges that lie ahead and steward the organisation into the future. To this end, two signature programmes have been launched that will enhance our ability to attract new talent into ALA.

The first is The ASEAN Moot, the inaugural edition of which was so successfully organised by ALA Malaysia, our hosts for this General Assembly. I am confident that The ASEAN Moot will attract law students to take an interest in ASEAN Law and will become the primary outreach mechanism for ALA in the Universities of ASEAN Member States. Today's law students are the members and leaders of tomorrow's ALA, and the continuation of The ASEAN Moot will be a key pillar in our efforts to ensure ALA's longevity. I am delighted that we have approved this in principle today at our Governing Council meeting, and I look forward to hearing the detailed proposals for the long-term conduct of the competition at the next Governing Council meeting.

The second signature programme is the Virtual Training Marketplace ("VTM"), which matches candidates with host law firms offering training and internship opportunities. The VTM not only allows younger ASEAN lawyers to upskill themselves, but also

enables them to become part of a growing community of lawyers in an interconnected ASEAN. This will serve to increase the mindshare of ALA among legal practitioners in the region. I hope that all National Committees will do their utmost to encourage their law firms to offer training places, and encourage their young lawyers to take up these training opportunities in order to make this programme a success. If our vision of the VTM is successfully realised, it will make a very important contribution to raising the level of legal services, promoting a closely interconnected network of law practitioners in the region, and injecting new blood into ALA.

Conclusion

Ladies and gentlemen, let me close by saying that it has been a great honour and privilege to have had the opportunity to steward ALA in the course of my presidency. It has truly been a fulfilling and rewarding five years. By my side I have always had the ALA Vice-Presidents, whose unstinting support has lightened my burden and it has been a joy to work with each of them. I have also had the great benefit of having my colleague, Secretary-General Paul Quan, to whom I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude for running the Secretariat so efficiently, and for doing so with the sunniest of dispositions.

It is my hope that, by strengthening links within ALA, fostering greater cooperation between ALA and other stakeholders in the legal industry, and strengthening ALA's links with other ASEAN institutions, I have fulfilled the manifesto that I outlined when I took office as ALA President, and that I leave to my successor, my admired friend, Tun Maimun, a strong legacy built on what I inherited from my predecessor, Attorney Avelino Cruz.

I respectfully suggest that the incoming ALA President has everything that is needed for perhaps a fifth “R” – to re-invent ALA so that it stands ready to meet the challenges that we may be confronted with in tomorrow’s world, to provide legal consultancy and technical assistance to ASEAN and beyond. This includes the impending establishment of ALA Laos, which will add to the strength and depth of our family; the envisioning exercise in relation to the ALA Standing Committees to better equip ALA and the Institute; and the establishment of further key areas of collaboration with ASEAN as the dialogue with ASLOM and ASEC continues. This has all been made possible by two visionary Secretaries-General of ASEAN and the painstaking efforts of our ALA Working Groups. I wish the new President and ALA Secretary- General the very best, and I have every confidence that with them at the helm, the future of ALA is assured and very bright indeed.

Thank you all so very much.

INCOMING SPEECH AS PRESIDENT OF ALA - 21ST OCTOBER 2023

THE HONOURABLE CHIEF JUSTICE TENGKU MAIMUN

Honourable Judges, Judicial Officers, Your Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuhu and good afternoon.

I must start this speech by saying that it is a distinct honour to take the seat of President. That said, seeing the tremendous amount of work that has been dedicated to ALA, especially by my immediate past predecessor, Chief Justice Sundaresh, I have big shoes to fill.



Speaking of my learned brother Chief Justice, Sundaresh Menon, I would like to say a few words about him – words I am sure, cannot do him justice.

Chief Justice Menon, it is with utmost gratitude and profound respect that we acknowledge the significant contributions you have made during your tenure as president. Your leadership of the organisation was truly exemplary, marked by steadiness, assurance, and practicality, especially in the face of the exceptional challenges posed by the global pandemic. You navigated us through the storm with remarkable fortitude and unwavering commitment.

Your visionary approach, geared towards fostering a stronger, better organization, and enhancing governance, has set a high benchmark. You possessed an astute understanding of the times and demonstrated a clear vision for ALA that perfectly suited the challenges and opportunities of our era. Your foresight and strategic thinking have indelibly shaped the trajectory of ALA, helping us evolve into a more resilient and future-ready organisation.

It is our fervent hope that you will continue to share your wisdom, insights, and innovative ideas to further enrich ALA in the coming years. Your continued participation would certainly further strengthen our organization.

I must also thank our outgoing Secretary-General, Judge Paul Quan for his intense dedication and commitment to the association over the past five years.

Allow me to express, for the record, the deep appreciation of the General Assembly and the Governing Council of ALA, to both Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon and Judge Paul Quan for their dedicated service and please join me in giving them a well-deserved round of applause for their outstanding contributions.

The momentous task now awaits the new Governing Council. I am deeply honoured and humbled to helm ALA, an organisation with a proud past and without a doubt an exciting future. I take note of the suggestion by my immediate predecessor, Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon to reinvent ALA. For now, permit me to state the following.

