NEW YORK STATE BAR ASSOCIATION ETHICS BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

PREAMBLE

The Latin American Council of the New York State Bar Association International Section ("LAC") aspires to promote, advance and support values and principles of ethics, integrity and the rule of law throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, with an emphasis on public and corporate responsibility and best practices. In support of its mission, LAC has prepared the following Ethics Best Practice Guidelines to promote uniformity of ethical commitments and expectations for Lawyers and Law Firms working across national borders in the Americas (the "Guidelines"). Lawyers practicing in other jurisdictions without clearly articulated ethics rules or guidelines may also find these Guidelines useful and informative.

The Guidelines are the result of two and a half years of study of various national laws, codes, rules and judicial decisions on ethical obligations of attorneys, as well as practical considerations. LAC obtained the views of leading international institutions, including the Cyrus R. Vance Center for International Justice, practicing attorneys in Latin America engaged in cross-border representations, and corporate counsel engaged in work in Latin America or with Latin American attorneys.

These Guidelines have been approved by LAC and the Executive Committees of the International Section and the New York State Bar Association ("NYSBA"). LAC, the International Section and NYSBA hope that the Guidelines will be seen as a model for cross-border practitioners in Latin America and in other jurisdictions around the world.

FIRST SECTION GENERAL PROVISIONS – DEFINITIONS

Article 1. Scope of Application

The Guidelines are a compilation of ethics best practices that should inform a practitioner's conduct in regard to ethical issues. These Guidelines are not legal provisions and, unless duly enacted by law, do not override any applicable national law, code or rule governing any Lawyer's or Law Firm's conduct in the practice of law.

Any Lawyer or Law Firm may, without compulsion, freely adopt and agree to abide by all or any part of the Guidelines. Neither the adoption nor lack of adoption of all or any part of these Guidelines shall give rise to any claim by clients, co-counsel, or third parties, including without limitation any governmental or regulatory body, against LAC, the International Section or NYSBA.

Article 1A. Definitions

"Adverse Interest" means any interest that may affect the loyalty of a Lawyer or Law Firm to a client, which may be conflicting, inconsistent, or otherwise contrary to the client's interests.

"Advertisement" means any public or private communication made by or on behalf of a Lawyer or a Law Firm with regard to their services, made for the primary purpose of inducing Persons to retain the services of the Lawyer or Law Firm. The term "Advertisement" does not include communications to existing clients or other Lawyers or Law Firms.¹

"Law Firm" refers to two or more Lawyers dedicated to the practice of law, or any professional corporation, sole proprietorship, partnership, company or other entity that represents clients in connection with Legal Matters.

"Confidential Information" refers to information obtained by a Lawyer during, or that is relevant to the representation of a client, when such information is: (a) protected as a Professional Secret; or, (b) likely embarrassing to the client or otherwise detrimental to her/his interests; or (c) information that the client requests be kept confidential. The term "Confidential Information" is not intended to include a Lawyer's knowledge of the law, or information that is generally known or otherwise of public knowledge.

"Guidelines" means these Ethics Best Practice Guidelines, as amended from time to time.

"Lawyer" means a person who is licensed to practice law, or who is admitted and eligible to practice law before the bar of the courts of his or her Local Jurisdiction.

"Legal Matter" refers to any litigation, proceeding, case, claim, suit, action, controversy, investigation, accusation, arrest, negotiation, contract, arbitration, mediation or any other legal representation involving a specific party or parties.²

"Local Jurisdiction" means the nation(s) or territory(ies) where a particular Lawyer or Law Firm is licensed or otherwise authorized to practice law.

"Person" refers to any natural person or to a corporation, partnership, association, trust or any other form of non-governmental organization or entity.

"Professional Secret" is a matter that a Lawyer or Law Firm is required to maintain in confidence, as defined by the Local Jurisdiction. Lawyers and Law Firms shall apply the definition of a Professional Secret, if applicable, as defined in the jurisdiction governing their professional conduct, the applicable definition of "Professional Secret" being hereby incorporated by reference as necessary.

SECOND SECTION FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

Article 2. Mission of the Profession and Main Principles

The law aims to defend the rights of Persons, and to promote the rule of law, justice and order. The Lawyer has an essential role in ensuring that the law serves these purposes. In this spirit, the Guidelines seek to establish a set of common objectives for its adherents and to promote transparency, ethical conduct, and a set of common standards governing legal professionals working across national borders in the Americas.

