**Annual IBA Conference 2016, Washington DC**

The IBA annual conference is an at times overwhelming experience. Between 18 and 23 September 2016, 6,000 lawyers gathered to meet, network, swap stories, and share best ideas between practitioners operating across the world.

The conference took place in Washington DC, and as such it was unsurprisingly a showcase for the USA’s leading political and legal figures. Each day began with a keynote speech. Anthony Kennedy (Associate Justice of the US Supreme Court), Colin Powell (former Secretary of State), Jeh Johnson (Homeland Security Secretary), Loretta Lynch (Attorney General) and others each stood at the podium before packed audiences. General Colin Powell gave acute insights on his perspective on the Iraq War and Guantanamo, and the legal issues surrounding them. There was also much cautious speculation about the impact of the UK’s referendum to leave the EU, with most speakers concurring that it was too early to say what impact the vote would have on the UK and the EU.

Each day was filled with specialized workshops or panel sessions arranged by the many IBA subcommittees. These were at times highly political, with Jack Straw giving a somewhat blunt appraisal of Jean-Claude Juncker whilst sitting on a panel with Lord Keen of Elie QC, the Advocate General of Scotland. Lord Keen, as a member of the UK government, was understandably rather more diplomatic in his comments.

At other times, highly technical seminars were delivered on the implications of recent treaties or global developments. An analysis of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership was insightful, and lawyers from various commodity intensive states explained the reasons behind and implications of recent commodity price falls. These talks often strayed deep into the field of economics.

For me however, both the grand oratory and detailed analysis was outshone by some far more low key workshop and panel sessions. One seminar, titled Law in a Dangerous Climate, was presented by lawyers working in conflict zones. Fady Kardous, a Syrian lawyer, played a video to the audience of the view from his office, an airy meeting room with windows on two sides, from where you could hear the whistles of bombs and see the smoke of fires rising above buildings in the distance. He explained periods of working to a soundtrack of strafe and gunshots. In amongst this mayhem Mr Kardous continues to represent clients, both in quotidian transactional work and as an advocate before ad hoc militia tribunals peremptorily deciding matters of life and death. His dedication to upholding the rule of law whilst working under such conditions was astonishing.

The UK delegation was headed by Lord Keen of Elie QC, Advocate General of Scotland. He hosted a well-attended breakfast for the many barristers and solicitors who attended the IBA, along with their guests and a superb party at the British Ambassador’s residence. It was at such events that the underlying commercial reason that most lawyers were present at the IBA came to the fore. There were lavish parties at Smithsonian museums, huge lunches, and endless intimate gatherings at embassies and bars where people met, swapped cards and looked for ways to work together. Uber drivers were kept in high demand throughout the week shuttling delegates from one amazing location to the next.

Experienced conference delegates had back to back meetings arranged throughout the week, and those (like me) there for the first time took the opportunity to make new contacts and hang on the coattails of seasoned IBA veterans. I was surprised and delighted at the number of opportunities available for junior barristers to develop an international practice.

The Conference itself is just the pinnacle of a packed calendar of events the IBA organizes. I can heartily recommend other junior lawyers to join the IBA and attend some of these and to develop an international component to their practices.

My attendance at the IBA was thanks to the generous sponsorship of the Bar Council and LCLCBA through the International Legal Practice Development Grant.

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