

Title: Republic of the Philippines v. Maria Lourdes P. A. Sereno

Facts:

Maria Lourdes P. A. Sereno was appointed Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the Philippines by then-President Benigno S. Aquino III in 2012. Prior to her appointment to the Supreme Court, Sereno served as a faculty member of the University of the Philippines College of Law and as legal counsel in various government agencies, including serving as legal counsel for the Republic in international arbitrations.

The Republic of the Philippines, represented by Solicitor General Jose C. Calida, filed a quo warranto petition before the Supreme Court seeking to declare the appointment of Sereno as Chief Justice void. The basis for the petition was the alleged failure of Sereno to file her Statements of Assets, Liabilities, and Net Worth (SALNs) required for government positions. These filings were for the period when she was a professor at the UP College of Law and while employed as legal counsel for the government.

The Solicitor General argued that Sereno's failure to file and submit her SALNs demonstrated a lack of integrity, making her ineligible to hold the position of Chief Justice. The petition was anchored on the notion that "proven integrity" is an indispensable requirement for appointment to the Judiciary as mandated by the Constitution of the Philippines.

Sereno countered that, as an impeachable officer, she can only be removed through the impeachment process provided by the Constitution, and that the remedy of quo warranto is inapplicable.

The case that led to the ouster of Sereno from the position of Chief Justice involved a series of legal maneuverings initiated by the Office of the Solicitor General.

Issues:

1. Whether the Supreme Court has the jurisdiction to hear a quo warranto petition against an impeachable officer such as the Chief Justice of the Philippines.
2. Whether the remedy of quo warranto is appropriate against Sereno, given the allegations of her failure to satisfy the requirement of integrity due to non-filing of SALNs.
3. Whether Sereno can only be removed by impeachment and not by any other legal proceedings.
4. Whether the petition is barred by prescription.
5. Whether the supplementation of a ground for tax fraud in the quo warranto petition

constitutes forum shopping.

Court's Decision:

1. The Court asserted its jurisdiction to hear the quo warranto petition. It noted that while impeachment is a political process, quo warranto is a judicial proceeding that addresses the legality of a public official's appointment.
2. The Court held that the failure to file the required SALNs, along with other grounds, shows a lack of integrity, thus rendering Sereno ineligible for the position of Chief Justice.
3. The Court ruled that the remedy of quo warranto is not exclusive to impeachment proceedings and that both legal remedies could coexist.
4. The Court rejected the argument that the petition was barred by prescription, asserting the principle "nullum tempus occurrit regi," which implies that the State is not bound by prescription in bringing actions in the public interest.
5. The Court did not find forum shopping in the filing of the quo warranto petition, clarifying that this case and the impeachment proceedings involve different issues and proceedings.

Doctrine:

1. The Supreme Court has original jurisdiction over petitions for quo warranto against public officials, including the Chief Justice, and such jurisdiction coexists with the process of impeachment.
2. "Proven integrity" is an essential qualification for membership in the Judiciary, and failure to comply with the requirement of filing SALNs can be a ground to challenge the validity of an appointment.
3. The State has the authority and interest in ensuring that only qualified individuals hold public office, and the Solicitor General may commence a quo warranto action to challenge the appointment of unqualified individuals.
4. Quo warranto proceedings and impeachment can proceed independently and are not mutually exclusive remedies.

Class Notes:

- In criminal cases, discuss how crimes are defined by law, noting that actions are either malum in se (wrong in itself) or malum prohibitum (wrong because prohibited).
- In civil cases, emphasize the necessary elements of a claim, such as breach, duty, causation, and damages.
- In administrative or constitutional law, outline the specific qualifications for public office provided by statutes or constitutional provisions.
- Verbatim citation: "The 1987 Constitution demands in no uncertain terms that the Chief

Justice be the embodiment of moral and ethical principles. He or she must be of unquestionable character, possessed of moral authority to demand obedience to the law and to impose the rule of conduct.” (831 Phil. 271)

- Explain how the elements, principles, or statutes are applied in the case: Here, the focus was on the constitutional qualification of “proven integrity” and its interpretation in light of the requirement of filing SALNs.

Historical Background:

- The quo warranto petition against Sereno is historically significant as it is the first instance in Philippine history where a chief justice was removed from office through a petition for quo warranto.

- The case is situated within the broader constitutional framework of checks and balances, which allows for both judicial review and impeachment as mechanisms to correct public wrongs and enforce accountability of public officers.

- In the historical context of the Philippines, impeachment has traditionally been the means to remove high-ranking officials, such as the President, Vice-President, and members of the Supreme Court. Sereno’s case was exceptional as it invoked the extraordinary writ of quo warranto, typically reserved for inquiring into the authority by which public office is held, to challenge her appointment and ultimately oust her from the position of Chief Justice.