



**ACCOMPLISHMENT REPORT
OF THE PUBLIC ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
FOR THE YEAR 2021**

Executive Summary

❖ **Clients Assisted and Cases Handled**

- Total No. of Clients Assisted 9,707,274
- Total No. of Cases Handled 787,124
- Average No. of Clients Assisted by Each Lawyer 4,170
- Average No. of Cases Handled by Each Lawyer 338

❖ **Organizational Outcome:** Accessible, efficient, high quality, and effective legal service to indigents and other qualified persons assured.

PUBLIC LEGAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM	FY 2021 TARGETS	FY 2021 ACCOMPLISHMENTS
A. Outcome Indicators:		
1. Number of available lawyer's time spent for each service	24 hours	24 hours
2. Percentage of cases, including the appealed cases, that were favorably disposed	81.34%	83.05% (248,963/299,781)
	1:1	1:2 ¹

¹ There are only 2,427 authorized positions for public attorney *vis-a-vis* 2,466 organized courts reported by the Court Management Office (CMO) of the Supreme Court as of 31 October 2021. Note that the number of organized courts reported by the CMO only includes the first and second level courts. It does not include the appellate and other special courts, such as the Supreme Court, Court of Appeals, and *Sandiganbayan*, as well as the various quasi-judicial bodies that adjudicate and resolve legal issues between opposing parties, including the National Labor Relations Commission (NLRC) and its various regional arbitration branches nationwide, National Police Commission (NAPOLCOM), Professional Regulation Commission (PRC), etc.

With the expanded mandate of the PAO, it is imperative to assign public attorneys to handle such cases before the appellate and other special courts, and quasi-judicial agencies, as well as to appear in other special interest cases; for instance, the ones assigned at the Executive Support Staff (ESS), Legal Research Service (LRS), Field Operations and Statistics Service (FOSS), and Special and Appealed Cases Service (SACS) at the PAO Central Office, as well as those assigned at the Regional Special and Appealed Cases Units (RSACUs) in

3. Public attorney to court ratio		
B. Output Indicators:		
1. Percentage of hearings for which no postponement is sought by the PAO legal representative	100%	100.00% (612,565/612,565)
2. Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) success rate	92.75%	89.43% ² (19,031/21,281)

Cebu City and Cagayan de Oro City. Those handling appeals serve as the counterparts of the solicitors from the Office of the Solicitor General, while those appearing before the *Sandiganbayan* serve as the counterparts of the prosecutors from the Office of the Ombudsman.

Given the current number of public attorneys *vis-a-vis* the combined courts and quasi-judicial agencies wherein the PAO represents indigent and other qualified clients, it is crystal clear that additional plantilla positions are needed in order to realize the intent behind the 1:1 ratio of public attorneys to courts aspired under the GAA and prescribed by the PAO Law.

² The persistence of the pandemic made it especially difficult for the PAO to achieve a 92.75% ADR success rate primarily because the mediation and conciliation service of the PAO is essentially a face-to-face service, which is hampered by IATF protocols. Specifically, the difficulties encountered by the Office are as follows:

- 1) There are significantly fewer cases set for mediation for this year due to the lockdowns, movement/travel restrictions, and observance of physical distancing rules. With fewer cases set for mediation, there are less opportunities for public attorneys to encourage disputing parties to settle;
- 2) The lack of ample office space in various district offices of the PAO also bars the conduct of mediation and conciliation. In some district offices, clients even had to be assisted outside the office (in booths or through windows) due to limited office space. Note that there will be at least three parties in a mediation meeting (the public attorney, complainant, and respondent) so ample space is required in order to comply with physical distancing rules;
- 3) There is a minimal turnout or attendance in scheduled mediation proceedings since the pandemic started. Mediation is set by sending out a notice to the adverse party inviting him or her to come to the office. Per internal procedure, the public attorney may send three notices but if the adverse party will not appear or will refuse to settle, then the proceedings will be terminated (as unsuccessful) and the next appropriate legal course of action will be taken. The PAO can only surmise that the pandemic discourages the adverse party to heed the notice and attend the mediation for fear of his or her health and safety. Note that the PAO has no power to compel the adverse party to attend the mediation. It can only invite the adverse party who is free to accept or refuse the invitation;
- 4) Transition to the use of internet and information technology (IT) cannot be effectively taken due to the limited resources of the indigent clients and their oftentimes limited access and knowledge on using the internet, especially those who live in far flung areas. The resources and capacity of the adverse party is also a concern as both parties must be technologically capable for online or remote mediation to work; and,
- 5) Mediation requires a human element. To be effective, a mediator must not only be competent, but must also build rapport with both parties. This is difficult to do if you have to distance yourself, limit speech, or if the mediation will be conducted online to comply with physical distancing rules.

