



Feature

Paralegal Profession Expands in the Philippines

By Kenneth Davis

The Securities and Exchange Commission recently approved the incorporation of Asian Advocates for Paralegal Practice, Inc., granting it “juridical personality,” according to an article in *The Manila Times*.



The Manila Times Institute for Paralegal Studies had applied for the incorporation, stating that its primary objectives were as follows: “to assist the court practitioners of law and law-enforcement agencies in the administration of justice, promote mediation and/

or arbitration of and help in maintaining the rule of law in order to attain a fair administration of justice, encourage the reconciliation of disputants, educate the people of their rights and obligations, and help make justice accessible to them.”

It is believed that this incorporation will bring more legitimacy to the paralegal profession in the Philippines and cause it to grow throughout the nation.

The *Manila Times* article states that the “institutionalization of the paralegal practice in the Philippines will bring about a faster flow of cases before the judicial, quasi judicial, and administrative bodies.”

It goes on to say that this “institutionalization” of paralegal practice in the Philippines will improve the country’s justice system because criminals will go to trial sooner, which will encourage more public participation in the administration of justice.

“The public’s active participation in the administration of criminal justice deters criminals, being aware of their speedy arrest, trial, and conviction,” said Ramon Mabutas, Jr., (former Associate Justice for the Philippines Court of Appeals) and Eloisa Mabutas (a private practitioner) in the *Manila Times* article.

Cindy Lopez, a New Jersey-based paralegal and the founder of NJParalegal.com, said that this new legal development in the Philippines “may set an example for other countries to take control of crimes and injustices.”

“If citizens could actively participate in the administration of justice, it may foster public confidence and may deter criminal activity,” she said.

Lopez also believes that the institutionalization of paralegal practice in the Philippines will have a positive impact on the paralegal profession in the United States.

“It can only add to the recognition and importance of the paralegal profession as a vital role in the administration of justice,” she remarked.

However, Lissa Treadway, the president of the Nevada Paralegal Association, had a slightly different take on the situation.

“While I heartily endorse the advancement of the paralegal profession in any country, I am unsure as to what effect the action in the Philippines may have in the U.S.,” Treadway said. “While I think the role of paralegals in the U.S. is being redefined often, the basic tenets are that they work under the supervision and guidance of an attorney and that they know the parameters of (and avoid) the unauthorized practice of law.”

Treadway added that she had to qualify her responses because she had no knowledge of the judicial system or procedures in the Philippines.

“I am unable to compare the Philippines program with the U.S.,” she said. “The ABA’s definition and NALA’s definition of paralegal also seem to differ from the stated purpose of the Manila Times Institute for Paralegal Studies [...]. If institutionalization of the paralegal practice in the Philippines serves to assist with the flow of cases and access to justice, then it is to be applauded.”

This recent legal development in the Philippines is another indication that the paralegal profession is continuing to grow throughout the world. EzineArticles.com contributor



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Scott Knutson reports that according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the job outlook for paralegals is very encouraging, with an expected growth rate of nearly 33% per year through 2010. The bureau points out that, compared to the levels of growth in other professions, the expansion of the paralegal field is significant.

It appears that the paralegal profession is starting to gain ground in other parts of the world, as well. According to an Estrin Legal Ed article, the number of paralegals in the UK has grown to 500,000; 50,000 are in the legal profession, and the remainder are spread throughout other economic sectors.

The expansion of the paralegal profession has been attributed to a couple of factors, according to EzineArticles' Scott Knutson. The first is that more law firms are hiring paralegals to do some necessary research and paperwork on their behalf. And the other is that companies are having paralegals do legal work rather than hiring expensive paid-by-the-hour attorneys, thus saving clients a great deal of money.

The incorporation of Asian Advocates for Paralegal Practice is one of two significant developments on the legal front in

the Philippines. The Philippines Supreme Court is currently implementing Republic Act 9285—a new law that has institutionalized the use of alternative dispute resolution systems in the Philippines.

In the Manila Times article, the Mabutasas state that the institutionalization of the paralegal profession will soon make paralegal practice a "prestigious endeavor in the Philippines, as it is in the United States and Canada."

This is a small glimmer of hope for the beleaguered justice system in the Philippines. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit, the country currently has a slow-moving judicial system that is hampered by a lack of funding and an insufficient number of judges.

The system has also been beset by corruption and ineffectiveness. There have been many reform movements over the years that aimed to eradicate some of these problems, and the institutionalization of the paralegal profession may be another step in the right direction.

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