Article 3. Principles

a. Independence

The Lawyer or Law Firm should enjoy independence in the exercise of the profession, and must exercise autonomous professional judgment in advising the client.³ The Lawyer must disregard her/his own interests or outside influences⁴ to the extent they conflict with the Lawyer's obligations to the client, and abstain from undertaking or continuing the representation of a Person in connection with a Legal Matter when aware of the existence of Adverse Interests, unless the Lawyer reasonably believes that her/his ability to represent the client is not compromised, the matter is not one before a court or tribunal and the client provides informed consent, confirmed in writing.⁵

b. Justice⁶ and Legality⁷

Lawyers or Law Firms in the exercise of their profession must be respectful of the law, and work to ensure the fair application of justice.

c. Confidentiality

The Lawyer or Law Firm shall make every lawful effort to protect and hold private the Confidential Information of the client. ⁸

The Lawyer shall make every effort to ensure that any Person she/he hires in connection with a Legal Matter and to whom the Lawyer has provided the client's Confidential Information will defend and protect that Confidential Information.⁹

The Lawyer or Law Firm engaged in cross border matters must consider and discuss differences in applicable privilege or confidentiality laws/rules with co-counsel prior to transferring data or information across borders.

d. Conflicts of Interest

The Lawyer or Law Firm shall not assume the representation of a client when doing so would involve the representation of Adverse Interests, unless the Lawyer reasonably believes that her/his ability to represent the client will not be compromised and the client provides informed consent, confirmed in writing.¹⁰ If a lawyer becomes aware of an Adverse Interest after engagement, the Lawyer or Law Firm must immediately inform the client and, absent a client waiver in writing, the Lawyer or Law Firm must terminate the engagement.¹¹

e. Interests of the Client

The Lawyer or Law Firm must act diligently in the interests of the client, as long as there is no conflict with the Lawyer's or Law Firm's ethical or legal obligations. Whenever possible, the Lawyer or Law Firm shall consult with the client as to the means by which the objectives of the client's representation are to be accomplished. ¹³

f. Freedom of the Client

The Lawyer or Law Firm must respect the freedom of clients to be represented by the Lawyer or Law Firm of their choice.¹⁴

g. Property of Clients and Third Parties

The Lawyer or Law Firm must protect carefully and faithfully any money or other property of the client or a third party that has been entrusted to her/his or its custody. The Lawyer may not under any circumstances commingle the client's money with her/his own personal or professional accounts.¹⁵

h. Honesty

The conduct of the Lawyer or Law Firm must be characterized by honesty and openness. A Lawyer or Law Firm shall not fabricate or misrepresent the truth; advise or engage in malicious acts; forge documents; misrepresent the facts, make inaccurate, incomplete, or malicious representations; or perform any other act that may impede or divert the prompt and effective administration of justice.¹⁶

i. Competence, Efficiency and Diligence

A competent and diligent representation requires knowledge, skill, preparation, responsibility, prudence, and promptness, to properly address the matter entrusted to the Lawyer in a timely fashion. A Lawyer may not agree to represent a client in a Legal Matter where the Lawyer lacks the requisite knowledge or ability to handle the matter, unless the lawyer associates with a Lawyer who is competent to handle the Legal Matter.

The duty to provide services in a Legal Matter in a competent manner entails an obligation of the Lawyer to regularly update and maintain her/his knowledge of the law. ¹⁸

j. Responsibility

The Lawyer or Law Firm shall recognize and seek in good faith to correct any harm to a client caused by her/his/its negligence or willful misconduct.

k. Respect

Lawyers and/or Law Firms shall behave respectfully in all relationships, but especially shall be cordial and respectful in all relationships with clients, authorities, courts, colleagues and counterparties.¹⁹

THIRD SECTION RIGHTS, DUTIES, PROHIBITIONS AND FEES OF THE LAWYER OR LAW FIRM

Article 4. Rights of Lawyers or Law Firms:

a. Freedom of Acceptance

A Lawyer or Law Firm may exercise complete discretion to agree or refuse to work on any Legal Matter, subject to the limitations set forth in Article 3(a) and (d).²⁰

b. Independence of the Defense

A Lawyer or Law Firm is entitled to accept work on any Legal Matter involving the defense of a Person accused of a crime, regardless of the Lawyer's or Law Firm's personal opinion on the Legal Matter.²¹

c. Fees²²

Lawyers or Law Firms have the right to receive reasonable fees for their work.²³

d. Expenses²⁴

A Lawyer or Law Firm has the right to require from clients a provision for necessary expenses, which is separate and apart from legal fees.

