

Know  
your  
Committee

# Sonia Abraham

Legalink Vice Chair





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enormous  
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potential”

Sonia Abraham  
Partner  
Azman Davidson & Co.

## 1. **What is your perspective on assuming the position of Vice Chairman at Legalink?**

Let me start with a little historical perspective on my journey with Legalink. Azman Davidson was one of the pioneering Asian firms to join Legalink in 1996, and hosted Legalink's inaugural Asian General Meeting in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in October 2002. I was then an enthusiastic young associate actively involved in organising the event. Later in October 2019, Azman Davidson again hosted the General Meeting in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and this time to a significantly expanded Legalink network. I then had the privilege of serving as Treasurer of Legalink from October 2021 to October 2023. Through these experiences, I have forged closer relationships with Legalink members and firmly believe in our enormous collective potential.

I am honored and just as enthusiastic to now serve as Vice Chairman of the Legalink Committee under the leadership of our Chairman, Chris Trowbridge, alongside our Committee Member, Alejandro Ripoll and Treasurer, Göran Andersson.

As Vice Chairman, I look forward to working with the Committee to build on the network's existing initiatives, whilst being responsive to the need for new initiatives which will encourage more dynamic and focused participation by members. I am hopeful that this in turn will translate to more opportunities for collaboration and referrals within the network, increase expansion and raise the regional and international visibility of our network and member firms.

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## 2. **You were the Treasurer of Legalink. How does this experience benefit your new role?**

At a personal level, being Treasurer of Legalink has given me a better understanding of the responsibilities and challenges of being a member of the Legalink Committee. I am therefore more aware of the time and effort required of me and those around me, to effectively fulfil my new role.

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At the network level, it has given me the opportunity to forge closer relationships with many Legalink members and to better understand their expectations and concerns from a business and personal perspective. I can therefore tailor my efforts through the Committee more constructively to address this.

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**3. How do you plan to promote diversity and inclusion within Legalink, both in terms of the Network's leadership and its member firms?**

There is a global momentum towards diversity which has been embraced by Legalink, with the launch of the Women in Law practice group in November 2023. Led by Tania Rahmany and Carla Leandro, the Women in Law initiative has been met with encouraging enthusiasm. It already shows promise in bringing innovative measures to raise awareness on the need and challenges of diversity. I believe that this will be a great platform to encourage more women to be involved in Legalink, to contribute to the various Regional and Practice Groups and to assume more leadership roles in Legalink and their member firms.

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**4. What do you believe are the biggest challenges and opportunities facing Legalink in the coming years?**

I'll start with the opportunities. The global pandemic recovery measures implemented by many countries have led to a rebound in economic activity, with Governments and businesses driving innovation across various sectors such as artificial intelligence, biotechnology and renewable energy. There is increased investment in infrastructure projects with stronger emphasis on sustainability and environmental responsibility. This resurgence and innovation has created collaborative opportunities for Legalink members and their clients. Members can collaborate on cross border transactions and leverage their experience and client base within the network to access new projects, niche areas and transactions.

The challenge lies in translating these opportunities to tangible results. The efforts of the Committee and Practice Groups need to lead to increased referrals and collaborative appointments. If this is not happening, we will need to identify the reasons behind it and attempt to find solutions to address any barriers to members exploiting these opportunities for their mutual benefit.

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## 5. **What can you tell us about yourself and your journey as a lawyer?**

I cannot talk about my journey as a lawyer without mentioning the law firm that has been an integral part of my career and life for nearly three decades.

I started as a pupil in chambers with Azman Davidson, uncertain whether I wanted to be a lawyer. The uncertainty gradually faded with my growing admiration for the founders and partners of Azman Davidson who were not only dedicated to legal excellence, but also genuinely cared about the well-being and success of their lawyers and clients. It was primarily this admirable blend of professionalism and concern that made me want to stay on in practice with the firm.

In the first 10 years in practice, I honed my skills in general litigation and arbitration and became a partner in that department. Around that time, the possibility of specialising in Employment Law and building up the employment practice in the firm was unexpectedly given to me. It felt right and I decided to seize the opportunity. With the support of the partners of the firm, I was able to expand the firm's employment law practice and have since headed the Employment Team at Azman Davidson.