As a result of the foregoing, the number of cases set for mediation was reduced from 161,891 in 2019 (pre-COVID year) to 82,605 in 2020 and 53,171 in 2021. Correspondingly, the number and percentage of successful mediation likewise fell.

3. Percentage of request for non-judicial assistance acted upon within two hours	100%	100% (2,977,826/2,977,826)
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❖ Total No. of Winning Appealed Criminal Cases <i>(For Court of Appeals and Supreme Court only)</i>	1,164
• Acquittals from Reclusion Temporal	178
• Acquittals from Reclusion Perpetua	835
• Other Favorable Dispositions	151

❖ Total No. of Winning Appealed Civil and Special Cases <i>(For Court of Appeals and Supreme Court only)</i>	463
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❖ Acquittals and Other Favorable Dispositions <i>(RTC & MCTC/MeTC)</i>	2,184
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No. of Cases with:

A. Acquittal	13,804
B. Dismissal with Prejudice	32,551
C. Granted Motion to Quash	1,732
D. Granted Demurrer to Evidence	2,793
E. Provisional Dismissal	33,756
F. Conviction to Lesser Offense	112,608
G. Granted Probation	15,371
H. Won	54
I. Granted Lesser Award	5
J. Dismissal Based on Compromise Agreement	58
K. Criminal Cases for Preliminary Investigation:	
K.1. Case Filed in Court (Complainant)	2,336
K.2. Dismissed (Respondent)	143
L. Pre-trial Releases and Other Favorable Dispositions:	
L.1. Released on Bail (Non-bailable offense)	794
L.2. Released on Recognizance	1,856
L.3. Diversion Proceedings/Intervention	501
L.4. Suspended Sentence	681
L.5. Maximum Imposable Penalty Served	3,141

❖ Limited Services	288,997
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Arraignment	85,494
Pre-Trial	54,808
Promulgation of Judgment	11,700
Others	136,995

(As *counsel de officio*, direct or cross examination during trial in the absence of private counsel, motion for bail, etc.)

❖ Special Legal Services	2,020
(Pursuant to Sec. 14-A of <i>Republic Act (R.A.) No. 9406</i> and MOAs)	
❖ Rendition of Quasi-Judicial Services	57,956
Mediation and Conciliation	57,842
Investigation	114
(R.A. No. 9745 or Anti-Torture Law)	
❖ Instant Services	7,867,770
Legal Documentation	792,394
Oaths Administered	1,571,680
Clients Counseled	5,503,696
❖ Outreach Activities	648,690
Inquest Investigation & Custodial Interrogation	85,533
Legal Information Dissemination	65,324
Jail Visitation	497,833
❖ Assistance to Person Deprived of Liberty (PDL) Clients	574,197
Interviewed and Assisted	173,814
Provided Legal Representation in Court	324,019
Released:	
Released on Recognizance After Service of Minimum Sentence	2,465
Released Due to Provisional Dismissal of Case	7,799
Released on Account of Preventive Imprisonment Equal to Maximum Imposable Penalty (Case is Still Pending)	1,384
Released Due to Complete Service of Sentence (Case is Already Terminated)	21,207
Released for Other Legal Reasons	43,509

❖ Legal/Inquest Proceedings Assistance

85,533

On their scheduled duties, public attorneys and staff of the PAO-Central Office have been providing legal and inquest proceedings assistance even during night time, weekends, and holidays since October 2009. For this purpose, the PAO hotline (02) 8929-9436 (*local 106 or 107 during office hours and local 159 after office hours*) is open to the public 24/7.

In September 2010, the coverage of this program was expanded to serve the clients assisted by the regional and district offices of the PAO nationwide. Since then, the said offices have been rendering *legal assistance* (e.g. giving legal advice and attending to the legal needs of suspects in the police stations within the territorial jurisdiction of the concerned PAO regional/district offices) up to 10:00 P.M. every day (including weekends and holidays). Further, the assigned PAO inquest public attorneys and staff therein remain on call, even beyond 10:00 P.M., to attend to inquest calls in police stations nationwide. Even during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, public attorneys and staff were directed to remain on call and ready to respond to urgent requests for legal assistance.

