

Title: ****Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo vs. The People of the Philippines and The Sandiganbayan****

****Facts:****

This case revolves around Criminal Case No. SB-12-CRM-0174, filed against Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo (Arroyo), former President of the Philippines, and Benigno B. Aguas, amongst others, for the crime of plunder as defined under Republic Act No. 7080. The charges were connected to the alleged misuse of PHP 365,997,915.00 from the Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office (PCSO) funds.

The journey to the Supreme Court began with the filing of a petition for certiorari by Arroyo and Aguas, challenging the Sandiganbayan's denial of their respective demurrers to evidence. The demurrer, a motion questioning the sufficiency of evidence presented by the prosecution, was filed after the prosecution rested its case. The Sandiganbayan, in its resolutions dated April 6, 2015, and September 10, 2015, denied the petitions, compelling Arroyo and Aguas to proceed to present their evidence.

However, the accused pursued a different path by elevating the matter to the Supreme Court on the ground of grave abuse of discretion on the part of the Sandiganbayan.

****Issues:****

1. Whether the denial of the demurrers to evidence by the Sandiganbayan constitutes grave abuse of discretion.
2. Whether the Supreme Court can take cognizance of a petition for certiorari against an interlocutory order, such as the denial of a demurrer to evidence, prior to judgment.
3. Whether additional elements in the prosecution of plunder, such as identification of a main plunderer and personal benefit to him/her, are required by law.
4. Whether the prosecution's evidence was insufficient to establish the crime of plunder beyond reasonable doubt.
5. Whether double jeopardy applies to the reconsideration of the Supreme Court's decision to dismiss the case against the petitioners.

****Court's Decision:****

The Supreme Court granted the petitions for certiorari, annulling and setting aside the resolutions issued by the Sandiganbayan. It ruled in favor of the petitioners' demurrers to evidence, dismissing the criminal case for insufficiency of evidence and ordering the

immediate release of the detained petitioners. The decision underscored several legal grounds:

1. **Certiorari Against Interlocutory Order:** The Court asserted its jurisdiction to review the Sandiganbayan's denial of the demurrers to evidence, emphasizing its duty to correct grave abuses of discretion amounting to lack or excess of jurisdiction, regardless of the interlocutory nature of such orders.
2. **Additional Elements for Plunder:** The Supreme Court clarified that the requirement for identifying a main plunderer and establishing personal benefit as part of the elements of plunder is embedded within Republic Act No. 7080 and pertinent jurisprudence. The failure of the prosecution to establish these elements led to the finding of insufficiency of evidence.
3. **Insufficiency of Evidence:** The Court found the evidence presented by the prosecution insufficient to prove beyond reasonable doubt the commission of plunder by the accused.
4. **Double Jeopardy:** Granting the prosecution's motion for reconsideration, according to the petitioners, would violate the constitutional prohibition against double jeopardy, as they have been acquitted by the dismissal of the case due to insufficiency of evidence.

Doctrine:

The Supreme Court reiterated the principle that the special civil action for certiorari is an available and proper remedy to assail an interlocutory order, such as the denial of a demurrer to evidence, when it involves grave abuse of discretion amounting to lack or excess of jurisdiction. Furthermore, it established the necessity of identifying a main plunderer and proving personal benefit from the ill-gotten wealth as critical in prosecuting the crime of plunder under Republic Act No. 7080.

Class Notes:

- **Demurrer to Evidence:** A motion to dismiss a case based on the insufficiency of the prosecution's evidence.
- **Certiorari Against Interlocutory Order:** The Supreme Court may review interlocutory orders in criminal cases if there's grave abuse of discretion by the lower court, notwithstanding the prohibition against such review before judgment.
- **Plunder Law (RA 7080) Elements:** The prosecution must establish beyond reasonable doubt the act of amassing, accumulating, or acquiring ill-gotten wealth amounting to at

least PHP 50,000,000.00 through a combination or series of overt criminal acts, including the necessity of identifying the main plunderer and the requirement of personal benefit.

- ****Double Jeopardy****: Protects against a second prosecution for the same offense after acquittal or conviction, and against multiple punishments for the same offense.

****Historical Background:****

The prosecution of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo for plunder was deeply rooted in allegations of corruption during her presidency, specifically involving PCSO funds. This case underscores the Philippine legal system's efforts to address high-level corruption and the mechanisms, such as the plunder law, designed to recover ill-gotten wealth. It also highlights the challenges in prosecuting complex crimes involving multiple actors and the judiciary's role in interpreting and applying laws to safeguard justice and accountability.