

Activity Report, Philippines 2016
Dylan Scudder, HSP (Area Studies), D5

I traveled with a team of colleagues from the University of Tokyo on a four-day study tour to the Philippines in January. The schedule was filled with seminars, workshops, and visits to local sites. My role was to give a presentation on corporate responsibility in disaster situations, and to help write up the proceedings for a post-visit publication. The following is a collection of my observations and reflections during this eye-opening visit to the Philippines.



Photo: Participants of the 2016 ANRIP conference

It was the first time to visit the Philippines, so I didn't know about the country beyond some cultural and historical trivia. It was also the first time for me to work with the members in my team. The topic of the conference, *Country of Origin Information* (COI), too, was new to me.

My first impression as we were shuttled from the airport to the main venue was that we were clearly part of a privileged minority within a society where most still struggle to get by. These social strata seemed to be reflected domestically, but also globally as the country itself is caught between the interests of the US and China.

There was an ongoing exchange with my colleagues as we each made some final adjustments to our presentation materials. This helped me to get to know the people in my team, while also learning firsthand about their areas of research. The content of the scheduled meetings mostly focused on some of the methodology and procedures behind collecting and analyzing COI, especially within a legal context.

I discovered at one point that, by reviewing my colleagues' presentations, what they were researching was also related to my own area of research; decision-making. I began to see a link between my colleagues' interests and my own that I was unaware of until then – we all wanted to communicate our research to the audience.

One of the presenters we heard from, Andrea Jakober, was from the Austrian Red Cross. She spoke about a database her team had developed, which was used for collecting and organizing documentation related to refugee and asylum seeker applications.



Photo: Group photo following a meeting

In one of the plenary sessions, participants discussed practical questions such as strategies for

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reducing research costs by increasing regional cooperation between countries collecting COI. It was suggested that this could be achieved at the institutional level through intergovernmental collaboration or through NGOs.

Details for specific initiatives were also explored, such as translating and editing of documents in a way that would reduce duplication of services.

There was a strong interest among the participants to learn from each other by focusing on an exchange of best practice in compiling and analyzing data. Many felt a need to get all levels of institutions more engaged, including national human rights institutions in countries across the region.



Photo: Opportunities to exchange opinions openly

The conference was such a success that many felt ANRIP could serve as an important platform for ongoing communication on COI in Asia. Many of the discussions aimed to establish themes for upcoming research and conferences. Getting governments more interested would require expanding the scope of the conference beyond the technical details of how reliable research is carried out. It would include topics of interest for policymakers.



Photo: Distinguished panelists lead the conference

Over the course of the first two days, an understanding emerged that discussing refugee status from a legal perspective is necessary but not sufficient. The scale and complexity of global social issues and natural disasters are also human security issues. This strengthened participants' view that the role of regional cooperation should be one of the central aims for the years to come.

Some participants expressed their view that there is still some room for improvement in terms of building a common standard for COI and its implementation at the country level. To this end, opportunities for more regular communication between lawyers and policymakers would benefit everyone involved.

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Following the first two days of the conference, we participated in a side event at a local university, where colleagues presented on their research topics to the students who gathered there. The presentations were well received as evidenced by the many questions from the audience.



Photo: Ayako Hatano delivers her presentation

Also on the last day, there was a special meeting with local NGOs and government where we discussed the publication of a forthcoming training manual on Human Rights and Business. This, in combination with the two days of COI discussion and university presentations gave everyone a valuable opportunity for reflection and networking with colleagues across Asia.



Photo: Dylan Scudder delivers his presentation