

# BEST PRACTICES

Numerous law firms across Latin America, as well as firms in the US with a strong focus south of the border, are boosting their services offerings by adding new practices or growing existing ones, in response to an increased workload and client demand.



ADALBERTO MÉNDEZ LÓPEZ

**T**In Mexico, ECIJA, which set up shop in the country in January in an integration with local firm Chacón & Rodríguez, has become the first firm in the country to incorporate a human rights and corporate responsibility practice, and for which it has recruited **Adalberto Méndez López** to head the practice.

Méndez López (*pictured*) has several years' experience as a company lawyer, a public official and an international consultant in more than 17 countries in matters of corporate social responsibility and human rights.

"Next year the UN will promulgate a law concerning companies and human rights, and which will bring a responsibility to companies to respect employees' rights," Méndez López says, and the new practice is designed to defend companies and help them design strategies to comply with the new regulations.

In addition, USMCA, the new free trade agreement among Mexico, the US and Canada, also contains clauses that guarantee workers' rights in the three

## COMPANIES WILL NOW HAVE MORE CLARITY REGARDING COMPLIANCE AND PREVENTION REGARDING SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS, AND AT THE LEVEL OF INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS

Ricardo Chacón, managing partner, ECIJA Mexico

countries, and a mechanism for international claims in the event of the violation of such rights, and which obliges companies to create new methods of compliance, he says.

And locally, two proposals have been presented in the Senate to grant the national human rights commission the faculty to denounce companies' violation of human rights.

Companies must also implement much stricter standards with regards to recycling and environmental protection.

"The corporate social responsibility and human rights practice will also allow us to offer consultancy services, both to companies and public officials, as a means of crime prevention," Méndez López says.

According to Ricardo Chacón, managing partner of the firm's Mexico office, ECIJA is the first firm in Mexico to offer this practice, while only four firms in the world offer such services, but none of which have such a practice in Mexico.

Chacón says the incorporation of Méndez López "reinforces not only our leadership in Mexico with a pioneering human rights practice in the country, but also responds to ECIJA's aim to become the firm of reference in Latin America, where we have positioned ourselves as the Spanish law firm with the biggest presence on the continent".

"ECIJA is a leader in innovation and this practice we have opened is another example of our cutting-edge position, there was no such practice in a law firm in Mexico, and will advise companies on how



RICARDO CHACÓN

to act in order to be socially responsible," he says.

"Adalberto is an authority in this matter and which is why he is the ideal person to lead this practice, with a team of lawyers, and which will be a point of reference in this matter."

Méndez López has worked at the United Nations Development Programme, the Inter-American Human Rights Institute (IIDH), USAID and Chemonics International, as well as at the UK's Foreign & Commonwealth Office.

He is one of few lawyers in the Americas who has participated in proceedings before three of the world's four human rights protection institutions, and has authored books on the subject.

As part of the OECD, Mexico in 2017 adopted its mechanism for the resolution of controversies regarding companies' social responsibility and human rights commitments. As a result, "companies will now have more clarity regarding compliance and prevention regarding social responsibility and human rights, and at the level of international standards", Chacón says.

Social responsibility and respect for human rights are not the same however, Méndez López points out. "A company can be socially responsible and at the same time violate workers' human rights, and many in-house lawyers are not aware of that," he says. 📄