

### ### Title

**\*\*Police Sr. Supt. Romeo Uy, et al. vs. Sergio Jr. and Sales V. Jacalan\*\***

### ### Facts

Respondents Sergio Jr. and Sales V. Jacalan acquired a second-hand Isuzu Wagon for ₱75,000 from Ryan Gallego at Oro Cars, Bulua, Cagayan de Oro City. The vehicle came with a Motor Vehicle Clearance Certificate (MVCC) from the Philippine National Police (PNP) indicating it was not wanted or stolen and that the engine and chassis numbers were not tampered with. However, on March 7, 2008, the vehicle was apprehended by officers for a minor traffic violation. Checking the vehicle's papers, the officers, including petitioners PS/Supt. Romeo Uy and others, suspected the Official Receipt (OR) and Certificate of Registration (CR) to be spurious and consequently impounded the vehicle. Despite respondents' demand for its return and their MVCC showing no tampering, the petitioners refused, citing concerns over the vehicle being stolen. This led to respondents filing a replevin action in the Regional Trial Court (RTC) to recover the vehicle or its value.

The RTC decided in favor of the respondents, ordering the petitioners to pay the vehicle's value plus damages. Petitioners appealed to the Court of Appeals (CA), which upheld the RTC's findings. Petitioners then elevated the case to the Supreme Court.

### ### Issues

1. Whether the CA erred in affirming the lower court's decision ordering the return or compensatory payment for the seized vehicle.
2. Whether the CA erred in upholding the award of moral damages to the respondents.

### ### Court's Decision

**\*\*1. Legitimacy of Respondents' Ownership\*\***

The Court upheld the lower courts' findings that respondents were legitimate owners of the vehicle, substantiated by numerous pieces of evidence including the Deed of Sale, MVCC, Macro-Etching Certificate, and OR/CR. These documents provided strong legal presumptive ownership in favor of the respondents.

**\*\*2. Legality of Vehicle Seizure\*\***

The Court agreed with the CA and RTC that the seizure and subsequent impounding of the vehicle were unlawful. The respondents' vehicle was initially seized under the suspicion of having fake OR and CR without any probable cause or warrant. The Court concluded that petitioners had acted beyond their legal authority and ignored the constitutional rights against unreasonable searches and seizures.

### **\*\*3. Moral Damages\*\***

The Supreme Court found that awarding moral damages was justified due to the undue distress and wrongful seizure experienced by the respondents. However, the Court deleted the award for attorney's fees, as the RTC failed to state the reasons for this award explicitly.

### **### Doctrine**

#### **\*\*1. Possession and Replevin\*\***

To succeed in a replevin action, the claimant must show clear ownership or entitlement to possession of the property and that it is wrongfully detained by the defendant. The Court's decision emphasizes the importance of respecting property rights and lawful procedures in vehicle seizures.

#### **\*\*2. Presumption of Ownership\*\***

A CR issued by the Land Transportation Office (LTO) creates a strong presumption of ownership unless contradicted by evidence to the contrary.

#### **\*\*3. Ultra Vires Acts and Public Accountability\*\***

Public officials can be held personally accountable for acts performed outside their official duties or with malice and bad faith. Sovereign immunity does not protect tortious acts or crimes committed under an assumption of authority.

### **### Class Notes**

- **\*\*Replevin\*\***: Legal action to recover possessions wrongfully withheld.
- **\*\*Key Elements\*\***: Ownership, wrongful detention, clear right to possession.
- **\*\*Presumption of Ownership\*\***: CR from LTO, unless countered, indicates ownership.
- **\*\*Constitutional Protections\*\***: Against unreasonable searches and seizures.
- **\*\*Ultra Vires Acts\*\***: Acts outside the authority of officials are personally accountable.

- **Public Accountability**: Government officials' tortious acts not protected by sovereign immunity.
- **Key Statutes**:
  - **Anti-Carnapping Act of 1972 (RA 6539)**
  - **Seat Belts Use Act of 1999 (RA 8750)**

### ### Historical Background

This case reflects ongoing challenges within Philippine law enforcement involving seizures of private property. It emphasizes the balance between enforcing laws like the Anti-Carnapping Act and adhering to constitutional rights. The case underscores the need for proper procedural adherence by law enforcement entities to avoid unjust actions against property owners.