e. Advertisement of Professional Services

A Lawyer or Law Firm has the right to disseminate Advertisements of professional services offered to the public, as long as this is performed is in a truthful and respectful manner. Such Advertisements may not contain statements that are misleading or false, make use of a client's Confidential Information or guarantee results to the targeted Persons.²⁵

Article 5. Duties of Lawyers or Law Firms

The Lawyer or Law Firm shall:

- a. Apply and uphold the laws of the Local Jurisdiction and, in general, preserve and defend the rule of law and applicable international obligations. ²⁶
- b. Endeavor to promote the dignity of the human person and human rights.²⁷
- c. Where possible, provide pro bono services to persons with limited resources.²⁸
- d. Regularly update her/his knowledge relevant to his/her area of practice.²⁹
- e. Preserve and defend the dignity and decorum of the legal profession.³⁰
- f. Where possible, help prevent unnecessary litigation and facilitate alternative dispute resolution mechanisms for conflicts.³¹
- g. Encourage witnesses to testify with veracity.³²
- h. Register and enroll with the competent authority of the lawyer's Local Jurisdiction.³³
- i. Properly preserve any goods or documents delivered by the client and, if fully paid by the client, return them promptly at the client's request.³⁴
- j. Submit to the regulation of the exercise of the profession in her/his Local Jurisdiction.³⁵
- k. Act in good faith in the exercise of the profession.
- 1. Senior Lawyers in professional practice should provide guidance and advice to new Lawyers who request such assistance.³⁶

Article 6. Actions Prohibited by Lawyers or Law Firms

Lawyers or Law Firms shall not:

- a. Maliciously or fraudulently induce a person to use their professional services.³⁷
- b. Authorize illegal contracts.³⁸
- c. Practice the profession without proper authorization.³⁹
- d. Disclose a client's Confidential Information, unless authorized to do so or required to do so by a competent court or tribunal.
- e. Fail to promptly inform a client or potential client of the existence of any Adverse Interests.
- f. Act without prior authorization from the client, unless doing so is necessary to prevent physical harm to others or immediate damage to the Legal Matter. 40
- g. Guarantee the client success in the Legal Matter.⁴¹
- h. Assign the Legal Matter to another Lawyer or Law Firm without the client's consent. 42
- i. Quit representation in a Legal Matter that they have accepted, without just cause. 43
- j. Withhold from, or fail to report to, the client information concerning the client's case. 44
- k. Improperly withhold or fail to deliver or to safeguard any property or documentation entrusted to the Lawyer or Law Firm. 45
- Charge fees in excess of those agreed upon with the client.⁴⁶
- m. Fail to inform the client of viable alternative means of conflict resolution, where they are available and permitted.⁴⁷
- n. Knowingly provide false information to a judicial or other government authority.⁴⁸
- o. Improperly influence or attempt to influence any legal authority.⁴⁹

- p. If prohibited under local laws, represent clients when the lawyer is serving in public office. ⁵⁰
- q. Allow their services, signature or name to be used by a Person not legally authorized to do so. 51
- r. Exert undue influence on the client to replace an existing Lawyer or Law Firm.⁵²
- s. Use or publish Advertisements that contain misleading or false statements.⁵³

Article 7. Fees of the Lawyer or Law Firm

Before or within a reasonable time after agreeing to represent a client, a Lawyer or Law Firm should agree with the client on the legal fees to be charged, as well as the expenses to be incurred, and if the fees are to be paid by a third party on behalf of the client, the Lawyer or Law Firm must inform both the client and the third party. This fee arrangement must be reflected in writing.

In no event may a Lawyer or Law Firm charge or collect a fee that is excessive or unreasonable. Factors to be considered in making this determination are:

- What is customary in the industry;
- Importance of services;
- Amount at issue in the Legal Matter;
- Novelty or difficulty of the Legal Matter;
- Specialty of the professionals involved;
- Economic capacity of the client;
- Whether the Lawyer or Law Firm will be inhibited from participating in other Legal Matters;
- Time spent on the Legal Matter;
- Level of participation in the Legal Matter;
- Whether the Lawyer or Law Firm only provides legal advice to the client or is authorized, by power of attorney or otherwise, to act on the client's behalf.⁵⁴

A Lawyer or Law Firm shall not accept referral fees unless her/his/its Local Jurisdiction permits acceptance of such fees. Lawyers working in a Law Firm⁵⁵ or in joint representation may reasonably apportion fees in relation to the shared duties.⁵⁶

FOURTH SECTION GENERAL PROVISIONS

Article 8. Interpretation

The application of the Guidelines' principles to a particular situation should be interpreted in light of the specific facts and circumstances of the situation. A departure from any of these provisions may be entirely appropriate in a particular case.