❖ Case Load

Out of **256,927 terminated criminal cases**, there were **222,184** or about **86.48% favorable dispositions** obtained by the public attorneys from representing indigent and other qualified clients.

- Total No. of Criminal Cases Handled 602,998
- Total No. of Terminated Cases 256,927
- Terminated Cases Favorable to Clients 222,184
- Total Percentage of Winning Criminal Cases **86.48%**

Out of **9,008 terminated civil cases**, there were **6,652** or about **74.04% favorable dispositions** obtained by the public attorneys from representing indigent and other qualified clients.

- Total No. of Civil Cases Handled 35,680
- Total No. of Terminated Cases 9,008
- Terminated Cases Favorable to Clients 6,652
- Total Percentage of Winning Civil Cases **73.85%**

Out of **2,991 terminated administrative cases proper**, there were **2,340** or about **78.23% favorable dispositions** obtained by the public attorneys from representing indigent and other qualified clients.

- Total No. of Administrative Cases Proper Handled 14,556
- Total No. of Terminated Cases 2,991
- Terminated Cases Favorable to Clients 2,340
- Total Percentage of Winning Administrative Cases **78.23%**

Out of **51,869 cases** handled at the prosecutor's level, **22,077** were **terminated**.

- Total No. of Prosecutor's Office Cases 51,869
- Total No. of Terminated Cases 22,077

Out of **3,742 terminated labor cases**, there were **3,061** or about **81.80% favorable dispositions** obtained by the public attorneys from representing indigent and other qualified clients.

- Total No. of Labor Cases Handled 18,453
- Total No. of Terminated Cases 3,742
- Terminated Cases Favorable to Clients 3,061
- Total Percentage of Winning Labor Cases **81.80%**

With respect to cases involving violation of **R.A. No. 9262** (Anti-Violence Against Women and their Children Act of 2004), **4,083 cases** were **handled** by the PAO, among which **2,041 cases** were **duly terminated**.

- Total No. of Cases Involving Women Victims of Violation of R.A. No. 9262 4,083
- Total No. of Terminated Cases 2,041

On the other hand, with respect to cases involving **children in conflict with the law** (CICLs) as defined under **R.A. No. 9344** (Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act of 2006), **17,687 cases** were **handled** by the PAO, among which **4,947** were **duly terminated**.

- Total No. of Cases Involving CICLs 17,687
- Total No. of Terminated Cases 4,947

❖ **Comparative of Actual vs. Target**

Overall, the PAO achieved **83.05%** favorable disposition rate for the cases it handled for the calendar year 2021, which is equivalent to **248,963 favorable dispositions** out of **299,781** terminated cases. This feat surpassed the target favorable disposition rate of 81.34% (based on the GAA of FY 2021) by **1.71%**, translating to **5,126** cases with favorable disposition above the target. The 2021 disposition rate is lower than last year's favorable disposition rate, but is well above the target.

The **248,963** cases with favorable disposition for the calendar year 2021 is broken down as follows: **222,184** criminal cases = **89.24%**; **6,652** civil cases = **2.67%**; **2,340** administrative cases = **0.94%**; **11,589** prosecutor's office cases = **4.66%**; **3,061** labor cases = **1.23%**; **1,435** special legal services = **0.58%**; and **1,702** appealed cases = **0.68%**.

The persistence of the COVID-19 pandemic kept the number of terminated cases down for the present year, as expected given the strict quarantine levels, intermittent lockdown of offices and courts, and fewer court hearings. Nonetheless, the Office was able to achieve its favorable disposition rate, due in part to its enhanced jail visitation program with focus on allowing the release of its PDL clients, and the increase in online hearing of cases.

