

Title: Atty. Juan Paolo T. Villonco vs. Atty. Romeo G. Roxas

Facts:

The case involves Atty. Juan Paolo T. Villonco, President of Republic Real Estate Corporation (RREC), who filed a complaint against Atty. Romeo G. Roxas for gross misconduct and violating the Code of Professional Responsibility (CPR). RREC had hired Roxas on a contingent basis to represent them in a land reclamation case concerning the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) Complex. The Supreme Court awarded RREC around P10,926,071.29, which was remanded to the RTC of Pasay City for execution. Despite instructions from RREC's Board to defer filing a motion for a Writ of Execution, Roxas proceeded to do so, leading to further legal challenges. Subsequently, without RREC's consent, Roxas filed several motions and a complaint against CA justices, and a petition challenging Presidential Decree No. 774. Despite being terminated by RREC, Roxas continued to represent and threaten the corporation, triggering Villonco to file an administrative complaint. Roxas argued that his long service to RREC justified his actions. The IBP recommended his suspension from the practice of law for six (6) months, which the Supreme Court extended to one year due to the gravity of his actions.

Issues:

1. Whether Atty. Roxas's actions of proceeding without client consent constituted gross misconduct and a violation of the CPR.
2. Whether Roxas's termination by RREC was justified.
3. The determination of an appropriate disciplinary action for Roxas's misconduct.

Court's Decision:

The Supreme Court concluded that Atty. Roxas violated the Code of Professional Responsibility by acting without RREC's consent and directly against its directives. The Court emphasized the importance of the lawyer-client relationship, highlighting the duty of lawyers to act with fidelity and to uphold the trust and confidence reposed in them by their clients. Roxas's unilateral actions were seen as a severe breach of this duty. Considering Roxas's previous misconduct, the Court increased his suspension from the practice of law from six (6) months to one (1) year and warned against further misconduct.

Doctrine:

- A lawyer owes fidelity to a client's cause and must always be mindful of the trust and confidence reposed in him (Canon 17, CPR).
- A client has the absolute right to terminate the services of an attorney at any time, with or

without cause, subject to the attorney's right to be compensated.

Class Notes:

- The lawyer-client relationship is founded on trust and confidence, requiring lawyers to act with fidelity and uphold their clients' interests.
- Unauthorized actions by a lawyer, contrary to the client's instructions, constitute misconduct.
- Violation of Canon 17 of the Code of Professional Responsibility can lead to suspension or disbarment.
- A client may terminate their lawyer's services at any point, which does not exempt the attorney from disciplinary action for any misconduct committed while in service.

Historical Background:

This case reflects the pivotal role of ethical standards in maintaining the integrity of the legal profession. It underscores the significant responsibilities lawyers hold towards their clients, the courts, and the public. The decision serves as a stern reminder to practitioners about the serious consequences of disregarding professional norms and the Code of Professional Responsibility.