Article 9. No Actionable Rights

Under no circumstances should behavior contrary to the Guidelines standing alone constitute or be deemed to give rise to a cause of action against a Lawyer or Law Firm by a client, another party or Lawyer, a regulatory authority or otherwise.

Article 10. Waiver of Liability:

Any Law Firm or Lawyer who incorporates the Guidelines into a private agreement or otherwise adopts the provisions herein hereby irrevocably waives any claims against LAC; the International Section; and NYSBA relating to, arising from, or connected with the Guidelines or any part thereof.

NOTES

- 1. New York Rules of Professional Conduct Rule 1.0(a), 22 NYCRR 1200.0, effective as amended through January 1, 2017. New York, United States of America.
- 2. New York Rules of Professional Conduct Rule 1.0(1), 22 NYCRR 1200.0. New York, United States of America.
- 3. New York Rules of Professional Conduct Rule 5.8(a), 22 NYCRR 1200.44. New York, United States of America; United Conduct for Profession, the International Bar Association. Warsaw. 2011; Code of Professional Ethics of the Venezuelan Lawyer. Superior Counselor of the Federation of Bar Association of Venezuela. City of San Cristobal, Táchira State. Venezuela. 1985; Standards of Professional Ethics. School of the Province of Buenos Aires. 1954; Lawyer's Code of Ethics. Board of Deans of the Bar Association Peru. Lima, Peru. 2012.
- 4. Law No. 387 of the Exercise of the Lawyer. Multinational Legislative Assembly, Act of July 9, 2013, Page 1. Bolivia. 2013; Law number 1123. Lawyer Disciplinary Code Congress of the Republic of Colombia. Colombia. 2007.
- 5. New York Rules of Professional Conduct Rule 1.7, 22 NYCRR 1200.7. New York, United States of America.
- 6. International Principles of Conduct for Legal Profession, the International Bar Association. Warsaw. 2011; New York Rules of Professional Conduct Rule 8.4(d), 22 NYCRR 1200.58. New York, United States of America; Code of Professional Ethics of the Venezuelan Lawyer. Superior Counselor of the Federation of Bar Association of Venezuela. City of San Cristobal, Táchira State. Venezuela. 1985; Standards of Professional Ethics. School of the Province of Buenos Aires, Argentina. 1954; Lawyer's Code of Ethics. Board of Deans of the Bar Association Peru. Lima, Peru. 2012.
- 7. Code of Professional Ethics. School of Lawyers and Notaries of Guatemala. 1994; Lawyer's Code of Ethics. San Salvador. October 2011; Code of Ethics Honduran law. Supreme Court Republic of Honduras, C.A. Tegucigalpa, Honduras. 1966; Code of Ethics and Professional Responsibility Lawyer. Plenary General Assembly under the 10th National Congress of Lawyers. Panama. 2011; Decree No. 1290, which ratified the Code of Ethics of the School of Lawyers of the Dominican Republic. Santo Domingo de Guzmán, National District, Dominican Republic. 1983; Code of Professional Ethics of the Venezuelan Lawyer. Superior Counselor of the Federation of Bar Association of Venezuela. City of San Cristobal, Táchira State. Venezuela. 1985; Standards of Professional Ethics. School of the Province of Buenos Aires. 1954; Lawyer's Code of Ethics. Board of Deans of the Bar Association Peru. Lima, Peru. 2012.
- 8. Law No. 387 of the Exercise of the Lawyer. Multinational Legislative Assembly, Act of July 9, 2013, Page 1. Bolivia. 2013; Code of Legal, Moral and Ethical Legal Professional duties. Bar Association Costa Rica. Costa Rica. 2004; Standards of Professional Ethics. School of the Province of Buenos Aires. 1954; Lawyer's Code of Ethics. Board of Deans of the Bar Association Peru. Lima, Peru. 2012.

