



# PWJA Newsette

Official Organ of the Philippine Women Judges Association, Inc.

June 1, 2021

Manila Philippines

**A CALL For PWJA:**  
*Resiliency Amidst Pandemic*

## 26TH PWJA CONVENTION

**Virtual Convention-Seminar**  
**June 2-3, 2021**



**Justice Estela M. Perlas-Bernabe**

Senior Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the Philippines



**Chief Justice Alexander Gesmundo**

Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the Philippines

### **PRESIDENT'S REPORT**

#### **26th PWJA Convention- Seminar**

By: Senior Associate Justice Estela M. Perlas-Bernabe

#### **25th PWJA Convention-Seminar**

On March 3-5, 2020, just days before the national government officially announced that the country was under Code Red Sublevel 2, placing Metro Manila on partial lockdown and imposing travel restrictions in and out of the capital to contain the rapid spread of the novel coronavirus, a total of 520 judges from the different islands of the Philippine archipelago converged at the historic Manila Hotel to attend the 25th Annual Convention and Seminar of the Philippine Women Judges Association (PWJA).

It was a milestone for the PWJA, having spent a quarter of a century gathering together and advancing common judicial interests and goals. In an astounding show of support, all but one member of the Supreme Court En Banc graced the occasion. It was a veritable who's who in the Judiciary lighting up the Centennial Hall of the premier hotel, with added wattage provided by keynote speaker Secretary Menardo Guevarra from the Department of Justice and Manila Mayor Francisco "Isko Moreno" Domagoso. The lady judges could not contain their exuberance and made sure to record their presence for posterity.

The theme "PWJA: Empowering Women Judges in the Cyber Age" was a portent of what would eventually become the "new normal" in conducting court proceedings, which relies heavily on technology. Relevant topics on (1) Internet for Judges – An Introduction to Cybercrime and (2) Evidentiary and Trial Issues Concerning Digital Evidence were expertly expounded by Mr. Daniel Ogden, a computer forensic analyst from Washington D.C., U.S.A. The lectures were followed by interactive activities – "Cyber Jeop-

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### **MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF JUSTICE**

One of the key strengths that helped the Judiciary pull through during these trying times is the Philippine Women Judges Association's theme—"A call for PWJA: Resiliency Amidst Pandemic"—the centrepiece of this 26<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention and Seminar. This theme hits the nail on the head as the COVID-19 pandemic took humanity down to its knees by striking our hearts with the fear of losing our lives and casting uncertainties which the world had not prepared for.

Yet, the tiny spark which lit the fire of hope is the powerful belief in our capacity to recover quickly and bounce back. Such tenacious spirit and determination to withstand this present adversity has become the cornerstone of our journey.

With the leadership of the lady Justices of the Court with the support of all lady magistrates of various courts, the PWJA has transformed itself into a beacon of inspiration by reminding us that adversity is but a part of life which can be conquered by initiative and true grit.

It is fitting that we celebrate this quality with renewed and strengthened commitment—one which the lady magistrates have taken upon themselves. Let us endeavor to challenge ourselves in understanding the current forces that hamper us from delivering effective justice. Let us empower ourselves through our strong will to be innovative during these hard times. Such driving force will compel and lead us overcome this crisis.

I commend the PWJA for boldly taking an active part in revisiting our processes, identifying obstacles, and reconfiguring our rules which will ultimately define Judiciary's direction for generations to come.

**President's Report** (cont. from page 1)

ardy – A Quiz Show on Cybercrime” and “Q&A with the Cybercops” – ably facilitated by Justice Maria Rowena Modesto-San Pedro, Judge Wilhelmina Jorge-Wagan and Judge Rainelda Estacio-Montesa who are all valued members of the Supreme Court Technical Working Group on Cybercrime.

Consistent with the theme, the PWJA launched its very own website, which was created with the help of Digital Enigma. It allowed us during the succeeding months to attain full connectivity to our counterparts from all over the country, and to facilitate the efficient dissemination of administrative circulars, court issuances, and updates from the PWJA leadership despite continuous lockdowns imposed by government. It has truly become a center of communication and information as we envisioned it to be. News and other articles involving members of the PWJA have been posted on time, and the updates kept coming without delay.

Another highlight of the Convention was the presentation of a music video featuring the PWJA national officers and board of directors in fabulous Filipiniana attires gracefully walking the hallowed halls of the Supreme Court Padre Faura Compound, and in business attires while attending the PWJA Board meeting held at the Alex Reyes Hall of the Court of Appeals. A revised version of the PWJA Hymn with a more upbeat rhythm served as background music. Said video was created by Rorschach Productions, the production company helmed by Parañaque City Councilor Jomari Ylana.

In the months following the Convention, when the pandemic caused technology to dictate how we work, we have shown ourselves to be empowered women judges, easing effortlessly to virtual hearings, videoconferencing and webinars. As frontliners of our courts, we have now been in a long drawn-out battle against an unseen enemy. Yet we have remained fearless and unyielding in the face of the clear and present danger presented not just by the coronavirus but by lawless elements. These are indeed extraordinary times, but the challenges have so far been faced head on.

**Health Coverage for PWJA members**

In response to the clamor for a health insurance plan and in order to identify the best health maintenance organization (HMO) to cater to the specific needs of the members, the PWJA officers and directors created the PWJA Health Committee composed of the following:

Chair: **Judge Rosalyn M. Loja**  
 Co-Chair: **Judge Sheryll C. Dolendo-Tulabing**  
 Members: **Judge Leilani Marie Dacanay Grimares**  
**Judge Belen G. Salespara- Carasig**  
**Judge Anne Beatrice Aguana Balmaceda**  
**Atty. Rogelyn T. Adalid-Mendiola**

Taking into account the following criteria: (1) HMO's capacity to provide service to at least 1,200 individuals; (2) inclusion of dependents in the coverage as well as judges in advanced ages up to 70 years; (3) network of doctors and hospitals and other health care providers; (3) cost of premiums which should not be more than 10% of the total package; (4) waiver of pre-existing conditions; and (5) inclusion of Covid-19 in the list of covered illnesses, the Committee drew up a shortlist from among several HMOs that presented their initial proposals. The top 3 HMOs identified were, as follows: Maxicare, PhilBritish/Cocolife and Kaiser International Healthgroup Inc. (Kaiser). It was further noted that Kaiser is the current provider for employees of the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeals.

