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Latinvex

August 7, 2013

Holland & Knight: Colombia Business Grows

Colombia business is growing at Holland & Knight.

BY JOACHIM BAMRUD

As Colombia cements its position as one of Latin America's economic stars, Holland & Knight is reaping the benefits of having opened an office there last year.

"All economic sectors have been on the rise significantly, including legal services," says **Enrique Gomez-Pinzon**, Executive Partner of Holland & Knight Colombia. "Holland & Knight is part of the excellent moment that Colombia is having. So far we are having a good year and the outlook is promising."

Colombia last year ranked third in Latin America in [foreign direct investment](#), behind Brazil and Chile. Meanwhile, it had the fourth-highest [GDP growth](#) among the region's top seven economies, outperforming both Brazil and Mexico.

"Colombia is the rising star in Latin America. Its economy is growing faster than world average and it is expected to keep growing for the next several years at steady levels," Gomez-Pinzon says. "Colombia has increased GDP per capita and boosted exports for the past eight years with Free Trade Agreements and at the same time, foreign direct investment has been up to record figures."

Last year, Colombia was among the top five Latin American countries that saw the highest increase in trade with the United States, according to according to a [Latinvex analysis](#) of data from the US Census Bureau. The US-Colombia free trade agreement was implemented on May 15, 2012.

Meanwhile, Colombia led the way in Latin American export growth to the European Union last year, according to a [Latinvex analysis](#) of data from Eurostat. Colombia's FTA with the European Union was implemented last week.

STAFF EXPANSION

Holland & Knight has added five new positions at the office since December. The office now includes three partners and five associates. In addition to Gomez-Pinzon, the other two partners are **Vicente Umaña Carrizosa** and **Juan Carlos Valencia Marquez**.

Valencia Marquez joined Holland & Knight in September last year from Valencia Abogados and Asociados after serving as general counsel of [Arcos Dorados](#) (McDonald's master franchisee for Latin America) and corporate tax director for Coca-Cola Femsa S.A. de C.V. He has also served as an advisor

to the Colombian government in tax-related matters and recently supported the commercial section of the U.S. Embassy in Bogota by advising the Franchise Mission on Colombian regulatory issues.

Umaña also joined Holland & Knight in September after serving as VP of labor relations of Citibank in Colombia and Central America and area counsel for Spanish-speaking South America and legal advisor for labor issues to IBM in Latin America. He is one of the few bilingual labor law attorneys in Colombia.

The Bogota office is Holland & Knight's only office in Latin America and its fourth outside of the United States (the other three are in China and United Arab Emirates).

Holland & Knight is one of only four international law firms that have offices in Colombia. The others are [Baker & McKenzie](#), Garrigues and Norton Rose Fulbright.

Gomez-Pinzon, whose work on corporate/M&A was singled out in [Chambers Latin America 2013](#) edition, divides his time between Bogota and Washington, DC, where he has worked at the Holland & Knight office for a decade. He began his legal career in Colombia and has served as co-founder and director of the Colombian-Japanese Chamber of Commerce, member of the Bogota Stock Exchange board of directors and director of the Colombian Trade Bureau in Washington, D.C.

LOCAL & INTERNATIONAL CLIENTS

The Colombia office came after Holland & Knight had served clients in the country for more than 30 years. "We opened because our clients requested it," Gomez-Pinzon says. "Since our opening, our business has expanded to provide local services as well as international."

Holland & Knight's clients in Colombia are both local firms and US, European and Eastern multinationals with regional presence. That means offering solutions to Colombian companies with local and international legal needs as well as non-Colombian companies that wish to enter the Colombian and regional markets, Gomez-Pinzon says.

Among its clients are Drummond Company, which Holland & Knight has advised in all aspects of its Colombian mining operations and infrastructure projects. Another client is Juan Valdez Café, which it has advised on expansion and site leasing in the United States.

Holland & Knight has also advised the InterContinental Hotels Group in the negotiation of two separate franchise agreements, each with a different local developer, to open two new hotels in Colombia's northeastern cities of Bucaramanga and Cucuta under the Holiday Inn brand.

Other major deals Holland & Knight has been involved in since it opened its Bogota office last year include advising Fondo Latinoamericano de Reservas (FLAR) in its close to a loan of more than \$450 million to the Republic of Ecuador, assisting foreign real estate and manufacturing companies in establishing operations in different cities in Colombia, advising an oil service company in the acquisition of a drilling operation in Colombia and representing a major cosmetics company in a tax-related trial.

The office now has clients in all sectors. "They include the EPC contractors of one of the most important infrastructure projects (Cartagena's Refinery), and one of the leading Colombian mining companies, which we represent in all aspects of its local mining operation and infrastructure projects," Gomez-Pinzon says. "We are also involved in the structuring of a public-private partnership for an infrastructure concession. On the other hand, we work with the most important financial group in the country and we continue to build a reputation for hospitality work, with hotel brands among our client list. Arbitration, of course, local and international is one of our main lines of work, as well."