

Title: \*In re Jurado Ex Rel: PLDT v. Supreme Court of the Philippines\*

Facts:

Emiliano P. Jurado, a journalist writing for the Manila Standard, was engaged in publishing a series of columns from October 1992 to March 1993, which contained allegations of impropriety within the Philippine judiciary. He insinuated that certain judges (referring to them as the “Magnificent Seven” and the “Dirty Dozen”) were involved in corruption and would sell judgments to the highest bidder. Furthermore, he made claims that some justices of the Supreme Court, referred to as the “Magnificent Seven”, allegedly voted unanimously and were implicated in a bribery scheme. He also claimed that a public utility firm paid for a luxurious Hong Kong vacation for six justices, including their families. In response to these allegations, Chief Justice Andres R. Narvasa formed an Ad Hoc Committee to investigate the reported corruption, but Jurado failed to respond to the Committee’s invitations to appear for any court session.

The Philippine Long Distance Telephone Company (PLDT), allegedly implicated in bribing the justices, submitted an affidavit through its Vice President, Mr. Vicente R. Samson, refuting Jurado’s claims. Samson categorically denied that PLDT arranged or paid for the justices’ Hong Kong trip. Jurado did not contest or qualify the affidavit in any significant manner or effort.

Issues:

1. Did Emiliano P. Jurado’s published statements constitute contempt of court by degrading the judiciary and endangering the administration of justice?
2. Did Jurado violate the Philippine Journalist’s Code of Ethics through his columns?
3. Does the protection of press freedom extend to Jurado’s refusal to substantiate his accusations when challenged to do so?

Court’s Decision:

The Supreme Court deemed Emiliano P. Jurado guilty of contempt of court. The decision, penned by Chief Justice Andres R. Narvasa, held that Jurado had published demonstrably false statements without making any bona fide effort to verify the facts, and persistently adhered to his unfounded claims even after being confronted with counter-affidavits. Furthermore, his conduct was determined to be violative of the Philippine Journalist’s Code of Ethics, which requires journalists to report the news accurately and fairly.

The Court refuted Jurado’s defenses invoking press freedom and his right under RA No. 53,

asserting that these rights do not protect journalists from due sanction for spreading falsehoods that degrade the court and impede the administration of justice. The journalist was found to have disregarded the obligation to act with justice, give due to everyone, and observe honesty and good faith in exercising his rights. As a consequence, Jurado was fined P1,000 for contempt of court.

Doctrine:

1. Press freedom does not shield journalists from accountability for publishing false or misleading information that degrades the courts or the administration of justice.
2. Journalists are obliged to adhere to the Philippine Journalist's Code of Ethics, mandating accurate and fair reporting, and to act with justice, honesty, and good faith in exercising their constitutional rights.

Historical Background:

This case was situated against the backdrop of heightened concerns about judicial corruption in the Philippines during the early 1990s. Such accusations in the media were not only detrimental to the individual judges and the reputation of the judiciary but could also undermine public confidence in the Philippine legal system. The formation of an Ad Hoc Committee to investigate these allegations was a response by the Philippine Supreme Court to preserve the integrity of the judiciary and assert its authority to safeguard the administration of justice. The Court's decision to hold Jurado accountable set a precedent for addressing journalistic irresponsibility and protecting the judiciary against unwarranted attacks.