

## THE PLEDGE DELIVERS LANDMARK ADVOCACY COURSE IN INDIA

In December, the India Subcommittee of the ERA Pledge delivered a landmark Arbitration Advocacy Course in Mumbai aimed at addressing a persistent structural gap in international arbitration: the limited access of mid-career and senior women lawyers to high-quality advocacy training and courtroom-equivalent experience.

The programme brought together 30 women practitioners at a critical stage of their careers and provided a rare, psychologically safe and technically rigorous environment in which they could practise advanced advocacy skills—particularly witness handling and opening and closing submissions—through a simulated cross-border arbitration. By focusing on seniority rather than entry-level training, the course directly targeted the “last-mile” barrier to visibility, confidence and appointment faced by women in arbitration.

The course was conceptualised and delivered by the International Advocacy Training Council (IATC), which assembled an exceptional international faculty of 12 trainers from South Africa, Malaysia, Hong Kong, the UK and India. The faculty included Justice Mary Lim Thiam Suan (former Judge of the Federal Court of Malaysia and Director of the Asian International Arbitration Centre), Justice Sharise Weiner (Justice of the Supreme Court of Appeal, South Africa), Anna Annandale SC (Chair of the IATC), Neil Mackenzie KC (Vice-Chair of the IATC), Brendan Navin Siva, and senior advocates including Jenny Cane, Wai Fong Lai, Joon Liang Foo, Shamala Devi, Lisa Olsen, Richard Samuel, Ka Wong, Nick Atkinson, Kat Roma Greer, Ravindra Mangave, Kaunrakar Shetty and Dhanashri Hardas.

Recognising that confidence, presence and voice are often cited by women as barriers to advancement, the programme commenced with a pre-course online session on public speaking delivered by professional voice coaches from Punch Presentations. Participants received individual, actionable feedback on pre-recorded advocacy videos, enabling targeted improvement even before the in-person programme began.

The in-person course ran from 12–14 December at the Maharashtra Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture (MACCIA), which generously hosted the programme. Teaching was grounded in the Hampel Method, a globally recognised advocacy framework centred on learning by doing. Participants performed advocacy exercises, received one clear and practical improvement point, observed trainer demonstrations, and then re-performed with the benefit of that feedback. Small group sizes ensured intensive, individualised coaching, while video-assisted one-to-one reviews allowed participants to reflect on their own advocacy in a structured and supportive setting.

The programme was oversubscribed before it commenced and generated powerful feedback. Participants described the course as confidence-building, transformative and “career-changing”, noting that comparable opportunities are rarely available to women practitioners in India or internationally.

The course was inaugurated by Sherina Petit, Chair of the India Pledge Subcommittee, who reinforced the ERA Pledge’s commitment to moving beyond statements of principle and delivering tangible interventions that create pathways to equality in arbitration.

The initiative was led by Namrata Shah, member of the Pledge’s India Subcommittee, whose vision and sustained commitment drove the programme from conception to delivery. She was supported by fellow Subcommittee members: Gulnar Mistry (funding), Ishaan Patkar (logistics), Priyanka Shetty (outreach), Hima Lawrence (guidance), Payel Chatterjee and Karishma Vora (participant engagement), and Jenna Krishnan and Hiral Thaakar, whose behind-the-scenes support was indispensable.

The programme was made possible through the generous financial support of senior counsel in Mumbai, including Navroz Seervai, Prateek Seksaria, Mustafa Doctor, Cyrus Ardeshir, Naushad Engineer, Manjari Shah, Chetan Kapadia and Sharan Jagitani, whose backing reflected a shared commitment to advancing gender equity at the highest levels of advocacy.

This initiative exemplifies meaningful DEI action: it addresses structural inequality, redistributes access to elite training, builds confidence and competence at senior levels, and creates a replicable model for sustainable change. It demonstrates how targeted, high-impact interventions can translate diversity commitments into measurable progress for women in international arbitration.

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