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\*\*\*\*\*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE\*\*\*\*\*

## **Free Legal Assistance Available for Earthquake and Tsunami Victims** *Partnership Between ASBA, ABA and FEMA Helps Residents*

UTULEI, AMERICAN SAMOA—Free legal assistance is being offered to low income victims of the September 29, 2009 earthquake and tsunami. These services will be provided through outreach clinics and a telephone hotline as part of a partnership between the American Samoa Bar Association (“ASBA”), the American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division (“ABA YLD”) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (“FEMA”).

Beginning on Monday, November 16, 2009, Disaster Legal Services (“DLS”) clinics will be held weekdays from noon to 1:00 p.m., as well as Saturdays from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., at the H. Rex Lee Auditorium in Utulei. Once-per-month Saturday village outreach clinics will also be held in affected villages from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. on dates and in villages to be announced. Appointments and questions may be directed to the DLS hotline at (684) 258-9830. Voicemail messages will be returned.

Through this project, ASBA will be providing legal advice and referrals for clients in various legal areas, including assistance in securing FEMA and other government assistance available to disaster victims as well as bankruptcy, civil rights, contract, criminal, employment, family, immigration, insurance, land disputes, probate, and worker’s compensation.

Interested and potential clients should visit any of the scheduled DLS clinics or call (684) 258-9830.

### **Background**

When the U.S. President declares a major disaster, FEMA, in cooperation with the American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division, establishes a number for disaster victims to request legal assistance. Funding for the toll-free line comes from FEMA under the authority of Section 415 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (Public Law 100-707). The American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division in turn partners with state bar associations and other legal organizations to recruit volunteer lawyers in affected areas to handle victims’ cases.

Victims should be aware that there are some limitations on disaster legal services. For example, assistance is not available for cases that will produce a fee (i.e., those cases where attorneys are paid part of the settlement by the court). Such cases are referred to a

local lawyer referral service. To determine whether an issue qualifies for free legal assistance, individuals should call (684) 258-9830 between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. for more information.

**The American Samoa Bar Association** - The American Samoa Bar Association is the official organization for attorneys and legal practitioners who practice law in the Territory of American Samoa. It was created in 1970 by an Act of the Fono, the legislative body of American Samoa, “to improve the administration of justice.” The Act provides that “[a]ll persons admitted to the practice of law on a regular basis before any division of the High Court of American Samoa shall be members of the Bar Association.” Under certain provisions of American Samoa Code Annotated, the Chief Justice of the High Court of American Samoa has the power to adopt reasonable rules and regulations to examine, admit and reinstate attorneys and practitioners to practice law in American Samoa. The Court has adopted Rules of Admission, under which the Bar of American Samoa is “integrated in that every person who has been admitted to practice law must maintain membership in the Bar Association [and o]nly a member of the Bar Association may practice law in American Samoa.”

**American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division** – The ABA YLD, the largest national organization of young lawyers, provides leadership in serving the public and the profession, and promoting excellence and fulfillment in the practice of law. Its parent organization, the ABA, is the national voice of the legal profession and the largest voluntary professional membership group in the world.

**Federal Emergency Management Agency** – FEMA coordinates the federal government's role in preparing for, preventing, mitigating the effects of, responding to, and recovering from all domestic disasters, whether natural or man-made, including acts of terror. Through an agreement with the American Bar Association, FEMA underwrites the cost of operating toll free legal assistance lines for victims in areas designated as federal disaster sites.