With respect to performance in ADR for the calendar year 2021, the Office garnered **89.43%** ADR success rate, which is equivalent to **19,031 cases successfully terminated through ADR** out of **21,281** terminated cases for ADR. This number is 3.32% short of the 92.75% target success rate (based on the GAA of FY 2021) and 0.95% short of last year's (2020) actual success rate of 90.38%. The decrease was mainly due to the significant drop in the number of cases set for mediation, which is down from 161,891 in 2019 (pre-COVID year) to 82,605 in 2020 and 53,171 in 2021. This is due to a combination of external factors such as community/office lockdowns, movement and travel restrictions, observance of physical distancing rules, minimal attendance in scheduled mediation, and the parties' lack of knowledge and access to the internet; and internal factor of lack of ample office space in various district offices of the PAO. The foregoing difficulties encountered by the PAO significantly decreased the opportunity for public attorneys to encourage disputing parties to settle, which resulted in the non-achievement of the target ADR success rate.

❖ **Total No. of Research Work and Legal Opinions** for Queries from the Public that were Directly Addressed or Otherwise Referred to the PAO **4,740**

❖ **Library Services**
 No. of News Releases from Various Broadsheets and Tabloids Concerning the Office, and its Cases, Programs and Projects **275**

❖ PAO Equipment

For the period covering January to December, 2021, the PAO purchased and distributed³ the following office equipment and semi-expendable properties, to wit:

• Air Conditioner	35 units
• Biometric Time Recorder	400 units
• Computer Printer	135 units
• Fan	14 units
• Scanner	2 units
• Television	1 unit
• Universal Power Supply (UPS)	136 units
• Water Dispenser	5 units
• Filing Cabinet	81 units
• Gorilla Shelf	11 units
• Office Chair	114 units
• Office Table	70 units

For its LAN Infrastructure Project, the PAO purchased the following equipment and softwares:

• Access Point	6 units
• Access Switch	6 units
• Anti-Virus Software	2400 units
• Core Switch	1 unit
• Distribution Switch	2 units
• External Hard Drive	1 unit
• Firewall Appliance	1 unit
• Multi-Function Network Printer	29 units
• Network Attached Storage	1 unit
• Network Cabling Services	1 package
• Server	2 units
• Server/Data Cabinet (For access switches)	6 units
• Server/Data Cabinet (For server room)	1 unit
• SQL Standard 2019	8 units
• UPS	2 units
• Visualization Technology Software	1 unit

❖ Training Participants	2,519
Lawyers	1,418
Support Personnel	1,101

• Training Sessions and Seminars	55
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³ Excluding the lease of 30 copier machines for the year 2020

The Office of the Chief Public Attorney

- ❖ The Office of the Chief Public Attorney **received/answered 44,345 communications** from January to December, 2021;
- ❖ The Office of the Chief Public Attorney actually served a total of **3,062,311 clients and other persons** during this period;
- ❖ The Chief Public Attorney, together with the PAO Special Panel of Public Attorneys, **personally handled and/or led** the following cases, **and/or rendered legal assistance** to the following individuals, *inter alia*, to wit:

1. Forensic & medico-legal examination, and legal assistance rendered to Dengvaxia victims and their families

The surviving families of **167 persons** (as of 31 December 2021) who had all been inoculated with *Dengvaxia* vaccine, and got injured and/or died after mass indiscriminate inoculation without screening and blood test, sought the help of the PAO for forensic examination and analysis, and legal assistance. Their requests were acted accordingly by the PAO and the PAO Forensic Team, pursuant to DOJ Order No. 792 dated 12 December 2017, issued by then Secretary of Justice Vitaliano N. Aguirre II. For the year 2021, **four dead Dengvaxia vaccinees** were examined by the PAO Forensic Team.

Relative thereto, criminal complaints for Reckless Imprudence Resulting in Homicide, violation of the Anti-Torture Law, violation of the Consumer Act of the Philippines, violation of the Pharmacy Law, and Obstruction of Justice before the DOJ, as well as civil cases for damages before the Regional Trial Court (RTC) of Quezon City, were filed against those responsible, both public servants and private persons, for the deaths of the inoculated victims.

As of 31 December 2021, **157** criminal complaints and **76** civil cases were filed against the persons responsible for the injury and/or death of the inoculated victims composed of minor children, together with two public servants consisting of one police officer, and one medical doctor.

Of the 157 criminal complaints, 16 are already pending in court, while the rest are still pending before the DOJ either for preliminary investigation or for review. Following the resolution of the First Division of the Supreme Court ordering

the transfer of venue of the cases to a family court in Quezon City, with further directive to raffle the cases to a single branch for further proceedings, five criminal cases are already consolidated before the RTC – Branch 107, Quezon City. Meanwhile, 58 out of the 76 civil cases are already consolidated before the RTC – Branch 216, Quezon City.

