



## **Press Release**

HELSINKI, 29 May 2013

### **AIJA conference breaks records**

#### **Helsinki congratulated the President of the international legal network for being an excellent host to the world's young lawyers**

The International Association of Young Lawyers (AIJA) experienced a record level of attendees at its bi-annual conference held in Helsinki last week. More than 270 lawyers aged 45 or under gathered for a high level programme on the subjects of employment law and arbitration. The four day conference also had space for many social events including the unique "home hospitality" when international lawyers, many of whom had never met each other before, were welcomed to the homes of their Finnish hosts.

The conference opened with the AIJA President, Thierry Aballéa, of Cabinet Artus Wise in Paris, who commented, "We were delighted with the number of delegates at this event which has served as the ideal platform for our annual conference in Buenos Aires. We believe that our future growth lies outside of Europe."

The Gala Dinner on the final night, held in the Helsinki Stock Exchange building, was another highlight, where the President of the Helsinki Organising Committee, Henna Kinnunen and her team, were formally thanked for being excellent hosts and the new team organising the forthcoming Buenos Aires conference were formally introduced to the members before offering a Tango lesson to all the participants.

The legal industry has not escaped the crisis since 2009, placing pressure on the marketing budgets of some law firms. This could have led to a reduction in the numbers of associates attending events such as this; however, AIJA has bucked the trend and has welcomed 1200 new members in the last four years.

Henna Kinnunen, of Castren & Snellman and President of the Helsinki Organising Committee said, "We made quite extensive marketing efforts through the bar associations and lawyers union here in Finland and we are delighted with the result." About the conference she added, "Everything has gone so going so smoothly. The choice of law seminar and forum was great."

Many legal networks have sprung out of the desire of a single large law firm, normally within the UK or US, to develop a best friend's network. AIJA is unique in that it is the only global association devoted to lawyers and in-house counsel aged 45 and under and in terms of individuals being members rather than firms. This changes the focus and dynamic of the association, with members placing self-development ahead of benefiting from business referrals, although many referrals do occur between members.

New member Pirita Virtanen, from Finnish firm Dittmar & Indrenius, said, "It's really great to meet so many interesting people from all around the world. Helsinki should be in the spotlight more often, it's "huikeeta!""

The youthful age profile of the members is demonstrated both in terms of faster development within the organisation, with many members being invited to take up official positions within 3-4 years of membership, and a more flexible approach to the industry.

The next major event for the network is their annual conference to be held in Buenos Aires in September 2013. Reinforcing the message that AIJA is fully international, Henna Kinnunen, of Castren & Snellman and President of the Helsinki Organising Committee, said "It is true that we are a more Europe-based organisation in terms of membership but AIJA is much wider than Europe." Plans for the Annual Congress in Buenos Aires indicate the global aspirations of the network and expectations are high.