In a special meeting held on October 1, 2020, the officers and directors unanimously chose Kaiser to provide voluntary health coverage to its members and their dependents. After the terms and conditions of said coverage were ironed out, and the benefit was extended to male judges and court employees, as well as their respective dependents, your President signed the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with Kaiser on November 16, 2020 at the Dignitaries' Lounge of the Supreme Court. Present as witnesses were Judge Rosalyn M. Loja (Regional Director – NCJR 1) and Judge Sheryll D. Tulabing (Deputy Regional Director – NCJR 1). On the other hand, Kaiser was represented by its President and Medical Director, Dr. Leah R. Uy-Yolo, as well as its Senior Vice President for Sales and Marketing, Mr. Brandon C. Gloria. Total premiums for 532 enrollees amounted to P 11,529,548.03. Expectedly, those who had been struck by the coronavirus in the succeeding months were able to seek medical care without straining their finances.

**PWJA Outreach Programs/Activities**

The year 2020 has brought untold misery and suffering, for some more than others. On top of battling the novel coronavirus, we had to deal with catastrophic natural calamities that left hundreds of thousands of our countrymen overwhelmed with grief and loss.

While a number of our judges and court personnel have succumbed to Covid-19, the rest of us rallied each other to extend comfort, prayers and financial assistance not just to our colleagues and subordinates but to the general community as well. Several initiatives for donations of face masks and face shields to judicial frontliners, and donations of personal protective equipments (PPEs) to medical frontliners were generously funded by our members, either individually or collectively. Our judges from the Ilocos region gave cash donations to a hospital that caters to Covid-19 patients, and judges from Pagadian City in Zamboanga del Sur supported a community pantry coordinated by the local church.

In November 2020, when the country was hit by back-to-back typhoons (Typhoons Rolly and Ulysses) that wreaked havoc on the Bicol Region, and in most parts of Luzon including the Metro Manila area, we selflessly pooled our resources to donate cash (close to P800,000.00), food items and clothing to court personnel who were displaced. As reported by Judge Maria Clarissa L. Pacis-Trinidad, donations for court personnel in Catanduanes amounting to P265,650.00 were generously sent by judges from Regions 1, 2, 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, 5, 8 and 11. Meanwhile, some court employees in Tabaco, Iriga and Legazpi received an aggregate amount of P117,000.00 from judges in Regions 4A, 4B, 5, 10, and NCJR 1. On the other hand, as reported by Judge Christine S. Muga-Abad, the joint project of PWJA Regions 6, 7 and 8, which was ably assisted by the Office of Deputy Court Administrator Jennylind Aldecoa-Delorino, collected total donations in the amount of P327,020.00 which were sent to judges and court employees in the provinces of Isabela and Cagayan in Region 2, and in Albay and Catanduanes in Region 5. PWJA Region 6 sent an additional P42,500.00 to typhoon victims in Cagayan through Judge Marivic A. Cacatian-Beltran.

Our judges from the Bulacan province also mobilized themselves to help the victims of the Taal Volcano eruption in the early part of year 2020. Indeed, the PWJA has proven time and again that it is an organization of courageous women whose contribution to society is marked by deep compassion for others. While the pandemic may have restricted our physical movements, our hands refused to be shackled; and the PWJA was able to reach out to those who needed help the most.

**15th IAWJ Biennial Conference**

The 15th IAWJ Biennial Conference, which was postponed because of Covid-19, was hosted by the New Zealand Association of Women Judges last May 7-9, 2021 with the theme “Celebrating Diversity: No less than fifty (50) PWJA judges attended the Conference, which was live streamed and recorded for registered delegates to view on its website.

Our beloved Justice Maria Theresa V. Mendoza-Arcega, who was deservedly re-elected as Regional Director for Asia Pacific, sat as moderator in the session on Indigenous, Customary and Alternative Justice. Meanwhile, three of our own judges acted as panelists, namely: Judge Emily L. San Gaspar-Gito (Families and Covid), Judge Marlo Malagar (Women in Custody and Alternatives) and Judge Teresita Asuncion Lakandula-Rodriguez (Environmental Mediation); and two more as rapporteurs: Judge Rebecca A. Guillen-Ubaña (Vulnerable Groups) and Judge Maria Belinda Crisostomo-Rama (Justice Sector Issues).

As your President, it was a proud moment for me to see how the PWJA has raised high the banner of the Asia Pacific in the IAWJ. But I am even prouder of the significant accomplishments that the PWJA has worked hard for in the past year despite the many challenges. The glowing country report that I delivered at the same Biennial Conference showed how the PWJA has proven to be an active and dedicated chapter of the IAWJ and, at the same time, has worked vigorously towards becoming a transformational force in the country by exhibiting not just the ideals of justice but social consciousness at its finest.

**Mabuhay ang PWJA!**



MALACAÑAN PALACE  
MANILA

MESSAGE

My warmest greetings to the **Philippine Women Judges Association (PWJA)** as it holds its **Virtual Convention 2021**.

For decades, PWJA has brought together women judges across the nation towards a common goal of promoting gender equality within the halls of the judiciary and beyond. I am pleased with your contributions in improving the administration of justice and initiating vital reforms in our judicial system, while at the same time enabling your members to share insights on your common struggles as lady judges.

This online event is indeed another opportunity for PWJA to contribute further to our efforts in making our government more responsive to the challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. I am confident that through this convention, you will come up with innovative solutions that will not just help our courts adapt to the new normal, but also make our judicial system more efficient and reliable during these difficult times.

I wish you more success in the years ahead at mabuhay kayong lahat!

RODRIGO ROA DUTERTE

MANILA  
4 May 2021



MESSAGE

Greetings to the Philippine Women Judges Association (PWJA) as you hold your first-ever virtual convention and seminar!

Your theme echoes a resounding call: "Resiliency Amidst the Pandemic" has been a shared battle cry among Filipinos since last year. We have weathered so much since the spread of COVID-19 and yet there are more obstacles on the horizon. Today, cases continue to spike, our healthcare system and medical frontliners are still overwhelmed, and daily, more Filipinos succumb to the virus. But we do not bow down: We fight on, we march forward, and we bravely take on the challenges together, hand-in-hand.

