

A JOINT GLOBAL REFUGEE FORUM PLEDGE

Mobilizing the Global Legal Community to Protect and Find Solutions for Refugees and others Forcibly Displaced

CONCEPT NOTE

Asia Pro Bono Legal Community Roundtable 2022

Building pro bono partnerships to address the legal needs of those forcibly displaced in Asia

1. Background: The Global Refugee Forum Joint Pledge - Progress so far

Many refugees, asylum-seekers, stateless persons, and others forcibly displaced (hereinafter 'refugees and others forcibly displaced') frequently live outside the protection of the law and lack access to legal information and assistance to secure their rights, justice and solutions to their displacement. During the Global Refugee Forum in 2019, committed legal and refugee rights organizations from around the world came together as part of a multi-stakeholder and partnership approach, and made a global commitment to change this. Over 80 private and public sector actors signed on to a joint **Global Legal Community Pledge** to work collaboratively to mobilize, connect, and support the legal community and refugee actors to address the legal needs of displaced persons.

Since the Pledge was made, law firm signatories have contributed over 275,000 pro bono hours to address the legal needs of refugees and others forcibly displaced. PILnet - which coordinates the joint pledge - also launched a **Matching Portal** in 2021 to enhance coordination and facilitate the matching of free legal help with the refugee-led and other organizations working with forcibly displaced people who need it. The Portal receives requests from a wide range of jurisdictions globally for both local, national, and cross-border pro bono support.

In 2020, to kick-start implementation of the Pledge, PILnet, UNHCR and a number of GRF Legal Community Pledge partners co-hosted a series of workshops that brought legal and refugee rights actors from the region together to learn more about the Pledge and explore how the pro bono hours pledged could be harnessed to address the unmet legal needs of refugees and the organizations that work with them. In October 2020, nine NGOs successfully pitched 15 pro bono projects to private sector law firms at the first Asia Pro Bono Legal Community Roundtable. 46 private sector representatives joined the Roundtable, including both Pledge signatory and non-signatories. Prior to the Roundtable, PILnet worked with NGOs to scope their project pitches and to develop a project description. The completed project descriptions were catalogued and shared with all participants ahead of the Roundtable in a Catalogue of

Pro Bono Projects. Following the event, PILnet then facilitated the matching of projects with interested law firms, supported the initial stages of the pro bono partnerships and continues to monitor the progress of the projects. Following the success of this workshop-roundtable series, the Core Group and its partners are hosting a second series, to foster new pro bono partnerships across Asia Pacific and explore what beyond pro bono the legal community can do to support the legal needs of those displaced.

2. Preparing for the Roundtable

In the lead-up to the Asia Pro Bono Legal Community Roundtable 2022, PILnet will work together with the Core Group members of the GRF Pledge based in the Asia Pacific, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Asia Pacific Network of Refugees and the Thomson Reuters Foundation to support legal aid service providers, RLOs and other NGOs working with and for refugees and others forcibly displaced, to develop pro bono projects to be pitched at the Roundtable. This work will include:

Asia Legal Community Stocktaking Workshop (24 May 2022)

The Asia Legal Community Stocktaking Workshop will be an opportunity to highlight and assess the impact of the Pledge in the region so far, including to explore some of the projects matched and the partnerships established. The workshop will also serve as an opportunity for those new to the Pledge to learn more about the Pledge and to gain a general understanding of the legal resources available and what pro bono support can be offered by law firms. There will also be a focus on what, beyond pro bono matching, those involved in the GRF Legal Community Pledge could do better to support the legal needs of refugees-with a focus on the identification of concrete activities to be prioritized in the coming year.

Asia Legal Community Pro Bono Development Workshop (01 June 2022)

The Asia Legal Community Workshop will involve discussions with and between legal aid service providers and other NGOs/RLOs with the aim of preparing participants to design their own pro bono projects. Successful models of scoping and pitching a pro bono project from the last roundtable will be highlighted, together with a range of tips on how to develop and implement such projects. A pro bono project template and other tools will be shared with the participants to support the development of their project pitches for the upcoming Roundtable.

Outreach to NGOs & RLOs

The Core Group will undertake substantive outreach with legal aid service providers and other NGOs/RLOs in the lead up to the Workshops and Roundtable. Outreach will be undertaken to both those who utilize a pro bono approach, and those who do not, with the objective of replicating promising practices and scaling up existing ones. Outreach will be tailored to support and prepare NGOs and RLOs to develop pro bono projects that can be discussed with law firms at the upcoming Roundtable.

Support to develop projects

Following the Workshops, Core Group members will provide support to RLO/NGO partners to scope and develop their projects. RLO/NGOs will be supported to identify legal gaps and lay out how a private legal sector pro bono partner could provide meaningful legal support to address the needs of these communities and/or those of RLO/NGO partners who work with and for these communities. At their heart, these projects aim to address the legal needs of refugees and other forcibly displaced communities. A catalogue of the projects will be shared with law firms prior to the Roundtable.

3. The Asia Pro Bono Legal Community Roundtable (Date TBC)

The objective of the Roundtable is to create a platform for inclusive partnerships and collaborations between the legal community and RLO/NGOs in Asia to support the GRF pledge to be operationalized in the region. The Roundtable will enable NGOs to pitch their concrete pro bono project ideas to law firms and will facilitate interactive discussions between them. To put their commitment to the GRF pledge into action, it is expected that law firms come to the Roundtable with the intention to take on one or more of the projects pitched. Participation is welcome from law firms that have not signed on to the pledge yet, though they will be encouraged to do so. Follow-up support to match law firms with RLO/NGOs and to establish a pro bono partnership will also be provided by PILnet and the Core Group after the Roundtable. Whether a firm has signed the Pledge will be a factor considered during the matching process. **The Roundtable and all workshops will take place virtually via zoom. Please register [HERE](#).**

4. Co-organizers

The above activities will be jointly co-organized by PILnet and Core Group members based in the Asia Pacific (Act for Peace, Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network, Justice Centre Hong Kong, Refugee Legal), UNHCR, Asia Pacific Network of Refugees, and the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

