

PARIS PRO BONO PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Project Origins

Over the last two years, a group of Paris law firms, joined by a number of in-house counsel and representatives of international non-government organisations, have been holding quarterly roundtable meetings to exchange information on pro bono work. This informal group came into being on the initiative of a handful of law firms and has grown to include some 35 firms (see attached distribution list). The list continues to grow.

Until late 2008, the meetings of the roundtable group mainly involved a series of presentations from various national and international organisations which regularly seek pro bono assistance from law firms (Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'homme, International Senior Lawyers' Project, Advocates for International Development, l'Institut des droits de l'homme des Avocats européens, Droits d'Urgence et Avocats sans Frontières France). The connections established by the roundtable group with these organizations have led to lawyers in the roundtable group working on pro bono matters for such organisations.

A steering committee comprised of Jean-Luc Bédos (Lefèvre Pelletier & Associés, founder of Droits d'Urgence), Denis Chemla (Herbert Smith, President of Droits d'Urgence), Gillian Lemaire (Dewey & Leboeuf) and Molly Slaughter (Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer) was created recently with the aim of recommending to the roundtable group how it should develop its activities. The steering committee put forward a proposal to the roundtable group in November 2008, identifying two main projects for the group, one international and one domestic.

On an international level, the roundtable group intends to continue developing its relationships with the above mentioned and other international organizations. In this regard, the roundtable group will act as a "clearing house", *i.e.*, it will receive requests for assistance from such organizations and distribute such requests to its members in order that the organisations may select the firm(s) best able to assist them in relation to a particular project.

On a national level, Jean-Luc Bédos suggested that those firms interested in developing a domestic pro bono programme could team up with Droits d'Urgence and provide teams of lawyers who would volunteer at legal clinics alongside experienced Droits d'Urgence in-house lawyers. For more information on the work of Droits d'Urgence see the attached Droits d'Urgence presentation or visit their website at <http://www.droitsdurgence.org>. The roundtable group wishes to develop this pro bono domestic programme with Droits d'Urgence, as more fully described below.

How?

Droits d'Urgence has identified three organisations in three different locations which we could support in this way – Le CAMRES, La Boutique de Solidarité and Les Petits

Frères des Pauvres, a new clinic created especially for this project. For more information on these organisations please see the attached documents.

Volunteer lawyers will be called upon to advise the clinic's users on a variety of legal issues. The attached documents provide information on the type of advice offered at each centre and the populations who make use of these services. However, it is worth noting that a high percentage of requests relate to immigration law.

Droits d'Urgence is aware that this area of law will be unfamiliar territory for lawyers specialising in business law and is keen to ensure that volunteers are adequately trained in order to ensure advice of the highest quality is provided. Droits d'Urgence will therefore offer training sessions of up to two days, the cost of which will be covered by the law firms and will amount to approximately €2,500 per session.

Keen to offer a range of opportunities for lawyers to get involved in their work, Droits d'Urgence is also offering volunteer lawyers the possibility of taking on cases after the initial provision of information at one of the legal clinics. This kind of support has the advantage of being able to be carried out from the office and managed according to the volunteer's workload.

Firms taking part in the project will be requested to adhere to a Droits d'Urgence Charter.

This project will run in parallel with *aide juridictionnelle* and will in no way infringe upon the invaluable work carried out by *aide juridictionnelle* lawyers. On the contrary, it is hoped that by directing people towards *aide juridictionnelle* and in providing assistance with the complex administrative task of requesting it, this project will in fact enhance people's prospects of obtaining *aide juridictionnelle*.

Who?

Clinics will be held once a week by two volunteers. If each volunteer attends a clinic every six weeks, we will require at least 12 lawyers for each centre, or 36 lawyers in total for the 3 centres. Although the number of lawyers from each firm will vary according to the firm's size and their interest in the project, it is hoped that each firm will be in a position to provide at least 3 lawyers every 6 weeks. Obviously, firms will need to be in a position to recruit a team of volunteers made up of significantly more lawyers in order to ensure not only that they are always in a position to provide cover in case work commitments prevent one of more volunteers from attending the clinic, but also that the clinics can function correctly.

When?

The project will be launched before the summer of 2009 during which a Droits d'Urgence film will be shown recounting the experiences of the legal clinic users and their staff. All potential volunteers are invited to attend this event, which will provide a useful insight into what will be required of them.

Once participating firms and teams of volunteers are established, a schedule will be drawn up listing volunteer names, dates and times they will attend the clinics.

If your firm is interested in taking part, you will be required to fill in an engagement letter, indicating the number of volunteer lawyers you can provide, along with the contact details of the person who will act as project coordinator for your firm.

The members of the Steering Committee are delighted to invite you to join us and take part in this exiting project, the first inter-firm pro bono project of its kind in France.