Sa ganitong panahon, lalong nagiging malinaw ang kahalagahan ng hustisya na nagpoprotekta sa karapatang pantao ng bawat Pilipino. Now more than ever, our fight to build a better normal simply does not end when we free our people from the suffocating grip of the pandemic. It pushes on as we continue to forge a fair, humane society built upon the bedrock of inclusiveness, equitability, and justice. There is so much work to be done. And with the women of PWJA in our corner committed to social justice, civil liberties, and the dignity of every individual, we are comforted and hopeful for a brighter future ahead.

We are truly grateful for your service. May you have a productive and meaningful convention! Mabuhay kayong lahat!

LENI ROBREDO

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New Manila, 1112 Quezon City  
www.ovp.gov.ph | www.lenirobredo.com



REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES  
Office of the Senate President  
Senator Vicente C. Sotto III

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### MESSAGE

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My warmest greetings to all the members of the Philippine Women Judges Association (PWJA) for the celebration of their first ever virtual convention seminar.

I applaud all of you for being an inspiration to women and a symbol of empowerment. This pandemic has created many challenges in court proceedings and other processes essential for efficient administration of justice. Nonetheless, you were able to quickly adapt and work through these changes in order to uphold the best interest of the Filipino people. Your commitment to public service and your dedication as one of our country's pillars of justice are truly commendable.

Maraming Salamat Sa Inyong Serbisyo! Mabuhay kayong lahat!

  
**VICENTE C. SOTTO III**

REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
QUEZON CITY

### A MESSAGE FROM THE SPEAKER



My warmest greetings to the Philippine Women Judges' Association (PWJA) under the able leadership of President Associate Justice Estela Perlas-Bernabe and Executive Vice-President Associate Justice Rosmari Carandang, as you hold your 1st Virtual Convention and Seminar with the theme: "A Call to PWJA: Resiliency Amidst the Pandemic".

I hold in great esteem the women judges in our country and it is my honor to join you in your virtual convention. Having previously worked at the Department of Justice and the Supreme Court, I am keenly aware that women judges have to balance their work dispensing justice in the courts, with their equally demanding and more important roles as wives, mothers, and daughters. With united resolve, I truly believe that PWJA could be the nation's leading force for gender equality and justice.

The pandemic ground the world to an almost complete halt, but the backlog of cases remains steadily rising. With social distancing likely to become the new norm for a while, courts are faced with the task of balancing the public's need for an efficient justice system with everyone's health and safety. I am pleased to learn, therefore, that that PWJA has adamantly asserted that judges are "frontline government workers in the justice sector whose functions are essential at all times, especially in the pandemic." Moreover, I am glad that the array of seminars for this event are quite apropos to the times: from the importance of mental health to the best court practices during this health crisis.

We need the wheels of justice turning, even in the midst of this worldwide pandemic. If we truly want meaningfully inclusive growth for our people, access to judicial relief must be readily available to all. To reiterate the call of the event: we need a more resilient justice system.

Congratulations and more power to the PWJA and to all women judges! May you have a productive convention.

  
**Lord Allan Jay Q. Velasco**



## MESSAGE FOR PWJA CONVENTION AND SEMINAR

by Presiding Justice  
**Remedios A. Salazar-Fernando**  
 June 2-3, 2021



### **“A CALL FOR PWJA: RESILIENCY AMIDST THE PANDEMIC”**

My warmest greetings to my fellow members of the Philippine Women Judges Association as we are again privileged to meet and greet, and to engage in a brief respite from our bustling work schedules as magistrates. This year’s convention is not akin to the customary annual gatherings that this organization staged in the past. The familiar faces, the authoritative yet sultry voices, and the brimming elegance of women magistrates no longer manifest through the usual face to face gatherings, but appear through a totally brand new set of medium forcibly tossed by the so-called “new normal” reality. This is the first time that this noble organization holds a convention seminar through virtual channels and, truly, this is a testament to PWJA and its members’ responsiveness, unflinching commitment, and ability to adapt to innovations in the pursuit of its mission.

“A call for PWJA: Resiliency Amidst the Pandemic”. The theme for this year’s convention and seminar is not only fitting than necessary. It is a topic that should and must really concern all of us because it does not only involve the women jurists, but the whole of justice system and humanity. Undeniably, the COVID-19 virus rapidly grew to a worldwide and historic pratfall that has induced anomic conditions impacting daily routines. Our justice system is one which took blows from the aggressive claws of this pandemic, and thus, caused disruptions to the functioning of our courts. Certainly, this matter is one concern which magistrates should place at top priority for instituting judicial reforms.

The constantly evolving nature of this global catastrophe suggests a need for rapid action. Hence, preferential attention is required to address the pressing concerns of our courts such as electronic case management, videoconferencing and remote hearings, fair trial issues, health and safety protocols at court, managing backlogs, on-line working measures to non-tech savvy jurists, among others. Thus, in order to address the looming issues which presently beset the courts today, as this year’s theme cites, we are beckoned to don our robes with resilience.

Thanks to the relentless efforts of the PWJA officers that we are bestowed with this two-day convention and seminar which affords us an efficient platform to voice out our concerns for the good of the entire judiciary in these trying times. Indeed, this gathering provides us an avenue to brainstorm legal issues, exchange and express our views in order to better equip ourselves on how to go about our enormous tasks as ministers of justice on the face of this new normal phenomenon.

With that, allow me to thank everyone who made this virtual PWJA virtual convention and seminar possible, especially to our esteemed officers, led by our very able and ever-hardworking President of the PWJA, Justice Estela Perlas Bernabe. I extend my commendations as well to the nameless others who in any way contributed to this innovative program. Too, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate and welcome the new members of the PWJA.

As we face the “new normal” reality as lady magistrates, let us shine our brightest and be worthy of the respect and reverence accorded to us as sentinels of justice. Let us work not only with a scholarly and perceptive mind, but also with a sense of urgency, and endeavor to be more responsive to the needs of our respective stations. Through this convention, may we even be more reinforced in our commitment to the rule of law, and prompt us to be more resilient amidst the challenges of this pandemic.