❖ The Chief Public Attorney received the following prestigious **awards** and recognitions, among others, to wit:

1. **Outstanding Public Service Program Host Award** from the ASEAN Excellence Achievers Awards 2021, Luminare Events and Production Management, Inc., and its media partner, Sonshine Media Network International (SMNI), given on 28 December 2021 at the Grand Ballroom of Okada Manila;
2. **Most Outstanding Public Servant of the Year Award** from the *Gawad Filipino Awards* during the 16th *Gawad Filipino Awards* held on 27 December 2021 at the Aberdeen Great Eastern Hotel, Quezon City;
3. **#PALA (Persida Acosta's Legal Advice)** is the recipient of the **Outstanding Public Service Program of the Year Award** from the 3Stars Productions and Onesimo Foundation during the conferment of the Diamond Excellence Awards 2021 at the Grand Ballroom of Okada Manila on 17 December 2021;
4. **Outstanding Filipino Achiever Award** from the Golden Globe Annual Awards for Business Excellence and Outstanding Filipino Achievers 2020 & 2021 awarded on 10 December 2021 at the Grand Ballroom Fiesta Pavilion, Manila Hotel;
5. **Most Admired Leader Award** from the *Dangal Ng Lahi Awards* conferred on 27 November 2021 at Okada Manila;
6. **Most Admired Woman of Substance and Influence of the Year Award** from the *Kagawaran ng Gintong Parangal* held during their *Gabi ng Parangal* on 26 November 2021 at the Manila Hotel;
7. **Hall of Fame Award** from the Volunteers Against Crime and Corruption (VACC), given virtually on the occasion of the VACC's 23rd Founding Anniversary, held on 11 November 2021;

8. **Gems of UE Award** from the University of the East (UE), "in recognition of her continued success, exceptional attainment and dedicated service to her profession, society and country thus giving honor to her Alma Mater and its legacy of producing life champions whose tomorrow begins in the East," conferred virtually during the UE's 75th Foundation Day on 25 September 2021;
 9. **Leadership Achievement in Public Service Award** given by the Elite Business & Leadership Awards, "for her success and victory worthy of commendation and emulation, and for her excellence in her chosen field of service," conferred on 21 May 2021 at the Grand Plaza Ballroom of the Sofitel Philippine Plaza Manila;
 10. **Gawad Mariveleña** (*Parangal sa mga natatanging kababaihan sa panahon ng pandemya*) from the Office of the Municipal Mayor of Mariveles, Bataan, given on 31 March 2021 at the Mayor's Conference Room, LGU of Mariveles Compound, Brgy. Poblacion, Mariveles, Bataan; and,
 11. **Plaque of Appreciation** given by the Quezon City Press Club Inc., "for her exemplary support, invaluable service and dedication in her 20 years as chief of the Public Attorney's Office and for her bravery and commitment to help millions of its indigent clients," on 1 February 2021 at the Public Attorney's Office (PAO)-Central Office.
- ❖ The Chief Public Attorney served as **Speaker/Resource Person** in the following events:
1. **Resource Speaker, Commission on Appointments' Online Seminar About the "Safe Spaces Act" (Republic Act No. 11313)**, conducted on 9 December 2021;
 2. **Speaker, Webinar Series Via Zoom: "Empowering Women Leaders and Scholars for Peace and Security in Mindanao,"** organized by the Association of Lady Shari'ah Counselors-at-Law of the Philippines, Inc., held on 6 July 2021; and,
 3. **Panelist/Speaker, International Conference on Globalisation of Professional Legal Education Constitutional Conspectus**, hosted by the School of Law of Bennett University, Greater Noida, India on 3 April 2021.
- ❖ The Chief Public Attorney's **lecture**, entitled "**International Collaborations: Enhancing Legal Aid and Legal Education**"

(Practices and Experiences of the Public Attorney's Office in the Philippines)” which she delivered during the above-mentioned online conference, the ***“International Conference on Globalisation of Professional Legal Education: Constitutional Conspectus,”*** was chosen for publication (together with the papers of other international resource persons/experts) in the book entitled, ***“Globalisation of Professional Legal Education Constitutional Conspectus,”*** edited by Nuzhat Parveen Khan and Garima Tiwari, and published by **Bloomsbury India** on 28 October 2021.

