



American Bar Association  
**News Release**



**Release: Immediate**

Contact: Nancy Cowger Slonim  
Phone: 312/988-6132  
E-Mail: [slonimn@staff.abanet.org](mailto:slonimn@staff.abanet.org)  
Online: <http://www.abanews.org>

**ABA SUMMIT TO SHAKE LEGAL PROFESSION OUT OF 'DIVERSITY FATIGUE'**  
*Job Is Not Done, Despite Advances, says ABA President H. Thomas Wells Jr.*

WASHINGTON, D.C., May 27, 2009--With numerous legal safeguards against discrimination in place and an African-American president in the White House, many have slipped into complacency regarding the need for diversity in all aspects of American life, including the legal profession. At its Presidential Summit on "Diversity in the Legal Profession: The Next Steps?" the American Bar Association will seek to awaken the legal profession from "diversity fatigue" and renew focus on its longstanding goal, to reflect the society it serves.

ABA President H. Thomas Wells Jr. is convening the summit June 19 and 20 in the Gaylord Hotel, National Harbor, Md.

"The legal profession is where society looks for its leaders. If we don't match the diversity of our profession with that of our society, society will find its leaders elsewhere," said Wells. "And thus far, we have failed to keep pace."

"This invitational summit is intended to take a fresh look toward the future. We must not succumb to diversity fatigue. Marching in place equates to falling behind. We must stride forward, but first, we must figure out how," he said.

"In fact-finding hearings leading up to this summit, the ABA has documented the shockingly low level of progress made by the legal profession," said Wells. "Despite our focus and efforts over the last 20 years, we still are at a point where only about 12 percent of the lawyers of this country come from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. While that is double the level 25 years ago, we lag shamefully behind the rest of society."

"While women enter the profession in record numbers, their exodus is a continuing problem. Particularly when women over 50 opt out, despite having attained positions of power, it creates a vacuum of mentors and role models for younger women. The profession has not even tracked the numbers of lawyers with disabilities, and those of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, who often are hesitant to self-identify," Wells said.

Kareem Dale, special assistant to President Obama for disability policy, will open the summit with keynote remarks, reflecting that the summit will address diversity in a broad range of contexts: race and ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity. Other key speakers will be U.S. Rep. G. K. Butterfield of North Carolina; Weldon H. Latham, senior partner and chair of the Corporate Diversity Counseling Group for the law firm of Davis Wright Tremaine LLP,

Washington, D.C.; and Cruz Reynoso, former justice of the California Supreme Court and professor emeritus at the University of California Davis School of Law.

Three topics will guide summit discussions, with expert speaker panels laying out broad issues and summit attendees convening in small working groups to establish an agenda for the legal profession's next phase of work in addressing diversity. Panelists will make the case for diversity, look to methods of retaining diverse professionals, and relate responsibility and relevance of diversity in the legal profession to society.

With more than 400,000 members, the American Bar Association is the largest voluntary professional membership organization in the world. As the national voice of the legal profession, the ABA works to improve the administration of justice, promotes programs that assist lawyers and judges in their work, accredits law schools, provides continuing legal education, and works to build public understanding around the world of the importance of the rule of law.