- 9. Op. Cit.
- 10. New York Rules of Professional Conduct Rule 1.7, 22 NYCRR 1200.7. New York, United States of America.
- 11. International Principles of Conduct for Legal Profession, the International Bar Association. Warsaw. 2011; New York Rules of Professional Conduct Rule 1.7, 22 NYCRR 1200.7. New York, United States of America; Fernandez del Castillo, Bernardo. Code of Ethics of the Illustrious and National School of Lawyers of Mexico. Mexico. 1997; Lawyer's Code of Ethics. San Salvador. October 2011; Code of Legal, Moral and Ethical Legal Professional duties. Bar Association Costa Rica. Costa Rica. 2004; Code of Ethics and Professional Responsibility Lawyer. Plenary General Assembly under the 10th National Congress of Lawyers. Panama. 2011; Law number 1123. Lawyer Disciplinary Code. Congress of the Republic of Colombia. Colombia. 2007; Code of Ethics. Extraordinary General Meeting of Members of the CAU. Uruguay. 2003.
- 12. New York Rules of Professional Conduct Rule 1.7, 22 NYCRR 1200.7. New York, United States of America; Law No. 387 of the Exercise of the Lawyer. Multinational Legislative Assembly, Act of July 9, 2013, Page 1. Bolivia. 2013; Code of Ethics. Extraordinary General Meeting of Members of the CAU. Uruguay. 2003.
- 13. New York Rules of Professional Conduct, Rule 1.2, 22 NYCRR 1200.2, New York, United States of America.
- 14. International Principles of Conduct for Legal Profession, the International Bar Association. Warsaw. 2011; New York Rules of Professional Conduct Rule 1.7(b)(3)-(4), 22 NYCRR 1200.7. New York, United States of America.
- 15. New York Rules of Professional Conduct Rule 1.15, 22 NYCRR 1200.15. New York, United States of America; Lawyer's Code of Ethics. San Salvador. October 2011; Code of Ethics Honduran law. Supreme Court Republic of Honduras, C.A. Tegucigalpa, Honduras. 1966; Code of Legal, Moral and Ethical Legal Professional duties. Bar Association Costa Rica. Costa Rica. 2004; Code of Professional Ethics of the Venezuelan Lawyer. Superior Counselor of the Federation of Bar Association of Venezuela. City of San Cristobal, Táchira State. Venezuela. 1985; Code of ethics of the Lawyer. Board of Deans of the law schools of the Peru. Lima, Peru. 2012; Law number 1123. Lawyer Disciplinary Code. Congress of the Republic of Colombia. Colombia. 2007; Law No. 387 of the Exercise of the Lawyer. Multinational Legislative Assembly, Act of July 9, 2013, Bolivia. 2013; Standards of Professional Ethics. School of the Province of Buenos Aires. 1954; Code of Ethics. Extraordinary General Meeting of Members of the CAU. Uruguay. 2003; Standards of Professional Ethics. School of the Province of Buenos Aires. 1954; Lawyer's Code of Ethics. Board of Deans of the Bar Association Peru. Lima, Peru. 2012.
- 16. International Principles of Conduct for Legal Profession, the International Bar Association. Warsaw. 2011; Code of Professional Ethics. Extraordinary Assembly of Bar Association Mexico; Code of Professional Ethics. School of Lawyers and Notaries of Guatemala. 1994; Lawyer's Code of Ethics. San Salvador. October 2011; Code of Ethics Honduran law. Supreme Court Republic of Honduras, C.A. Tegucigalpa, Honduras. 1966; Decree No. 1290, which ratified the Code of Ethics of the School of Lawyers of the Dominican Republic. Santo Domingo de Guzmán, National District, Dominican Republic. 1983; Law No. 387 of the Exercise of the Lawyer. Multinational Legislative Assembly, Act

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- 17. International Principles of Conduct for Legal Profession, the International Bar Association. Warsaw. 2011; Code of Professional Ethics. School of Lawyers and Notaries of Guatemala. 1994; Lawyer's Code of Ethics. San Salvador. October 2011; Decree No. 1290, which ratified the Code of Ethics of the School of Lawyers of the Dominican Republic. Santo Domingo de Guzmán, National District, Dominican Republic. 1983; Law No. 387 of the Exercise of the Lawyer. Multinational Legislative Assembly, Act of July 9, 2013. Bolivia, 2013; Code of Ethics. Extraordinary General Meeting of Members of the CAU. Uruguay. 2003; Code of Legal, Moral and Ethical Legal Professional duties. Bar Association Costa Rica. Costa Rica. 2004.
- 18. Code of Ethics of the Lawyer. San Salvador. October 2011; Law Number 1123. Lawyer Disciplinary Code. Congress of the Republic of Colombia. Colombia. 2007.
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- 20. International Principles of Conduct for Legal Profession, the International Bar Association. Warsaw. 2011; Code of Professional Ethics. School of Lawyers and Notaries of Guatemala. 1994; Lawyer's Code of Ethics. San Salvador. October 2011; Code of Ethics Honduran law. Supreme Court Republic of Honduras, C.A. Tegucigalpa, Honduras. 1966; Code of Ethics and Professional Responsibility Lawyer. Plenary General Assembly under the 10th National Congress of Lawyers. Panama. 2011.
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