Thank you and wishing all of us a fun-filled, empowering and meaningful convention and seminar. - PJRAS

## Court of Tax Appeals

Agham Road, National Government Center,  
 North Triangle, Diliman, Quezon City. Trunkline No. (632) 920 4249/39



From the Chambers of

Hon. Roman G. Del Rosario  
 Presiding Justice

Philippine Women Judges Association  
 First Virtual Convention and Seminar  
 June 2 to 3, 2021

“A Call for PWJA :  
 Resiliency Amidst the Pandemic”



Dear Justices and Judges,

Greetings!

It is my great pleasure to greet you on your first ever virtual convention and seminar.

Since last year, much of our time and resources have been devoted to cope with the challenges that the Covid-19 Pandemic has presented in the administration of justice. In the interest of public health and safety and to ensure uninterrupted access to the courts, some courts were forced to shift to the virtual world to minimize exposure to the virus of court personnel and litigants. We found our days filled with a mixture of in-court hearings, video conference meetings and hearings, virtual founding anniversaries, virtual retirement programs, virtual trainings and seminars, among others.

The fight to end the pandemic seems to be longer than what we have expected. Yet, we cannot shirk on our mandate to timely dispense justice. It is imperative for us to be vigilant in calibrating our processes to address emerging concerns with dispatch, without compromising the health and safety of all concerned.

It is a relief that resilience, an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change<sup>1</sup>, is never lacking in Filipinos. This pioneering virtual convention and seminar is a testament to the resiliency of the PWJA.

The resiliency of any institution is only as strong as the resiliency of the individuals comprising it. With the PWJA’s efforts and contributions to ensure efficient and timely administration of justice amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic, I am very confident that the Judiciary is capacitated to get through this pandemic and to prepare for the new “better” normal.

To the PWJA officers and members, I wish you a meaningful and fun virtual convention and seminar. May this event forge stronger ties among all of you as we navigate through this extraordinary times.

Mabuhay ang PWJA!

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/resilience>, last accessed on May 11, 2021, 1:39 p.m.



Republic of the Philippines  
**Sandiganbayan**  
Quezon City



*Amparo M. Cabotaje-Tang*  
Presiding Justice

My heartfelt greetings to the Philippine Women Judges Association in its first ever-virtual convention and seminar.

The past year has been truly daunting. It was a year of disruptions and a year of losses – the loss of our sense of normalcy and sadly, for some of us, our loved ones. As members of the judiciary, we were challenged by the Covid-19 pandemic to mount a quick response in order to keep the courts functioning and maintain the people’s access to justice unimpeded, despite the uncertainty in the early days as to how we would stop, let alone face, the spread of the virus. On top of the challenges to deliver at work, a lot of us were likewise challenged at home since as women, we were expected to bear the bigger share of the heightened caregiving needs of our family members, especially since children are now spending the whole day at home due to physical closure of schools.

Fortunately for us in the judiciary, we were led, and continue to be led, by a very capable Supreme Court which has responded quickly to the disruptions brought by the pandemic through the prompt issuance of guidelines on the use of technology to manage court workloads, with due regard to prescribed health protocols. These issuances enabled, and continue to enable, us to discharge our adjudicative functions as far as practicable despite the pandemic.

With the success of virtual hearings in keeping courts operational during this crisis, I am quite certain that technology would continue to play a role in the dispensation of justice even beyond the pandemic. Through this seminar, it is my hope that we can reflect on how we can best use technology to aid us in delivering justice in a more effective and efficient way. May we also use this seminar as an opportunity to reach out to one another and help one other recover from the physical and mental exhaustion that we are experiencing due to the pandemic. After all, the PWJA is not just a community of judges but a community of women seeking to uplift one another.

I wish everybody the strength to get through this crisis. May we all stay safe as we continue to step up to the considerable challenge of keeping the wheels of justice turning during these unprecedented times.

Thank you and God bless us all!



Republic of the Philippines  
**Supreme Court**  
Office of the Court Administrator  
Manila



### MESSAGE

Congratulations to the officers and members of the **Philippine Women Judges Association (PWJA)**, for successfully organizing their first ever virtual convention and seminar *via Zoom* on 2-3 June 2021.

Unprecedented in recent memory, the past year has proven to be the most challenging episode in the history of the Judiciary to date. Amidst the global health crisis, our courts have remained undeterred by the technological, logistical, and public welfare concerns hounding the litigants and the public. Coming at an opportune time, this year’s theme, “*A Call for PWJA: Resiliency Amidst the Pandemic,*” presents a powerful message to our women judges to forge ahead and to continuously deliver justice to the people.

For the first time in its 120 years, the Court has intermittently closed its doors to the public due to the ongoing dangers of the pandemic. Notwithstanding physical closure, however, the Judiciary guaranteed all court users and stakeholders the unrestricted access to justice by taking advantage of technological advancements transforming the predominantly manual processes to online filings, submissions, and hearings. For one, the continued success of the videoconferencing hearings after almost a year of implementation is a constant reminder that we, in the Judiciary, can rise above any challenge.

Without a doubt, overcoming the difficulties of the past year, and even of the months to come, will not be possible without the collective resilience and tenacity of our judges and court personnel. In confronting the daily challenges of the sworn judicial duties, may our women judges continue to push steadfastly forward and remain committed in guiding our courts to be responsive and proactive in addressing the needs of the times.

*Mabuhay po kayong lahat.*

Manila, 23 April 2021

  
**JOSE MIDAS P. MARQUEZ**  
Court Administrator



Republic of the Philippines  
Supreme Court  
Philippine Judicial Academy



**MESSAGE**

For an organization which was borne out of an idea of then United States Justice Sandra Day O'Connor which she expressed to then Philippine Supreme Court Associate Justice Ameurina A. Melencio-Herrera, later Chancellor of the Philippine Judicial Academy, the Philippine Women Judges Association (PWJA) has come a long way in the past 34 years. It has weathered all kinds of storms while serving as the premiere platform for women magistrates in letting their voices be heard in matters of national and global importance.

I would like to congratulate you on your First Virtual Convention on June 2 and 3, 2021. This year's theme -- A Call for PWJA: RESILIENCY AMIDST PANDEMIC is especially relevant to the needs of these challenging times. The lectures you have chosen for this convention are very interesting. The practical science behind the COVID19 vaccine which is to be discussed by no less than the Undersecretary of the Department of Health Ma. Rosario Singh-Vergeire, MD who is also the spokesperson for COVID19 updates would no doubt be of great help to our women judges as they care for themselves and their families.

