

Title: Peñalosa v. Ocampo, Jr.

Facts:

The case revolves around the issue of a libel charge against Jannece C. Peñalosa (Peñalosa) for a Facebook post she made on August 3, 2011. In the post that was later charged as libelous, Peñalosa made comments directed at Jose A. Ocampo, Jr. (Ocampo, Jr.), which Ocampo claimed had damaged his reputation. Peñalosa moved to have the information quashed and proceedings deferred pending the resolution of her Motion for Reconsideration with the Office of the City Prosecutor and her Petition for Review before the Department of Justice.

The Office of the City Prosecutor denied her Motion for Reconsideration. However, the Department of Justice granted Peñalosa's Petition for Review, finding no law penalizing "Internet Libel" when the post was made in 2011. The Regional Trial Court subsequently issued an Order in 2015 dismissing the case against Peñalosa, ruling that the act was not punishable when committed. Ocampo then filed a Petition for Certiorari before the Court of Appeals, which reversed the trial court's order and remanded the case for further proceedings. Peñalosa challenged the Court of Appeals' decision via a Petition for Review on Certiorari with the Supreme Court.

Issues:

1. Whether the appropriate legal remedy against the trial court's Order dismissing the libel case was employed by Ocampo, Jr.
2. Whether Ocampo, Jr. had the legal standing to question the trial court's Order.
3. Whether the trial court gravely abused its discretion in granting the withdrawal of the Information for libel against Peñalosa.

Court's Decision:

The Supreme Court ruled in favor of Peñalosa, finding that the correct remedy against the trial court's order was an appeal and not a Petition for Certiorari as wrongly invoked by Ocampo, Jr. Further, it determined that only the State through the Office of the Solicitor General may file an appeal in a criminal case, thereby rendering Ocampo, Jr. without legal standing to file a Petition for Certiorari. The court held that the trial court did not gravely abuse its discretion in granting withdrawal of the Information because there was no law penalizing cyber libel at the time Peñalosa made the Facebook post.

Doctrine:

The remedy against a court order granting a motion to withdraw information is an appeal, which may be filed only by the State through the Office of the Solicitor General, not the private offended party.

Historical Background:

The case is set against the background of evolving Philippine jurisprudence on online defamation. Cyber libel was not a punishable crime under Philippine law until the Cybercrime Prevention Act of 2012. The case underscores the principle that laws, including penal laws, are not retroactive if they do not favor the accused, as well as reiterating the proper procedure for appeals against the dismissal of criminal cases.