ASEAN has an incredible diversity and a large part of this diversity includes women. I am myself a woman but I cannot confirm this – it is often said that most women are distinguished by their meticulous attention to detail, unwavering resilience, boundless

compassion, and exceptional leadership qualities — traits that significantly enhance the multifaceted nature of ASEAN tapestry.

Given this backdrop, I would like to speak on the following points:

- a. Firstly, the remarkable role of ASEAN women in law;
- b. Secondly, the challenges faced by ASEAN Women in the legal sphere; and
- c. Thirdly, initiatives to be undertaken by ALA as regards women.

(A) THE REMARKABLE ROLE OF ASEAN WOMEN IN LAW

The role of women in the legal profession is crucial and cannot be overlooked. They have not only made substantial contributions as attorneys but have also excelled as judges. Their influence extends beyond the individual cases they handle; they shape the legal landscape, pushing boundaries and challenging conventions, thereby enriching the profession as a whole.

In the ASEAN region, there are numerous examples of exceptional women who have gone against societal norms, and set new precedents.

It may be hard to believe, but there was a time when it was forbidden for a woman to be accepted into the Bar of the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States. It was B.H Oon who bravely tackled this issue in court, finally earning recognition as the first female lawyer in Malaya in the 1920s. Her historic victory paved the way for others, including Singapore's Teo Soon Kim, who became the first woman admitted to the Straits Settlements Bar.

Meanwhile, in the Philippines, Maria del Pilar Francisco de Villacerna was admitted to the Philippine Bar as early as 1911, and Ma Pwa Mee of Myanmar achieved the same feat in 1928, remarkably without any opposition. Thailand welcomed its first female lawyer in 1930, and Indonesia followed suit in the early 1950s, marking significant milestones in the pursuit of gender equality in the legal profession.

(2) THE CHALLENGES FACED BY ASEAN WOMEN IN LAW

Whilst we are proud of history because women fought to gain the basic right to be at Bar table just as a man can, we realise that equality means much more than that. And so, as times change, new challenges arise.

What are some of these issues faced by modern women lawyers?

Unconscious and subconscious gender bias and discrimination persist, affecting everything from hiring decisions to career progression. Stereotypes and traditional expectations often undermine women's credibility and authority in courtrooms and legal boardrooms. In addition to these biases, work-life balance remains a formidable challenge for many ASEAN women in law. The demanding nature of legal work, long hours, and frequent travel can be especially burdensome for women who are often expected to shoulder a significant share of family responsibilities.

I am fortunate to have a very understanding and supportive husband and family, but this basic understanding that I have in my family is not available for all ASEAN women in law. Thus, achieving equilibrium between their professional and personal lives becomes an intricate juggling act, leading some talented and able ASEAN women to opt out of the legal profession altogether.

Other challenges include sexual harassment at the workplace. Women are still in many cases objectified and seen as lesser individuals. There is no justification for this and it must stop.

Addressing these challenges is not only a matter of gender equality but also critical for harnessing the full potential of ASEAN's legal community. Moreover, it is high time for ALA to respond to the global call for gender equality and increased women's representation in public institutions, aligning our efforts with the United Nations Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the ASEAN Declaration on Gender Equality and Family Development.

(3) PROPOSALS AS ALA PRESIDENT

In addressing challenges faced by women in the legal field, I would like to propose the establishment of a new Standing Committee for Women in Law within the ASEAN Law Association (ALA), which will provide a platform to promote advocacy, fostering dialogue, and facilitating collaboration. This will ensure the voices, experiences, and perspectives of women embedded within the legal profession are not heard but amplified, addressed, and integrated into our broader strategies and approaches.

Additionally, the formation of this committee will allow us to build stronger bridges with the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC). By synergizing our efforts, we can provide more focused and effective legal assistance, contributing to the broader mission of gender equality and children's rights protection.

As a secondary measure, inspired by the remarkably successful “Women in Law Pledge” initiated by the UK Law Society, I foresee the ALA, facilitated by the newly formed Women in Law Standing Committee, crafting a unique set of guidelines. It is a roadmap that guides institutions towards a future where the scales of justice are balanced not just in the courtroom, but also in the offices where our legal professionals work. These directives, which ASEAN legal entities, governmental agencies, and assorted stakeholders can readily adopt, would bolster gender equality within their ranks. Our aspiration is to craft a blueprint for gender equality in legal practice, promoting an environment where opportunities and recognition are afforded based on merit and devoid of gender-based limitations.

It is paramount to emphasize that our vision for gender equality within the legal profession does not seek to isolate or diminish any gender’s role. Quite the opposite; it aspires to create an inclusive legal landscape where individuals thrive based on merit, unburdened by gender-based constraints.

Moving on, I propose that we channel our efforts into several key areas to build upon the remarkable progress we have achieved thus far. Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon, during his previous tenure as ALA president, wisely emphasized two crucial focal points: the need to fortify ALA’s objective to sustain and develop relationships and enhancing ALA's role as a dynamic think tank. I firmly believe these should continue to be our steadfast commitments.