A discussion on best court practices to face the COVID 19 challenge is most welcome too as our courts venture to sync their procedures to accommodate the changes brought by this pandemic. Additionally, a lecture on pandemic-related mental health issues and how to cope with them is another important matter which must be brought to the table. A discussion on virtual court hearings by Justice Maria Filomena D. Singh of the Court of Appeals completes the singularly well put together topics for this year's convention.

Congratulations too to Supreme Court Senior Associate Justice Estela M. Perlas-Bernabe and all the PWJA officers and members for ably advocating the interest and welfare of Philippine women judges especially in these unusual and challenging times.

The Academy remains committed in assisting you to ensure the success of the First Virtual PWJA Convention.

All the best.

  
ADOLFO S. AZCUNA  
Chancellor

Manila, April 15, 2021

*Congratulations*

**Justice Maria Theresa Mendoza-Arcega**  
re-elected IAWJ Director IAWJ Asia-Pacific Region

**IAWJ 2021 First Virtual Conference"**

Participating Panelists

**Judge Emily L. San Gaspar-Gito**  
**Judge Mario Magdoza-Malagar**

and

**Judge Teresita Asuncion Lakandula-Rodriguez**

Rapporteurs

**Judge Maria Belinda Crisostomo-Rama**

and

**Judge Rebecca Guillen-Ubaña**

Session Moderator

**Justice Maria Theresa Mendoza-Arcega**

*Best Wishes !!!*

**Newly Appointed Judges  
and Judges at Large**

A CALL TO PWJA:  
*Resiliency Amidst Pandemic*

**PWJA Newsette**

**Judge Evelyn J. Gamotin Nery**  
Editor in Chief

PWJA Newsette Writers/Contributors:

**Judge Josefina E. Siscar**

**Judge Shaldilyn Bara Bangsaja**

**JUNE  
2-3**



# LAWJ CONFERENCE THROUGH THE TIMES



  
 International Association of Women Judges  
 15th Biennial Conference  
 "Celebrating Diversity"  
 Hosted by the  
 New Zealand Association of Women Judges  
 May 7-9, 2021  
 Auckland, Aotearoa, New Zealand

The Story of Filipino Nurse Erwin Lambento  












# PWJA OUTREACHES 2020-2021



# PWJA Online Board Meeting of May, 2021.

2021



# ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE IN THE TIME OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN AN ISLAND COURT IN MINDANAO

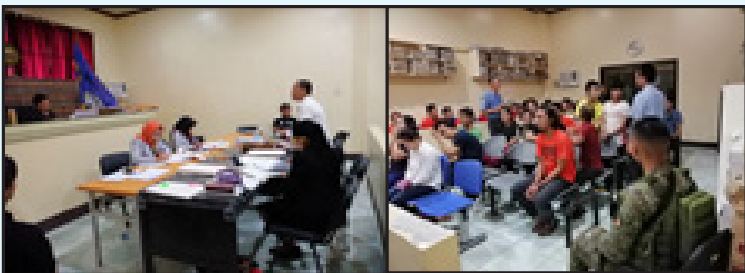


**SHALDILYN BARA BANGSAJA**  
Presiding Judge  
Regional Trial Court Branch 33, Zamboanga City

My assumption in January 2020 as Acting Presiding Judge of the Regional Trial Court Branch 3, Jolo, Sulu was a homecoming of sorts. And my one year stint was truly an unforgettable learning opportunity.

While the court is officially referred to as RTC-Jolo, the Hall of Justice where it is housed is located in the Municipality of Patikul. Yes, that infamous Patikul!

After a few weeks of inventory and housekeeping, we calendared 352 cases for arraignment and set them for February 17 and 18, 2020, morning and afternoon sessions. As these cases involved four batches of 70 persons deprived of liberty (PDLs) whose cases ranged from Physical Violence against Women to Illegal Sale of Dangerous Drugs and Kidnapping, I decided to seek the assistance of the 11th Infantry Division through its G3 to help secure the Hall of Justice during our 2-day continuous hearing as well as to help the jail officers in the transportation of the PDLs from the Sulu Provincial Jail.



In order to diffuse any tension and to perhaps foster harmonious interaction between the security forces and the relatives and other supporters of the PDLs, the Provincial Prosecutor suggested that we host something akin to a family reunion for them. Thus, it was agreed that the Office of the Provincial Prosecutor and the Court would provide for the drinks and snacks while a local civic organization would provide the legwork.



As Jolo was no longer my place of residence, and because I felt uncertain about my security, I had decided to take the flight from Zamboanga City to Jolo in the same morning of our hearing on February 17. I was fetched by the Battalion Commander of the 35th Infantry Battalion at the Jolo airport and from there was whisked directly to the Hall of Justice in Patikul. A private practitioner would later tell me that when she arrived at the Hall, she wondered if she was entering court premises or a camp because she saw a number of military trucks.



When I had the opportunity to personally report to the Deputy Court Administrator for Mindanao during a Roundtable Discussion on Terrorism Cases in Zamboanga City on February 19, that we were able to successfully hurdle our calendar, DCA Madrazo smiled at me and said, "Just do your best, Judge."

By March 2020, the court had acted on quite a number of Motions to Dismiss and was poised to promulgate almost forty Judgments based on the Supreme Court Framework on Plea Bargaining in Drugs Cases. However, on March 17, the President signed Proclamation No. 929 which placed the entire Philippines under the state of calamity on account of COVID-19. On March 20, Zamboanga City was to be placed on Enhanced Community Quarantine and travel restrictions were imposed starting March 16. Consequently, the Court's March calendar had to be cancelled.

On 27 April 2020, Administrative Circular No. 37-2020 on the Pilot Testing of Hearings of Cases Involving Persons Deprived of Liberty Through Videoconferencing was issued. RTC-Jolo was included in the list of pilot courts.

By April and May, the number of Motions for Plea Bargaining filed before the Court continued to increase. Such that by the time that the Office of the Court Administrator through the DCA for Mindanao approved in June the request to conduct videoconference hearing from the Regional Trial Court Branch 33, which is my permanent court station in Zamboanga City, we were ready to promulgate 166 Judgments.