❖ **Other Significant Accomplishments**

On the Organization and Administration of PAO

A. Continuing Innovation to Adapt to the “New Normal”

The PAO has consistently strived to upgrade and innovate in order to adapt to the changing needs of its clients, and it continues to do so even during this COVID-19 pandemic. With the best interest of its clients in mind, the PAO strengthened its policy of maintaining a communication line between the clients and their assigned counsels. For this purpose, public attorneys were instructed to give their official work cellphone numbers to their clients. (PAO Office Order No. 012, s. 2021 dated 26 January 2021 *re: Submission of Permanent Cellular Phone/Mobile Number*) Through this simple yet highly effective strategy, clients are able to reach their counsels and get updates on their cases with minimal risk as both physical interaction and travel outside of one’s residence are dispensed with.

Addressing the special needs of certain clients, the Office authorized the conduct of home visit to persons with disability, abandoned children, and senior citizen clients who need urgent legal assistance but could not come to the office, with strict instruction to public attorneys to comply with duly issued health and safety standards. This is authorized for case conference, preparation for trial, and execution of affidavits and other legal documents, among others. (PAO Office Order No. 053, s. 2021 dated 27 May 2021 *re: Personal Visit to Handicapped and Other Similarly Incapacitated Clients*)

Finally, the Office further extended its reach during the pandemic by engaging its clients through social media. The innovative **#PALA** Program, an online legal counselling program that is broadcasted live and posted on Facebook, and also uploaded to YouTube, allowed the Chief Public Attorney to directly interact with clients, and render legal advice on queries

sent by followers/viewers (from the Philippines and other countries as well) and legal opinion and teachings on day-to-day legal concerns typically encountered by the general population. The first episode of #PALA was aired on 30 July 2021 with positive feedback. As of 31 December 2021, a total of **40 episodes** have been aired over Facebook, which can still be accessed by netizens.

Through these innovations, the Chief Public Attorney only hopes to lighten the burden of the PAO's clients, aggravated by the pandemic.

B. Completion of the 2021 Revised Public Attorney's Office (PAO) Operations Manual

Following a series of meetings and consultations, capped by a final review conducted by the top management of the PAO where each and every provision under consideration were meticulously deliberated, the *2021 Revised Public Attorney's Office (PAO) Operations Manual* was finally signed on 14 December 2021. Among the key revisions made on the said manual, the increase in the net income threshold for the indigency test takes precedence. Under the latest revision, the net income threshold was increased from P10,000.00 – P14,000.00 to P20,000.00 – P24,000.00. To be precise, upon its implementation, the following persons shall be considered as indigent:

1. If residing in cities or municipalities within the National Capital Region (NCR), persons whose individual net income does not exceed Twenty-four Thousand Pesos (P24,000.00) a month;
2. If residing in other cities outside the NCR, persons whose individual net income does not exceed Twenty-two Thousand Pesos (P22,000.00) a month; and,
3. If residing in municipalities outside the NCR, persons whose individual net income does not exceed Twenty Thousand Pesos (P20,000.00) a month.

For easier understanding by the general public, a Filipino version of the *2021 Revised Public Attorney's Office (PAO) Operations Manual* was issued together with the English version. The english version of the *2021 Revised Public Attorney's Office (PAO) Operations Manual* was published on 20 December 2021 and took effect fifteen days thereafter on 4 January 2022. On the other hand, the Filipino version was also published on 4 January 2022.

C. Induction of Local Area Network (LAN) Infrastructure Project

This year, the Office was able to complete the procurement of all the hardware and software components of its LAN Infrastructure Project. This project aims to connect the various regional and district offices of the PAO located in different parts of the country to the Central Office through a safe and secured network system. It likewise targets to consolidate and organize the existing information and communication technology (ICT) capabilities of the Central Office into an integrated working network system capable of handling its current operational needs, with ample room for expansion to address its foreseeable ICT requirements, and to complement the Human Resource Management Information System Project implemented during the previous year.

Once fully implemented, the Office will have a more efficient internal communication line between and among its various units, and bring the PAO one step closer to achieving its goal of modernizing its internal management systems through the use of information technology.

