

Title: People of the Philippines vs. Jerry Rapeza y Francisco

Facts:

- Incident and Initial Investigation:** On October 21, 1995, an unidentified woman reported a killing at Sitio Cawa-Cawa, Barangay Osmeña, Culion, Palawan. The police found the bodies of Priscilla Libas and Cesar Ganson, both with multiple stab wounds.
- Autopsy Findings:** Both victims died of hypovolemic shock due to massive bleeding. Ganson sustained six stab wounds, while Libas had sixteen.
- Appellant's Arrest and Initial Statement:** Acting on information that Jerry Rapeza wanted to confess, SPO2 Ciriaco Gapas found him and invited him for questioning. Jerry agreed to confess in the presence of a lawyer.
- Custodial Investigation:** On October 23, 1995, with Atty. Roberto Reyes assisting, Jerry allegedly confessed, narrating how he and Mike Regino, who was at large, committed the murders. The confession was carried out in the presence of municipal officials and an interpreter.
- Judicial Proceedings:** Regino was released after preliminary investigation by the MTC of Culion, but the Provincial Prosecutor included him in the Information when he had already fled. The RTC of Palawan found Jerry guilty of two counts of murder and sentenced him to reclusion perpetua for each, plus damages.
- Appeal Process:** Jerry appealed, claiming his rights during custodial investigation were violated. The Supreme Court reviewed, especially focusing on the admissibility of his extrajudicial confession and procedural lapses.

Issues:

- Admissibility of Extrajudicial Confession:** Whether Jerry's confession, primarily relied upon by the lower courts, was obtained in accordance with constitutional standards protecting under custodial investigation.
- Presence of Counsel:** Whether Jerry was assisted by competent and independent counsel of his choice during the custodial investigation.
- Voluntariness of Confession:** Whether the confession was voluntary or coerced.

4. **Evidence Beyond Reasonable Doubt**: Whether there was sufficient evidence presented by the prosecution independent of the confession to prove Jerry's guilt beyond reasonable doubt.

Court's Decision:

1. **Admissibility of Confession**: The Supreme Court found Jerry was not properly informed of his rights as mandated by the Constitution and Republic Act No. 7438. The need to explain these rights clearly, given Jerry's illiteracy and lack of comprehension in Tagalog, was not adhered to, making the confession inadmissible.

2. **Presence of Counsel**: The Court deemed Atty. Reyes was not a competent and independent counsel since his participation was mainly confined to notarizing the confession. His selection by the police, and not by Jerry, also violated the constitutional requirement of having a counsel of his own choice.

3. **Voluntariness of Confession**: Given inadequate evidence of understanding his rights and the absence of a voluntary waiver, the confession was not considered voluntary.

4. **Evidence Conviction**: With the exclusion of the confession, no other substantial evidence linked Jerry directly to the crime. There were inconsistencies in the testimonies regarding significant details such as wound placements and the crime's timeline.

Doctrine:

- **Custodial Rights and Confession**: An extrajudicial confession must be voluntary, made with the assistance of competent and independent counsel of the suspect's choice, informed of their rights in a comprehensible manner. Failure to meet these conditions renders the confession inadmissible.

Class Notes:

- **Key Elements for Confession Admissibility**:

- Must be voluntary.

- Must be assisted by competent and independent counsel, preferably of the suspect's choice.

- Rights must be clearly explained to the suspect.

- Any waiver of rights must be in writing and in the presence of counsel.

- **Relevant Legal Statutes**:

- Sec. 12, Art. III, 1987 Constitution: Protection during custodial investigation.
- Republic Act No. 7438: Reinforces rights during custodial investigation.
- ****Application****: Clear explanation and comprehension of rights are crucial in ensuring the voluntariness of a confession.

****Historical Background:****

This case underscores the evolving jurisprudence in the Philippines related to the rights of detainees during custodial investigations. Post-1987 Constitution cases often grappled with ensuring strict adherence to custodial rights amid historical practices of coerced confessions.