In 1993, American Bar Association Central and Eastern European Law Initiative (ABA CEELI) opened its doors in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Following the dissolution of the former Soviet Union, there was a clear desire for democratization in Central Asia and a dearth of trained lawyers available to ensure fair and transparent political and legal transitions. The ABA initiated its first CEELI programs in 1990 to provide training and support to the legal communities throughout other regions in Europe and Eurasia. Following the success of our programs in the Europe and Eurasia region, the ABA created similar rule of law programs for Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East and North Africa. In 2007, these programs, along with CEELI, were consolidated into the single entity of the ABA Rule of Law Initiative (ABA ROLI). Due to our highly consultative and collaborative approach of providing objective technical assistance, ABA ROLI has since become a leading international legal development NGO, promoting the rule of law in over sixty countries.

The first CEELI projects in Kyrgyzstan focused on providing technical support to Kyrgyz judges, lawyers, and law professors. This included providing expert commentary on pending legislation and developing practical skills trainings that would enhance the ability of lawyers to actively protect their clients’ interests and rights. In the years since, our programming has expanded to cover a broad range of rule of law issues.

Support to the Legal Profession
ABA ROLI has been actively supporting the legal profession. Since the early 2000’s, ABA ROLI has supported the development of a more professional and self-regulated bar in Kyrgyzstan. While a fully unified bar is the most effective way to regulate the legal profession, the process in Kyrgyzstan is sluggish. In 2005, ABA ROLI helped establish a working group to develop strategies for improving the administration of criminal law within the country. The working group is made up of ABA ROLI staff, lawyers, law professors and members of the legal community and government. This working group helped develop a draft law, which would mandate the national bar with conducting bar exams, providing licenses, regulating and disciplining lawyers, and offering mandatory continuing legal education (CLE). Over the years, the draft law has gone through a series of revisions to address concerns and is pending parliament’s approval. In the meantime, ABA ROLI has continued to diligently work with the parliament and the executive branch to encourage adoption of some version of the bill. At present, the bill is only set to provide updated regulation for the criminal defence bar, but if successful it will be a model for more comprehensive bar reform.

Continuing Legal Education and the Advocates Training Center
In 2008, ABA ROLI was a lead partner in the establishment of the Advocates Training Center (ATC) as the country’s first training center for practicing lawyers. The ATC remains the only institution that provides regular, high quality legal training for lawyers. Since 2008, the ATC has provided, on average, one training per month, and in 2013, it expanded its offerings to include trainings for notaries. In addition to the routine technical trainings, the ATC provides topical trainings on new and pressing issues. For example, in 2012, ABA ROLI and the ATC provided a series of trainings on self-defence for advocates, and in 2013, began to provide trainings on domestic violence. Such trainings serve both to raise awareness of the problem and to provide training to lawyers representing victims during prosecutions.

Participants in an Advocates Training Center workshop receive high quality legal instruction.
Street Law and Youth Programming
In 2001, ABA ROLI started a street-law program, aimed at secondary school age (14–18 years old) students. The course, led by volunteer law students, combined peer networking with social advocacy in a know-your-rights style course, with a focus on human rights and principles of democracy. After five successful years in public schools, the program expanded its original scope to include 14 religious madrassa schools. During the course of this program, more than 7,000 students participated in the street-law program.

Post Conflict Youth
Throughout its history, ABA ROLI has worked to support the development of good governance, often taking a ground-up approach. For example, in 2008, ABA ROLI developed a training book entitled *New Honest Generation*, to help instil an anti-corruption culture among primary school students in Kyrgyzstan. In 2010, in response to the troubles in the southern region of Kyrgyzstan, the ABA ROLI office in Osh developed a program, *Towards a Future Without Conflict*, for secondary school students. The program was designed to ease ethnic tensions, and to teach peaceful coexistence in an ethnically diverse society.

Legal Education at the University Level
In 2012, ABA ROLI, through funding from USAID, entered into a memorandum of understanding with Kyrgyz Slavic University, Kyrgyz State Law Academy, Kyrgyz International University and the Kyrgyz National Law academy to formalise support to the legal clinics at each school. This program expanded to Osh and Jalalabad in late 2012 and the American University of Central Asia informally began cooperating with the legal clinic framework in 2013.

These clinics provide free legal advice, either through one-off meetings or full representation of clients unable to afford private counsel, while providing law students a practical experience in their field with careful supervision and guidance from experienced practitioners. Representation is conducted under the close supervision of a professor and generally does not extend to criminal matters.

To build on this practical skills approach employed in the clinics and to reach an even greater number of future lawyers, ABA ROLI established a working group with law professors in September 2012 to develop three practical-skills courses for the law schools: *Tactics in pre-trial proceedings*, *Client interviewing*, and “*Trial Advocacy*.” These courses are intended to raise both the confidence of future advocates and their ability to thrive in trial proceedings.

To many more years of progress!
Currently, ABA ROLI is preparing to support the initiation of jury trials, which are scheduled to commence in 2015. Options for supporting this important step towards a more transparent democracy include a public awareness campaign and a training program for judges, prosecutors and defence attorneys.

There are many ways ABA ROLI can contribute to the development of the legal community in Kyrgyzstan in both the short and long term. Our goals are to collaborate with the local legal community of practitioners, academics, government officials and beneficiary citizens to help develop a fair, transparent and effective legal system that supports respect for both human rights and the rule of law and to continue our long-standing commitment to good governance in Kyrgyzstan and around the world.