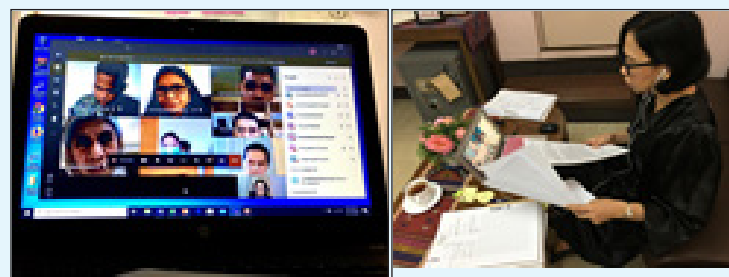
Meanwhile, we turned our attention to solving two primary concerns: one, how to safely transport the Judgments from Zamboanga City to Jolo considering the travel restrictions, and two, how to navigate through the power outages and lack of steady internet connectivity in order to successfully conduct videoconference hearings for RTC-Jolo.

I was quite determined to find solutions to these concerns because I felt that the pandemic rendered imperative that the Judgments be promulgated as soon as possible. To my mind, once the promulgation pushes through, then the PDLs will be able to avail of the benefits of post-sentence remedies like probation and bail, among others, as far as applicable, pursuant to Administrative Circular No. 38-2020. I was scared that a COVID-19 outbreak would occur inside the provincial jail and sought to prevent it from happening.



To resolve the transportation concern, I again requested for the assistance of the Armed Forces of the Philippines. The boxful of court documents were safely transported from Zamboanga City to Jolo through the Philippine Airforce, where it was received in Jolo by G3, 11th ID who then had it delivered to the OIC-Clerk of Court of RTC-Jolo. As to the second concern, we purchased portable pre-paid wifi modems for (1) the Court, (2) the Office of the Provincial Prosecutor, (3) the Public Attorney's Office, (4) the Sulu Provincial Jail, (5) the Jolo Municipal Police Station, and (6) the Patikul Municipal Police Station. We patiently conducted test runs and before the dates of our videoconference hearings, I would cheekily task Jolo MPS to request SULECO to suspend blackouts in the attendees locations for the duration of our videoconference hearing sessions. During the times when our requests could not be granted, we all agreed to patiently wait for power to be back and resume the hearing anyway. As to the internet signal, I became most prayerful and beseeched the Almighty's divine intervention.

At our first scheduled videoconference hearing in June 2020, I invited the Director of the Integrated Provincial Health Office of Sulu. My objective was to discuss with her the protocols that we were going to implement prior to the release of a PDL from the provincial jail, and prior to commitment of a PDL to the provincial jail from police custody as well as the set up that the IPHO may implement within the premises of the provincial jail and the police custodial facilities in order to address concerns about COVID-19 transmission.



In order to further manage the congestion of PDLs in the Sulu Provincial Jail, I requested the Jolo District Jail to seek the approval of the Regional Director of the BJMP-BARMM to allow the commitment of PDLs charged before the Regional Trial Court. Thus, by July 2020, the Court started issuing Commitment Orders addressed to the Warden of Jolo District Jail.



In the succeeding months, the court utilized the electronic filing system allowed under Administrative Circular No. 33-2020. However, to maintain and keep the physical court records updated, the court tapped the Philippine Coast Guard for assistance in safely transporting court documents from Zamboanga City to Jolo.

The Court's monthly schedule of videoconference hearing of criminal cases involving PDLs was interrupted only once. This was caused by the twin bomb explosions, which hit Jolo on 24 August 2020. Since RTC-Jolo is a single-sala court, it was also my responsibility as Executive Judge to direct the physical closure of the Hall of Justice in Patikul as well as the courthouses where the first level courts and Shariah courts were stationed for the safety of our court personnel.



Heraclitus, a pre-Socratic philosopher, allegedly once stated that "Into the same rivers we step and do not step, we are and are not." My family left Jolo when I was a grade four pupil sometime in 1989. Thirty years later, the Supreme Court gave me the opportunity to serve my birthplace by issuing my designation as Acting Presiding Judge for RTC-Jolo in December 2019. By then, I had already been an RTC Judge since March 2016.

I am grateful to the Supreme Court and the Office of the Court Administrator for the opportunity to be an instrument in the administration of justice when RTC-Jolo was at that critical time when Sulu was adjusting to the challenges brought about by the then emerging infectious disease and its protocols.

My judicial career is enriched by my year-long experience as Acting Presiding Judge of RTC-Jolo for it presented me with the opportunity to handle six municipalities under the Court's territorial jurisdiction: Jolo, Patikul, Panglima Estino, Panamao, Pangutaran and Panglima Tahil. I likewise exercised administrative supervision over first level courts for those municipalities as well as be the building administrator of the Hall of Justice.

I acknowledge that it is not up to me to conclude if my designation was effective in administering justice during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic in Sulu in 2020. However, with the collaborative efforts of the other pillars of the criminal justice system in Sulu, RTC-Jolo was able to dispose of over 300 criminal cases. For this achievement I thankfully extend my commendation to the RTC-Jolo OIC-COC and other court personnel and support staff, as well as my staff in RTC Branch 33, Zamboanga City, the Office of the Provincial Prosecutor of Sulu, the Jolo District Public Attorney's Office, the Sulu Provincial Jail, the Jolo District Jail, the Integrated Provincial Health Office of Sulu, the Sulu Provincial Police Office as well as the Municipal Police Stations of Jolo, Patikul, Panglima Estino, Panamao, Pangutaran and Panglima Tahil, the Philippine Coast Guard, the 35th Infantry Battalion and the 11th Infantry Division especially its then G3. My short stint as Acting Presiding Judge of the RTC-Jolo was a homecoming of sorts. For one year, RTC-Jolo was my second judicial home and these offices were the pillars of that home.





## THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY IN THE PHILIPPINES.



Hon. Josefina E. Siscar, Presiding Judge  
Regional Trial Court of Manila Branch 55

The onslaught of COVID 19 has brought the world to its knees. The effects are damaging, incessant, and continuous. All aspects of the economy, the government, private institutions, jobs, schools, churches were all seriously affected.

