

INSPIRATIONAL MESSAGE of CHIEF JUSTICE DIOSDADO M. PERALTA
25th PWJA Annual Convention-Seminar
March 4, 2020, Manila Hotel
[Delivered by Court of Appeals Justice Fernanda Lampas Peralta]

A pleasant and empowering morning to everyone.

The timing of the present annual PWJA Convention Seminar with the theme: “*Empowering Women Judges in the Cyber Age*,” is very opportune in this month of March, being the “National Women’s Month,” and harmonizes well with the International Women’s Day, which is on March 8, or this coming Sunday.

Since 1987 when the PWJA was established by then Supreme Court Associate Justice and eventually Chancellor of the Philippine Judicial Academy Ameurfina A. Melencio-Herrera, the PWJA has continuously promoted the welfare, rights, and status of women by serving as a venue for the exchange of opinions and information among the PWJA members. For the past 33 years, the PWJA has worked for the promotion of women's access to courts and the elimination of gender bias in the Judiciary.

Through the PWJA's initiatives and promotion of judicial reforms, it has unified its members towards becoming women of the law who espouse appropriate measures and remedies to address legal issues encountered not only by the female members of the legal profession, but by women in general.

The latest statistics from the Court Management Office of the Office of the Court Administrator show that as of February 26, 2020, there are 414 women RTC Judges who constitute 46% of the total number of Judges in the RTCs; 35 women Family Court Judges who constitute 73% of the total number of Judges in said courts; and 527 women first-level court Judges who constitute 55.75% of the total number of first-level court judges.

In the Court of Appeals, 24 out of the 54 incumbent Justices are women, including the Hon. Acting Presiding Justice Remedios A. Salazar-Fernando and my wife, Hon. Fernanda C. Lampas-Peralta. In the appellate courts, women are likewise at the forefront. In the Court of Tax Appeals, seven out of nine Justices are women. In the Sandigangayan, eight of the 21 incumbent Justices are women, including its Presiding Justice, Hon. Amparo M. Cabotaje-Tang. In the Supreme Court, there are 3 incumbent lady Justices.

These numbers eloquently speak the reality that over the years, women Judges have earned the trust of the appointing authority. For women Judges have been empowered by their innate ability to persevere, and to work with passion and conviction. It is for this reason that I earnestly request the PWJA's continuing support for the programs of the Judiciary, particularly the 10-point program of the Peralta Court.

A significant and timely accomplishment of the PWJA that is something I am absolutely passionate about: the speedy disposition of cases. For as often invoked, justice delayed is justice denied. As Chief Justice, I want the Peralta Court to be known for three things: *first*, the clearing or declogging of court dockets; *second*, the adoption of judicial reforms which aim to streamline judicial processes; and *third*, the continuance of a disciplined and responsive Philippine

Judiciary.

My motto is: *I shall lead and live by example*, while my guiding principle which is not only for myself but for the entire Judiciary is: *Let us be united, and let us follow the rules*.

I sincerely believe that a truly democratic system of governance demands a judicial system that is not only fair and just, but also fast and speedy. This is why I have been and will remain to be a staunch proponent of the *Revised Guidelines for Continuous Trial in Criminal Cases*.

Obviously, the PWJA shares this advocacy of mine in promoting the speedy dispatch of cases. As early as 1988, the PWJA had forwarded to the Supreme Court *En Banc* its recommendations for the adoption of mandatory continuous trials. The PWJA should be credited with spearheading judicial reforms geared towards addressing the problems of congestion of court dockets.

I would like to highlight the significance of this Convention's theme this year, *Empowering Women Judges in the Cyber Age*, as it is well in consonance with the Supreme Court's current judicial reforms which are geared towards the incorporation of technology in court proceedings and processes.

With the implementation of more skills-based training for Judges as an integral part of my Ten-Point Agenda for the Judiciary, the contribution of women Judges to the quality of adjudication and efficiency of judicial administration is indispensable.

To stress, the elimination of backlog in all courts, continuous revision of the rules of procedure so as to be more responsive to the needs of court users and the public, automation of court processes and incorporation of court technology in hearings and trials, are among the aspects of my ten-point agenda.

In line with this, the Supreme Court has approved the proposed amendments to the *Revised Rules on Evidence* and to the *1997 Rules of Civil Procedure*. The adoption of new rules on the use of technology in court proceedings and processes was necessitated by the Judiciary's need to keep up with the demands of modern times.

The amendments to the *Revised Rules on Evidence* reflect various Supreme Court rulings on admissibility and evaluation of evidence. Significant amendments include provisions that will implement the Apostille Convention, to which the Philippines is a party, wherein the authentication procedure of documents for use abroad is made simpler by attaching to the documents an Apostille, or a certificate from the Department of Foreign Affairs that authenticates the origin of a public document. Other significant amendments pertain to the inclusion of recordings, photographs, words, sounds, numbers, or their equivalent to the list of documentary evidence; and the changing of the term "Best Evidence Rule" to "Original Document Rule" in order to avoid confusion, since the said rule only applies to documents.

On the other hand, the amendments to the *1997 Rules of Civil Procedure* present a multi-faceted adjustment to the rules, with the goal of improving the flow of judicial proceedings and avoiding delays. For the parties, the requirements to institute an action will be modified such that the complaint must now include evidentiary matters, like judicial affidavits and copies of documents. Several motions, which are currently susceptible to dilatory abuse, will be prohibited, while litigated or adversarial motions may be heard at the discretion of the Judge. The new rules will also require Judges to take on a more proactive role in assessing the merits of cases and the progress of proceedings in general.

Another procedural rule meant to facilitate the efficiency and effectiveness of court proceedings, is *The Rule on Administrative Search and Inspection under the Philippine Competition Act (PCA)*, or *R.A. 10667*. This *Rule*, which took effect on November 16, 2019, governs the application, issuance, and enforcement of inspection orders for administrative investigations of alleged violations of the Philippine Competition Act and its implementing rules and regulations. This *Rule* is instrumental in further systematizing court practices, and in extending the power needed by the Philippine Competition Commission to achieve its mandate under the law of prohibiting anti-competitive agreements, abuses of dominant position, and anti-competitive mergers and acquisitions.

Also worthy of mention are the *Proposed Guidelines on the Use of Video Conferencing for Remote Testimonies of Persons Deprived of Liberty*, which had been pilot-tested in Davao City in September of last year, as well as the planned increase in the threshold amount of Small Claims Cases from ₱400,000.00 (or ₱300,000.00 for first level courts other than the Metropolitan Trial Courts) to ₱1 Million after the scheduled amendment of Batas Pambansa Blg. 129 regarding jurisdictional amounts.

I hope that the advent of these new rules will all the more inspire you, as they are meant to improve the judicial system and enhance public trust. Having been a Judge of the Regional Trial Court and Presiding Justice of the Sandiganbayan myself, I know from experience that competent Judges and Justices like you have the ability and discipline to willingly adapt to innovations that will redound to the benefit of the Judiciary and the public.

To conclude, I sincerely thank all of you, officers and members of the PWJA, for your unrelenting zeal in your meaningful conventions and for upholding the true spirit of the legal profession.

I wish you all a productive and empowering convention. To the PWJA officials and members, you all deserve to be commended. Mabuhay ang PWJA!