

# American Bar Association Section of International Law and Practice Report to the House of Delegates

## II. INDEX TO LATIN AMERICAN LEGISLATION

### RESOLUTION

BE IT RESOLVED, that the American Bar Association urges the Congress of the United States to provide adequate funds to enable the Hispanic Law Division of the Library of Congress to modify its automated on-line database of the Index to Latin American Legislation to provide a system which would be accessible to the government officials, lawyers, scholars, and other researchers who require access to such an index.

### REPORT

#### Background

The Section of International Law and Practice of the American Bar Association recommends that the American Bar Association calls upon the Congress to authorize sufficient funds for the modification of the present automated on-line database of the Index of Latin American Legislation of the Hispanic Law Division of the Law Library, Library of Congress (the "Index"), to a system accessible to the public. Such access would be of substantial value to researchers of Latin American legislation, particularly because it would make possible such research by many who would not have available to them the gazettes' indexes, and would allow comparative subject searches, such as foreign investment regulations of the various Latin American countries. This system would also bring up to date the index which is currently available in print through 1975.\*

---

\*Information in the Index has been drawn from an informative description of the system prepared by the Hispanic Law Division "Law Library, Library of Congress, Hispanic Law Division, Index to Latin American Legislation" dated 5/7/86. Inquiries on further information on the system can be sent directly to Dr. Rubens Medina, Director, Hispanic Law Division, Law Library, Library of Congress, Room LM235, Washington, D.C. 20540, (202) 287-5070.

\*\*The Index covers the following countries:

Angola	Dominican Republic	Nicaragua
Argentina	Ecuador	Panama
Bolivia	El Salvador	Paraguay
Brazil	Guatemala	Peru
Cape Verde	Guinea-Bissau	Portugal
Chile	Haiti	Sao Tomee
Columbia	Honduras	Principe
Costa Rica	Mexico	Uruguay
Cuba	Mozambique	Venezuela

## Description of the Index

The Index is an on-line database of English language abstracts of selected provisions of the more than twenty gazettes received by the Hispanic Law Division. In addition, the Index provides subject access to the gazettes of Portugal and her former colonies in Africa.\*\*

The Index includes abstracts of the most significant national legislation, as well as citations to the publication date of that legislation in the corresponding official gazettes. In addition, the abstracts contain country and subject headings.

The Index began in 1950 as an important research aid to the staff and clientele of the Hispanic Law Division and was maintained on 3'' × 5'' cards until it was automated in 1976.

The system has previously been made available to the public through the publications of G.K. Hall, Boston, Massachusetts. G.K. Hall originally photocopied the card index in 1961, publishing it as the *Index to Latin American Legislation 1950-1960* with a print run of four hundred and fifty copies. To date there have been three supplements: the first covering 1961-65; the second, 1966-70; and the third, 1971-75. Thus, in 1976, when the Index went on-line, it became unavailable to any audience outside of the Library of Congress.

## Need for Wider Access to the Index

The public accessibility to the on-line system would allow researchers to use it on a continuing updated basis, which is vastly superior to the print publications. In addition, the automated mode would allow virtually every practitioner, academician, or government researcher with an undedicated computer terminal to enjoy access to the Index. The Index would also greatly facilitate comparative or multiple jurisdiction research by making available the indices of all the gazettes in a single context and a uniform format. Besides usage within the United States, it may not be a too-far-fetched idea to contemplate making access to it available also to researchers in the Latin American countries themselves, which could greatly enhance the administration of justice in these jurisdictions.

## Conclusion

By adopting this recommendation, the American Bar Association would be urging the Congress to provide the means which would make available to United States citizens a valuable research tool. Access to the Index would greatly enhance the research capabilities of Americans doing research on Latin American legislation.

Respectfully submitted,

Joseph P. Griffin, Chairman  
Section of International Law  
and Practice

August 1988