D. Successful ISO 9001:2015 Recertification

This year, the PAO successfully completed one full certification cycle and applied for ISO 9001:2015 recertification, through ***TUV Nord Philippines, Inc.***, an ISO-accredited certification body. The external audit was conducted on 17-18 November 2021 at the Central Office, and ISO-certified regional and district offices. It yielded positive result, with the auditors concluding that all conditions for recertification were fulfilled, without any non-conformity finding. Significantly, the auditors even found several good practices, including the implementation of programs in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, recognitions awarded by distinctive individuals and organizations, and continuous conduct of comprehensive management review. Thus, TUV Nord Philippines, Inc. issued a new ISO 9001:2015 Certificate to PAO, which is valid for a period of three years from 21 December 2021 to 20 December 2024.

On the Services Rendered by the Office

E. PDLs Released During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The persistence of the COVID-19 pandemic called for the continued attention of the PAO in guarding not only the legal rights of its clients, but also their health and safety. This is

especially true in the case of its PDL clients who face tremendous risk in congested jails and detention facilities. With the vigilance of our public attorneys, the PAO was able to secure the release of **76,364 PDLs** for the whole year 2021. Some of the notable legal bases for release of PDL clients include release on recognizance after service of minimum sentence, release due to imprisonment equal to maximum imposable penalty or complete service of sentence, allowance and posting of bail / reduced bail, plea bargaining, grant of demurrer, dismissal with prejudice, and grant of probation.

F. Continuing Assistance to PDLs in Consonance with R.A. No. 10951

For the year 2021, public attorneys nationwide assisted a total of **6,827 PDLs** relative to R.A. No. 10951, entitled "An Act Adjusting the Amount or the Value of Property and Damage on Which a Penalty is Based and the Fines Imposed Under the Revised Penal Code, Amending for the Purpose Act No. 3815, Otherwise Known as "The Revised Penal Code", as Amended", by assessing their respective cases and pursuing the necessary legal remedy, if applicable. Of this number, **1,353 PDLs have been released** or are pending release by virtue of a granted petition, while **782 PDLs had their sentence reduced**. The rest are either awaiting the resolution of their petition, in the process of filing their petition, or the petition of the PAO is not applicable (e.g. application is not favorable, PDL has a private counsel, etc.). From the passage of the said law on 29 August 2017 up to 31 December 2021, the PAO already assisted a total of **31,031 PDLs** through legal advice, documentation service, and legal representation, when necessary.

G. Acquittal of Members of Indigenous Group Charged with Violation of the Anti-Terror Law

On 21 August 2020, Mr. Japer Gurung and Mr. Junior Ramos, both Aeta farmers, were arrested in San Marcelino, Zambales and accused of being members of the New People's Army (NPA) who fired at soldiers of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). Upon their arrest, they were allegedly carrying ammunitions and grenades. As such, they were charged with Violation of R.A. No. 11479, known as the "Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020", among others. Their case is the first involving the controversial law, which faced constitutional challenge filed by various groups.

As their counsel of choice, the PAO-Olongapo City District Office represented Mr. Gurung and Mr. Ramos during the

proceedings before the RTC – Branch 97, Olongapo City. After the presentation of the prosecution’s evidence, the PAO filed a Demurrer to Evidence on the ground of failure to prove their identity as the perpetrators of the crime of terrorism. On 15 July 2021, the court issued a decision granting the demurrer and ruling further that the arrest of Mr. Gurung and Mr. Ramos, as well as the seizure of the alleged ammunitions and grenades found in their possession, are illegal. Consequently, all cases filed against them were dismissed, and they were released from detention.

H. Assistance to the Father of Ten-Year Old Raymark Mariano

Ten-year old Raymark Mariano went viral on social media after his heartbreaking story was featured on *Kapuso Mo, Jessica Soho (KMJS)* in May 2021. Despite his young age, he was forced to plow rice fields to support his aging grandparents in the absence of his father, Rene Boy Mariano, who absconded to evade a criminal case.

Upon referral of the case, the PAO-Isulan, Sultan Kudarat District Office immediately acted. It determined that the charge against Rene Boy is for illegal possession of firearms. Efforts were then made to encourage him to submit to the jurisdiction of the court so that his case can proceed; to which he acceded. Upon his voluntary surrender, the Office secured the reduction of his bail by one-half from One Hundred Thousand Pesos (P 100,000.00) to Fifty Thousand Pesos (P 50,000.00), and assisted in posting his reduced bail so that he may avoid jail time while his case is being heard. At present, his case is set for arraignment and pre-trial under the guidance of the judge-at-large who recently took over the case.