In May 2020, the world was shocked to learn that while COVID 19 has been surging, there was a parallel rise in domestic violence cases all over the globe. It seemed that lockdowns and quarantines had brought the incidences of physical violence against women to surge as well. While women in the Philippines have been subjected to different kinds of harassment and discrimination, their exposure to COVID-19 further exacerbated their situations. This pandemic saw women to be more prone to sexual abuse and exploitation brought about by lockdowns and quarantines as the latter effectively cut their access to support services. Police precincts, PNP women's desks, and other police enforcement services, including the barangays, were overburdened with COVID 19.

A report of the UN Women of Asia-Pacific stated that mobility and transportation restrictions under Enhanced Community Quarantine —introduced to protect citizens from COVID 19, have resulted in increased risks for women seeking gender-based violence protection by reducing their options for accessing support services. In addition, The Commission on Human Rights and other women's groups in the Philippines have noted concern on under-reporting and monitoring of gender-based violence cases during the COVID 19 as women are prohibited from leaving their homes

As 72% of health workers in the Philippines are women, the latter experienced discrimination when there were no means of transportation made available due to the imposed lockdowns that included public transport. Others had to walk to and from their workplace due to the lack of transportation. Other health workers had suffered discrimination and harassment in their places of residence. Having been exposed to the virus in the hospitals and healthcare facilities where they work, their lessors sought their unilateral ejection from their rented units or abodes for fear of contracting the virus.

Reports of women workers being subjected to COVID 19 checkpoints or checkpoints on curfews may also be breeding grounds for harassment. Female enforcers comprise only 12% of police enforcement in the Philippines; that is why women are likely to suffer some form of discrimination and harassment in the COVID 19 checkpoints like the conduct of temperature checks, body search, or frisking.

As stated, this pandemic has worsened the economic hardships that women are exposed to even before the advent of COVID 19. Prior to the global pandemic, plenty of women have already been denied access to basic human rights such as food, livelihood and housing. Additionally, women are more vulnerable to acts of gender-based abuse and discrimination such as prostitution, sexual harassment, and domestic abuse resulting to mental and physical distress. Based on reports on unwomen.org, due to economic hardships, there is now a shift to resort to online pornography where women and children alike are being sexually exploited and abused online. The findings of the Gender & Inclusion Assessment (GIA) of the Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Vulnerable Women and Girls, a survey sponsored by the UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund) together with the Commission on Human Rights, indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic has worsened the situation of women across vulnerable subgroups. They mostly come from hidden households- the homeless, initially displaced, indigenous, LGBTQ+ and the geographically isolated. Take the case of women migrant workers who comprise 11% of the total population of the Philippines. Their remittances is 11% of the Philippine Gross National Product. Additionally, Filipino women constitute slightly of the vast majority of overseas workers from the Philippines, yet their vulnerability to harassment and exploitation compared to their male counterparts is much greater: 80% of trafficked persons and almost 70% of repatriated overseas Filipino workers in distress. In most cases, women workers are employed as domestic helpers abroad. Sometimes they are subjected to physical, psychological and sexual abuse in private homes as well as forced confinement in the workplace, non-payment of wages and long working hours. Migrant workers may find themselves trapped either in the Philippines or trapped abroad with no work and no payment schemes brought about by the closure of borders due to establishment of protocols for the pandemic. Contracts for work employment had been terminated due to business operations contracting and fears of imported COVID 19 cases. However, repatriation assistance given by the government is not enough. There is a fear of the economic difficulties they would have to face once they return and their ability (or the lack thereof) to provide for their families. There are instances where returning women migrant workers

suffer from acts of discrimination including being denied entry into their hometown provinces.

While the government has passed laws such as R.A. No. 11469 (The Bayanihan To Heal as One Act) and R.A. No. 11494 (Bayanihan To Recover as One act) their full implementation has yet to be realized. As recommended by the UN Women (pars. 1-8 ) (while pars. 9-13 are recommendations from this writer) the following may prove to be helpful :

- 1) Reporting and monitoring mechanisms for violence against women and girls should take into consideration COVID 19 mobility and community restrictions as well as information communication technology access and literacy should be enhanced. Additionally, should also include women migrant workers both repatriated/returnees and on site in countries of destination;
- 2) Women's shelters should continue to be considered essential services and remain accessible to women and children during COVID 19;
- 3) Delivery of sexual and reproductive health services ,including contraception and maternal health services should be maintained during COVID 19;
- 4) Implementation of laws on gender based violence and gender equality should continue having regard to the increase in intimate partner violence , sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse of women and children on line;
- 5) Social protections must recognize and respond to the needs of diverse women, including indigenous women , women with disabilities, women migrant workers, LGBTQ+ women;
- 6) Women migrant workers should be afforded their full human rights without discrimination and regardless of their migration status in compliance with international law;
- 7) For all stakeholders in the Philippines, including government actors and policy makers to place women and girls at the center of COVID 19 responses;
- 8) It is crucial that COVID 19 responses are gender inclusive and respond to the distinct needs of women and girls including enhancing human rights protection, strengthening the implementation of the Magna Carta for Women and improving social and economic outcomes and supporting women leadership and participation;
- 9) Access to more vaccines commensurate to the percentage in the population to ensure that more individuals are vaccinated and help promote herd immunity;
- 10) Continuing promotion and observance of health protocols , like use of face masks, face shields , continuous use of disinfectants and social distancing;
- 11) Enhanced medical services, access of women and girls to basic medical services, promotion of health boosters;
- 12) Active prosecution and trial as well as proper monitoring of domestic violence case, human trafficking, sextortion cases, other sexual harassment cases, including proper support services for victims and the corresponding rehabilitation for victims and offenders alike;
- 13) Provide priority in livelihood opportunities, economic assistance for women.

The Philippines has yet to see the eradication of COVID-19. The resources of the country have been severely affected. While this is an international health crisis for which almost all countries were not prepared, the novelty of the virus in terms of its strength, possible mutations, and its rapid and airborne transmission require the government to carefully weigh its options. The programs and policies as well as existing and future resources must be geared to support these recommendations with the goal of achieving gender equality, and the protection of women from the pernicious and crippling effects of COVID 19.