To further nurture and solidify ALA’s position as a frontier think tank, I propose that we formulate a robust strategy for continuing legal education, leadership development, and capacity building. I would suggest that we take Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon’s concept of exposing lawyers to training, attachments, and internships within law firms

in another ALA Member States, a step further. That is, by establishing an exchange program or secondment initiative for judicial and legal officers of ALA Member States. This programme aims to engage the middle management of these institutions to elevate their legal perspectives and honed administrative skills. Such an initiative not only benefits the participants but also nurtures invaluable understanding of each other's legal system.

Last but not least, I suggest the initiation of an ALA Lecture Series that could be organised quarterly in a year on a rotational basis between all ALA Member States. The setting need not be confined to physical setting, but it could be remote or a hybrid of both physical and online format. We can collaborate with esteemed organizations such as ASEAN to delve into pressing ASEAN legal issues or partner with various NGOs to host a talk series on a wide range of legal topics pertinent to ASEAN and even international organisations, bar associations and other legal networks. These topics could span from environmental concerns to women's empowerment and beyond. I believe that a structured series of talks like this would be immensely beneficial for all ALA members, helping us expand our knowledge and awareness of the current legal issues in our region.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, I want to extend my deepest gratitude once again to each and every one of you for your loyal support and active participation in the noble mission of ALA. On my part, I pledge to devote my utmost effort and dedication to the role of leading this esteemed organisation.

Thank you and I look forward to meet all of you again at the Gala Dinner.

18TH ALA CHAMPIONSHIP GOLF TOURNAMENT

The 18th ALA Golf Tournament kicked off on 18th October 2023 at the Tropicana Golf Club in Kuala Lumpur, attracting 133 participants from Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Malaysia. This event served as a wonderful opportunity for fostering camaraderie among members of ALA.

Mr. Nandang Sunandar Tarmudin from Indonesia was crowned the Gross Champion, with his trophy presented by the newly elected Chairman of the ALA Golf Chapter, the Honourable President of the Court of Appeal of Malaysia, Justice Tan Sri Datuk Amar Abang Iskandar.



The coveted Tun Dzaidin Trophy was also awarded to the Indonesian team by the Honourable Chief Justice of Malaysia, Tun Tengku Maimun, in recognition of their outstanding performance in the tournament.



ASEAN MOOT COMPETITION

ALA Malaysia initiated the inaugural ASEAN Moot Competition held from 19th - 20th October 2023 in Kuala Lumpur, featuring seven teams from ASEAN countries.



Singapore emerged as the overall champion, taking home the ALA Moot Challenge Trophy, while Malaysia's team secured second place. Singapore also won the Best Memorial Trophy for its outstanding written legal arguments, with Malaysia's Ms. Abby Si Xinyi named Best Mooter.

LAUNCH OF VIRTUAL TRAINING MARKETPLACE

The Virtual Training Marketplace (“VTM”), a platform offering training and internship opportunities for young lawyers across ASEAN, was officially launched during the 14th ALA General Assembly held in Kuala Lumpur.



Spearheaded by ALA Singapore, the initiative received praise from the ALA President at the time, Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon. He commended the dedication of the ALA Singapore working group chaired by Justice Lee Seiu Kin and extended his heartfelt gratitude to the team for their tremendous efforts in making the project a reality.

Chief Justice Menon also acknowledged Attorney Andre Palacios, ASEAN Law Institute’s Executive Director, for facilitating the integration of the VTM portal on the ALA website. He further recognized the participating host law firms for their role in supporting the VTM concept. Chief Justice Menon emphasized that the VTM marks a key initiative to rejuvenate the legal community and engage the next generation of lawyers in an increasingly interconnected ASEAN.

NEWS FROM PHILIPPINES

APPOINTMENT OF NEW CHAIR OF ALA PHILIPPINES



Chief Justice Alexander G. Gesmundo was elected Chair of ALA Philippines on April 21 2023

Chief Justice Alexander G. Gesmundo, the 27th Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the Philippines, has had a distinguished legal career since obtaining his law degree from Ateneo de Manila University in 1984. After joining the Office of the Solicitor General, where he was recognized as Most Outstanding Solicitor in 1998, he served in various capacities, including as Commissioner of the Presidential Commission on Good Government and Assistant Solicitor General.

He was appointed as an Associate Justice of the Sandiganbayan in 2005 and later joined the Supreme Court as an Associate Justice in 2017, before being elevated to Chief Justice in 2021. He is currently leading significant reforms in the Philippine judiciary through the Strategic Plan for Judicial Innovations 2022-2027, focusing on efficiency, transparency, and access to justice.

Throughout his career, Chief Justice Gesmundo has also contributed to numerous judicial committees and educational initiatives, demonstrating his commitment to the continuous improvement of the legal system. He has been involved in international legal education and benchmarking, and has been honored with various awards, including several honorary Doctor of Laws degrees and international recognition such as the 2023 Chief Justice Richard W. Holmes Award of Merit.