

[FOREWORD]

BENCHBOOK FOR TRIAL COURT JUDGES

On 23 March 2000, I referred to the Activity Signing Ceremony between the Philippines, through the Supreme Court, and Australia, through the Philippines-Australia Governance Facility, as an 'historic event.' That was the beginning of what until then had only been a vision.

It was in February 1999 that the concept for the preparation and production of a benchbook for the Philippine Judiciary was first hatched. Judges need tools to enhance their effectiveness, efficiency, and accountability, and to insure the delivery of fair, impartial, equal, and swift justice. Essential thereto is their continuing judicial education, which the Philippine Judicial Academy is tasked by law to undertake. The process entails huge expenditures because judicial enhancement programs mean seminars, workshops, and conferences. These cannot be done for all the judges at short regular intervals. In the meantime, the inertia of rest may set in; the passion for excellence may likewise hibernate.

Hence, the need for a single book that provides at all times the necessary assistance to judges in the rendition of quality resolutions and decisions. That book is the PHILIPPINE BENCHBOOK FOR TRIAL COURT JUDGES, the 'Judicial Bible for Philippine Judges.'

This Benchbook is a book of, among other things, articles on civil and criminal procedure, rules on evidence and special proceedings, judicial ethics, total quality management, judicial drafting, and the Sandiganbayan. The roster of authors and editors is a virtual Who's Who in the Philippine legal circle. A unique and important feature of the Benchbook is the ease with which Judges and other users can update it by the mere expedient of inserting new laws or rules of procedure or circulars of the Supreme Court. The same facility attends the use of the CD-ROM version and the interactive web page.

Furthermore, through the prospective dissemination of the Benchbook to lawyers and representatives of civil society, greater understanding and respect for the courts will be fostered. Consequently, the level of public trust in the justice system will thereby be heightened.

To fully utilize the various applications of this Benchbook, the Philippine Judicial Academy designed a workshop module for its usage and accordingly carried out said workshops in staggered phases. Paired with the impending upgrading of the Judiciary's communication and technology systems and infrastructure, the positive goals of the Benchbook will surely be realized.

In the near future, the Benchbook will be translated into some of the major local dialects. This is deemed necessary in view of the perceived dichotomy in the country between English, on one hand, which is the principal language in our courts, and any of our dialects, on the other, which is more readily understood by rural folk comprising the bulk of the court users in the countryside.

Indubitably, this Benchbook will go a long, long way in assisting the Judiciary pursue