Azman Davidson's values of excellence, camaraderie and practising law with a human face contributed significantly to my personal and professional growth as a lawyer. As I became more active in Legalink, I resonated with its similar culture – one that fosters collaboration, mutual respect and a shared pursuit of excellence. It is my sincere hope to carry forward this legacy with Legalink.

## 6. **Could you highlight a significant achievement or project in your legal career that you are particularly proud of?**

There are two matters that come to mind: an unexpected win in a landmark sexual harassment case and a meaningful talk to cancer survivors.

In 2020, I was Counsel in a landmark case on sexual harassment in Malaysia where the Courts held, inter alia, that the use of terms of endearment at the workplace itself, could constitute sexual harassment. The case was challenging at many levels. The victim had resigned and moved on and did not wish to relive the experience in any way. Over time and given the circumstances, she eventually co-operated fully, with the support of her entire family. She faced what often seemed like harsh challenges in court which was disheartening to witness. Yet, against what seemed to be a losing battle, the facts prevailed and she was vindicated. I was truly humbled by the experience.

Just before the pandemic, I was invited by the National Cancer Society Malaysia to deliver a presentation on “Employee Rights and How to Transition to Working Life After Cancer” at a forum for patients and survivors of breast cancer. As I prepared for the talk, I reflected on the burdens faced by cancer patients whilst battling the illnesses. Many lacked sufficient financial support and carried concerns for their young children and families. Assuring them that they need not sacrifice their careers or income during this period, and equipping them with basic legal knowledge and negotiation skills for their transition back to work - this seemingly small act of guidance carried such significant impact. I had hoped to follow through with providing them with further assistance but with the pandemic, the moment was lost. I do wish to continue with the effort in the future.

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## 7. **Can you share an example of a successful collaboration within Legalink your firm has been a part of?**

Over the last 28 years that Azman Davidson has been a member of Legalink, we have had many successful collaborations with Legalink member firms.

The first that comes to mind is the enforcement of an arbitral award in the early 2000s in favour of a Malaysian party represented by Azman Davidson against a Finnish construction company. Azman Davidson worked closely in collaboration with Jorgen Hammerström, a former Legalink member, to defend the challenge of the award that went up to the Finnish Supreme Court, with the matter being effectively re-heard on its merits by the Finnish courts. The collaboration successfully concluded with the award being paid up in full with interest when the bailiff turned up for execution at the Finnish party’s headquarters in Helsinki.

Another successful collaboration was a dispute between the Malaysian subsidiary of a Belgian steel fabricator and its Australian sales representative, pursuant to an agreement governed by Singapore law. The arbitration was conducted in accordance with the ICC Rules in Singapore. Azman Davidson collaborated with Braddell Brothers in Singapore, with Rajendra Navaratnam and Edmund Kronenburg appearing as co-counsel in the arbitration hearing. It was a successful collaboration that concluded with a settlement between the parties to the dispute\

A recent collaboration was a project headed by Mishcon de Reya, who was acting for a client exploring expansion of its business into various countries, including Malaysia. We provided legal advice covering Malaysia together with other Legalink members from other countries taking part in the collaboration. Mishcon handled and managed the multi-jurisdictional collaboration most efficiently..

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**8. What's a fun or interesting fact about yourself that your Legalink members might not know?**

I enjoy playing the piano and singing although I must confess from the outset that I am no Lady Gaga!! I was fortunate to be a part of a group of performing lawyers called the Reluctant Performers, who provided commentary and insight to current events through acting and singing in satire. We performed at numerous legal functions and were also regularly invited to perform at social events held by other professional bodies and groups. All proceeds were donated to Legal Aid. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, the Reluctant Performers have had to temporarily and reluctantly retire!

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**9. How do you enjoy your free time outside of work?**

My free time outside of work is spent largely with my very supporting husband Kamraj and two wonderful children aged 14 and 9. I also enjoy listening to music, baking and catching up with my close girlfriends and cousins, who are an integral part of my emotional support system. I am blessed to have a balance of work, family, friendship and music in my life.

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