-end-



# 26th Virtual Annual Convention-Seminar of the Philippine Women Judges Association (PWJA) June 2 to 3, 2021 via Zoom

## *Resiliency Amidst Pandemic* A Call for PWJA *Resiliency Amidst Pandemic*

### First Day: Wednesday, June 2, 2021

Moderators: **Hon. MA. BELINDA CRISOSTOMO-RAMA**  
Vice President (MCTC/MTC)

**Hon. BELEN S. CARASIG**  
Deputy Regional Director, NCR-District 1

**Hon. REBECCA GUILLEN-UBAÑA**  
Deputy Regional Director, Region III-District 1

### Morning Session

- 8:30 - Opening Ceremonies  
Ecumenical Prayer for the Courts  
Philippine National Anthem  
Philippine Judiciary Hymn  
Supreme Court Hymn  
PWJA Hymn
- 8:45 - Opening Remarks  
**Hon. ESTELA M. PERLAS-BERNABE**  
Senior Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the Philippines and PWJA President
- 9:15 - Introduction of the Guest of Honor  
**Hon. AMY C. LAZARO-JAVIER**  
Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the Philippines
- 9:30 - Keynote Address  
**Hon. ALEXANDER G. GESMUNDO**  
Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the Philippines

### Presentation of Plaque of Appreciation

- 10:00 - Oath taking of Newly Appointed Members of the PWJA
- 10:20 - Announcement of Rules for the Election of 2021-2023 PWJA Officers and Directors

### Announcement of Candidates

**Hon. GERALDINE C. FIEL-MACARAIG**  
Chairperson, Election Committee

- 10:30 - "Surviving the Pandemic: The Practical Science Behind the COVID 19 Vaccine"

**Hon. MARIA ROSARIOSINGH VERGEIRE MD, MPH, CESO IV**  
Undersecretary, Department of Health (DOH)

### Facilitator:

**Hon. MARIA FILOMENA D. SINGH**  
Associate Justice of the Court of Appeals

- 12:00 - Lunch Break and Registration

- Start of Silent Auction. (The items will be uploaded in Facebook Group.)
- On-line games via FB Group.
- Raffle via Spin the Wheel App.

### Afternoon Session

- 1:00 - Presentation of Best Court Practices Videos

- 1:30 - "Virtual Court Hearings and Online Mediation: **BOON or BANE?**" **Resolutions and Amendments**

**Hon. MARIA FILOMENA D. SINGH**  
Associate Justice of the Court of Appeals

### Facilitators:

**Hon. ROSALYN M. LOJA**  
Regional Director, NCR-District 1

**Hon. GINA BIBAT-PALAMOS**  
Assistant Secretary

- 2:30 - "I AM NOT OKAY, ARE YOU?"  
Bro. JON ESCOTO  
Feast Speaker, Author

### Facilitators:

**Hon. ANNE BEATRICE AGUANA-BALMACEDA**  
Vice President, Metropolitan Trial Court and Municipal Trial Courts in Cities

**Hon. SHERYLL TULABING**  
Deputy Regional Director, NCR-District 1

- 3:30 - "Face to Face Models of Adaptation-Best Court Practices to Face the COVID 19 Challenge"

**Dr. ALBERT FRANCIS E. DOMINGO, MD, MSc**  
Health Systems Specialist  
Consultant WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific

### Facilitators:

**Hon. MYLA M. VILLAVICENCIO-OLAN**  
Vice President, Family Courts

**Hon. MARY CHARLENE V. HERNANDEZ-AZURA**  
Regional Director, Region IV-District 1

- 5:00 - Message from the Former PHILJA Chancellor  
**Hon. ADOLFO S. AZCUNA**  
Former Chancellor, Philippine Judicial Academy

### Presentation of Plaque of Appreciation

- 5:15 - **Raffle**  
6:00 - End of casting of votes.

### Second Day: Thursday, June 3, 2021

Moderators: **Hon. MA. BELINDA CRISOSTOMO-RAMA**  
Vice President (MCTC/MTC)

**Hon. BELEN S. CARASIG**  
Deputy Regional Director, NCR-District 1

**Hon. REBECCA GUILLEN-UBAÑA**  
Deputy Regional Director, Region III-District 1

### Morning Session

- 8:30 - PWJA Business Meeting

### President's Report

**Hon. ESTELA M. PERLAS-BERNABE**  
Senior Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the Philippines and PWJA President

### Treasurer's Report

**Hon. LORIFEL L. PAHIMNA**  
Associate Justice of the Sandiganbayan and PWJA Treasurer

- 9:00 - Recognition for the Newly Appointed Justices to the Appellate Courts, 25 Years and 30 Years in Service and Retirees

**Hon. TITA MARILYN PAYOYO-VILLORDON**  
Associate Justice of the Court of Appeals and PWJA Vice President, Court of Appeals

- 9:30 - Proclamation of New Set of Officers and Directors

**Hon. GERALDINE C. FIEL-MACARAIG**  
Chairperson, Election Committee

**Hon. LOIDA S. POSADAS-KAHULUGAN**  
Co-Chairperson, Election Committee

**Hon. LORENZA REDULLA BORDIOS**  
Co-Chairperson, Election Committee

- 9:45 - Oath Taking of New Set of Officers and Directors

- 10:00 - OCA Hour

**Hon. JOSE MIDAS P. MARQUEZ**  
Court Administrator

**Hon. RAUL B. VILLANUEVA**  
Deputy Court Administrator

**Hon. JENNY LIND ALDECOA-DELORINO**  
Deputy Court Administrator

**Hon. LEO TOLENTINO MADRAZO**  
Deputy Court Administrator

**Hon. LILIAN BARRIBAL-CO**  
Assistant Court Administrator

**Hon. MARIA REGINA A. F. M. IGNACIO**  
Assistant Court Administrator

### Facilitators:

**Hon. EVELYN G. NERY**  
Vice President, Regional Trial Courts

**Hon. ABOUBEN JADE R. PABELLAN-BACAL**  
Regional Director, Region X

**Hon. EILEEN JOY T. PAKINO-BONGHANOY**  
Deputy Regional Director, Region X

- 11:00 - End of Silent Auction and Announcement of Winners in Best Court Practice

- 11:15 - Closing Remarks

**Hon. ROSMARI D. CARANDANG**  
Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the Philippines  
EVP, Philippine Women Judges Association

- 11:45 - **Raffle**



# PWJA 2020 CONVENTION THE RESILIENT WOMEN JUDGES:

