

Report on the 27th IPBA Annual Conference and AGM held in Auckland, New Zealand

Name of the IPBA Scholar: Raghav Kumar Bajaj

Jurisdiction: India

Category of Scholar: Young Lawyers

Attending the 27th IPBA Annual Conference and AGM held in Auckland, New Zealand has indeed been a great learning experience for me, both on personal as well as professional fronts. Undoubtedly, I can say that I have been able to learn and gather a wide gamut of knowledge, learnings, skill sets, networking opportunities from this conference held in the southern hemisphere. Coming from a nation (India) which has a population of more than 1 billion, the first thing which gained my attention was the fact that the total population of New Zealand is less than even 5 million (*Auckland itself inhabits more than one third of this population*).

At the outset, I would like to convey my sincere thanks and gratitude to the IPBA Scholarship Committee for providing me with this golden opportunity to attend such a large-scale annual conference as an IPBA scholar and also to the IPBA Secretariat for making such wonderful arrangements for us IPBA scholars, both before the conference as well as during the conference. It gives me immense professional pleasure to know that I was selected as one of the 7 IPBA scholars to attend this conference. I consider myself fortunate to have had this occasion to interact closely with all the scholars who came from different jurisdictions and different professional backgrounds.

Our first day at the conference started with a warm welcome and greeting by the IPBA scholarship committee chair Jay LeMoine who took us to the Auckland High Court where James Jung (past IPBA scholar) had arranged for a special session for us IPBA scholars to get to know vital and essential insights into the judicial system prevalent in New Zealand. There, we got to learn that New Zealand is one of the very few countries in the world that does not have its own written constitution. It was also interesting to note that the Kiwis still have a jury system. I was particularly impressed by the fact that the rate at which judicial cases are disposed off in New Zealand is very fast (much faster than the rate in my jurisdiction). From there, we went to a local law firm Hesketh Henry where a partner of that firm shared some practical insights about the working environment in New Zealand and the experience of working in a law firm in New Zealand. Two aspects which were able to grab every scholar's attention were that every individual in the law firm was operating on dual screens (to increase the level of efficiency) and that no one had specific Chambers/cabins for them, not even the partners.

Thereafter, in the Conference sessions, we got to hear some important principles of life from Dame Susan Devoy, former world number one squash player and Race Relations Commissioner for New Zealand. At the IPBA scholars' reception, it was heartening for us to introduce ourselves and receive a certificate of appreciation from the IPBA President. This was an amazing opportunity for us to present ourselves to the IPBA members. I was also excited to meet so many lawyers from different jurisdictions at the welcome reception dinner. The IPBA had much more in store for us - for instance the traditional Maori dance to welcome the conference participants and the formal opening by Mr Anand Satyanand (former governor general of New Zealand) were just the beginning of this

extravagant affair. In the next session, Mr Phil O Reilly brought out and highlighted the fact that New Zealand tops the list of ease of doing business in the world. What was also interesting for me was the fact that India ranks amongst the top jurisdictions when it comes to the providers of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) services in the world. The panel discussion on the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) - in particular, the discussion on implications of the US withdrawal therefrom and the probable future outcomes thereof was very good to attend. It also gave us the perspective of USA as well as some smaller jurisdictions like New Zealand and Peru which were placing very high bets on the TPP.

What is also commendable is the kind of diverse and high-quality technical topics on which the concurrent committee sessions were organised at the conference. Contemporary topics such as artificial intelligence, difference between strategic investors and financial investors, developing an international lawyer, drafting of shareholder agreements, exit strategies were appreciated by many participants. Being a tax professional myself, I was keenly looking forward for tax related sessions wherein the much talked about BEPS (Base Erosion and Profit Shifting) project of the OECD was discussed in length by the learned speakers. Speakers from jurisdictions such as Malaysia, Korea, New Zealand, Singapore, Indonesia, Japan, India apprised us with the level of development and progress that is taking place in their jurisdictions in relation to the implementation of this BEPS project. It was interesting to learn that countries like Canada, Malaysia also have an aggressive tax planning department to combat the harmful tax avoidance measures undertaken by taxpayers. It was a good sign that all these jurisdictions were making satisfactory progress in the implementation of the BEPS project in their respective jurisdictions. We also got to learn that off late, there have been instances in Korea where the tax authorities have not been keen in following their Supreme Court decisions. Based on what all the speakers said, one thing that is certain is that all the jurisdictions are very active in implementing the BEPS project and taking measures such as CBC (Country by country) reporting and transfer pricing documentation seriously. Thereafter we were also apprised with the various tax related amendments which are proposed in the United States of America such as the proposed destination-based corporate cash flow tax, as per which exports would be exempt but at the same time the cost of goods of such exports would be tax-deductible from other income, and the proposed border adjustable tax regime. Among the other substantial tax amendments proposed in USA are the proposed reduction in the corporate tax rate and the amendment proposed that all capital investments could be expensed off in the first-year of investment itself.

Apart from the technical sessions, we also attended the annual general meeting of the IPPA wherein we got to know many more details about the IPBA – such as the manner in which it works and operates, its vision, its financial affairs, its different committees and their roles etc. The theme for the conference ‘Connectivity and Convergence’ was aptly fulfilled and demonstrated at the welcome reception dinner, the gala dinner, the Farewell party, the after party and the numerous tea and snacks sessions where we got to meet, greet and know so many different lawyers, barristers etc from different jurisdictions, understand the legal systems in their countries, understand the client expectations there and understand the manner in which legal professionals operate in their jurisdictions.

All this would give a snapshot of the wonderful experience I had in attending the IPBA Conference in Auckland, New Zealand. I hope that I'm able to attend next year's conference in Philippines and I meet my friends and professional connects with whom I interacted at the Auckland conference. Also, I would be very much interested in contributing to the IPBA in whichever manner possible, especially by writing quality articles on topics and subjects of professional interest to IPBA members as well as promoting the IPBA in my jurisdiction. I also hope that I become a part of the young member's committee which is proposed to be set up in the IPBA from this year.

To sum up, all I can say is that my entire experience of attending IPBA conference in Auckland, New Zealand as an IPBA scholar was just excellent and I would urge more and more young lawyers to participate in this scholarship programme of the IPBA.