

QATAR LAW FORUM

In November 2017, I attended the Qatar Law Forum (QLF) in Doha joining an enviable guest list who were invited to discuss Goal 16 of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. I was honoured to have been invited to contribute to that debate and I am most grateful for the grant provided by the Bar Council's International Professional and Legal Development grant programme in conjunction with the Criminal Bar Association and the Bar Council Scholarships' Trust.

In Qatar four hundred international leaders in law, including Ministers of Justice, Chief Justices, judges, political and diplomatic leaders, discussed the most topical and contemporary issues relating to the rule of law. Over the course of an enjoyable weekend there were five plenary discussions, covering corruption, displaced persons, modern day slavery, access to justice and financial inclusion. Particular highlights included the passionate and personal opening to the plenary discussion on displaced persons by Dana Khalid Al Anzy together with the keynote addresses from H.E. Dr. Ali Bin Fettais Al-Marri, the Attorney General of Qatar, Rt Hon Lord Phillips, President of the Qatar International Court and Dispute Resolution Centre and Senator George Mitchell, former Independent Chairman of the Northern Ireland Peace Talks.

What was evident was that the rule of law is not a prehistoric, academic subject designed merely to be theorised. It is, as observed by Faisal Al Sahouti, CEO of Qatar International Court and Dispute Resolution Centre a highly relevant, vital and absorbing topic, ever-evolving upon which each one of us depends for our just place in a healthy society. Prominent aspects of the rule of law include human rights, equality before the law, the right to a fair hearing and an independent judiciary, along with numerous other consequential and related matters. It is because of the vital importance of the rule of law that the United Nations included the same within its Sustainable Development Goals. The aim is to encourage countries to find ways to implement (and aspire to achieve) similarly high legal and judicial standards. As such, a large focus of many plenary contributors were to reveal personal experiences and lessons learned from respective jurisdictions and to freely suggest, without criticism or restraint, how matters could be improved. The debates were lively, informative and passionate.

In addition to hearing such interesting contributions and debate, in the light of Doha being home to Bin Jelmood House, which seeks to play a role in the global abolition of human exploitation, a private tour was arranged for international guests. The same was thought provoking and emotional; it reinforced the plenary discussion on slavery which highlighted that slavery is more likely to occur where the rule of law is weaker and corruption is rife. Thereafter a traditional dinner followed which provided not simply an opportunity to enjoy the rich cultural heritage of the Middle East but to debate further in a relaxed setting.

Each formal plenary discussion at the forum and informal social gathering provided a great catalyst for debate. The thought-power within the room and legal expertise was almost overwhelming. It was further impressive to observe the young Qatari Lawyers and Students who hosted their own discussion exploring alternative disputes resolution; the new generation were shining through.

It is important to always grow as lawyers and to learn from the word around us; the influence and power which comes from law is not merely confined to the courtroom.

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