

Chilean bar elects Alessandri's managing partner as president

Monday, 29 June 2015 (2 days ago) by Thomas Muskett-Ford

The managing partner of IP and corporate firm [Alessandri](#), Arturo [Alessandri](#), has promised to expand ethical oversight in Chile's legal profession following his election as president to the Colegio de Abogados de Chile last week.



The 19-member general counsel of Chile's national bar voted by 11 votes to six in favour of [Alessandri](#) taking the top job for a two-year term on 22 June. There were two abstentions. He saw off competition from the only other contender, Alfredo Etcheberry, a prominent criminal law professor at the Universidad de Chile. [Alessandri](#), 62, replaces constitutional lawyer Olga Feliú, who has served as the bar's president for the past four years.

The Colegio de Abogados de Chile is the country's largest and oldest bar association. Membership stands at around 9,000, or approximately half the country's legal profession. Joining the bar requires proof of a law degree and the annual payment of a 60,000 pesos (US\$95) membership fee. However, membership, which has been voluntary for newly qualified lawyers since 1980, has declined in recent years. [Alessandri](#) says his main priority as president will be to reverse the downturn by publicising the bar's activities at leading law schools through a mixture of talks, course offerings and literature.

[Alessandri](#) attributes the decline in membership among young lawyers to several factors. "I think many are not aware of the advantages it brings and look at it as burden," he says. "They may also question why they should pay a membership fee to get ethical oversight."

[Alessandri](#) hopes increased membership figures will improve the bar's ethical oversight of Chile's legal profession. Bar members who are found guilty of professional misconduct can have their membership suspended and are named and shamed in the association's quarterly magazine, which [Alessandri](#) believes is enough to keep them in check. "I think that's the biggest deterrent; they are afraid of both the moral and social sanction," he says. In contrast, those outside the bar are not subject to the same oversight, argues [Alessandri](#).

Indeed, the bar's role as a policing entity is central to its existence, claims [Alessandri](#). "There are a lot people in need of a lawyer because of personal circumstances," he says. "They make a big effort to save up and then don't get the service they paid for and their lawyer is not held accountable, so I think we are playing an important role."

In addition to publicising the bar's value, [Alessandri](#) will also work to address the issue of accountability by re-energising a bill in congress that would allow local courts to hold public lawyers to their own set of ethical standards. However, the bill in its current form would not apply to lawyers in the private sector. "The intermediary solution is to have this law enacted so that there are ethical tribunals for everybody [including private lawyers]," says [Alessandri](#), who believes it would work to complement the bar's efforts at achieving greater ethical oversight.

Nonetheless, [Alessandri](#) argues it is important for lawyers to also voluntarily submit to the bar's ethical codes and dismisses a return to the times when membership was compulsory and it could strip lawyers of their title. "We believe there is a big difference between those who are willing to subject themselves voluntarily to ethical controls [and those that are not], because it affects the way clients and society see our profession," he

declares.

Alessandri has been a member of the bar’s general council since 1997, but must now balance his new role with his position as managing partner at Alessandri. “Although this is not a full time job, it will of course take up much more of my time,” he admits. However, he says he can count on the backing of his colleagues. “I will have to delegate much more to my partners who have been very generous in their support.”

The Chilean bar’s new president comes from a highly distinguished family. His uncle, who shares his name, was also a prominent lawyer and twice president of Chile in the first half of the last century, while his father served as a senator.

Comments

There are currently no comments.