OFFICE OF THE COURT ADMINISTRATOR (OCA), COMPLAINANT, VS. JUDGE CRISPIN C. LARON, REGIONAL TRIAL COURT, BRANCH 44, DAGUPAN CITY, RESPONDENT.

A.M. NO. RTJ-04-1870 (FORMERLY A.M. NO. 04-7-388-RTC). July 09, 2007

Ponente: TINGA, J.

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TINGA, J.:

This administrative matter arose from several judicial audits and physical inventories of cases conducted by the Office of the Court Administrator (OCA) in the Regional Trial Court (RTC), Branch 44, Dagupan City, presided over by respondent Judge Crispin Laron.

The first judicial audit was conducted in 1996 by a team headed by then Senior Deputy Court Administrator Reynaldo L. Suarez. The 1996 Audit Report[1] showed that 369 cases, comprising 147 criminal and 222 civil, were audited. Of the records actually examined, 37 were deemed submitted for decision, 17 of which were beyond the 90-day reglementary period within which a judge must decide a case. There were also 26 cases submitted for resolution, 19 of which were beyond the prescribed period within which they must be resolved. Likewise, 14 cases with motions unresolved beyond the 90-day prescribed period were noted and 15 cases have had no further proceedings for a considerable length of time. Meanwhile, 188 cases which were included in the branch's Docket Inventory were not presented to the team.[2]

On 21 January 1997, the Court en banc issued a Resolution directing respondent to:

> (a) resolve the pending Motions/Incidents that will determine final disposition of cases which are likewise beyond the 90-day reglementary period; (b) resolve, if he has not yet done so, the pending Motions in the following cases which are already beyond the 15-day period, to wit: Criminal Cases Nos. 96-01310, 96-013311, 96-01348, 94-00263, 94-00264, 96-01308 and Civil Cases Nos. 00376, and D-9895; (c) inform this Court whether or not Decisions in Criminal Cases Nos. D-8335, D-8336, x x x D-10606, D-10607 and D-10611 were promulgated as scheduled and to submit proof of such compliance; and (d) explain in writing also within the same period why no disciplinary action should be taken against him for his failure to decide/resolve cases/motions within the prescribed period. [3]

A second judicial audit, this time headed by the Hon. Narciso T. Atienza, was conducted in the same branch sometime in 2000 at the request of Mr. Restituto Basa, author-publisher of "The Pangasinan Leaders," in view of the complaints of some legal practitioners on the unreasonable delay in the resolution of cases in said court.[4]

The 2000 Audit Report[5] revealed that 1,045 cases were audited. Of these cases, 70 were considered submitted for decision, 54 of which were beyond the 90-day reglementary period. There were also 123 cases with pending matters or incidents for resolution, and 101 cases had not been resolved despite the lapse of the reglementary period. In addition, 52 cases had no further action or setting in the court calendar despite the lapse of a considerable period of time and 22 cases were noted to have not been acted upon since the time of filing.[6]

A third audit was conducted in 2003, per request of a certain Claveria family in a letter to then Chief Justice

Hilario G. Davide, Jr. for an investigation of the sala of Judge Laron that allegedly had cases pending for three or more years and which remained unresolved.

The 2003 Audit Report[7] showed that 911 cases were audited consisting of 394 criminal cases and 517 civil cases. It was found that 110 cases were decided beyond the reglementary period and pending motions or incidents in 74 cases were likewise resolved beyond the period prescribed, 39 cases with pending motions or incidents for resolution remained unacted upon as of the time of the audit, 42 cases were acted upon after having been dormant for a considerable period of time, and there were a number of cases that had not been acted upon from the time of filing. Several cases that were included in the Docket Inventory were not presented to the audit team. The team also observed that respondent had been very lenient in granting postponements. It likewise observed that records were not kept orderly and the court did not submit the required monthly reports on time. The team then recommended that respondent be directed to:

> (a) to EXPLAIN within fifteen (15) days from receipt why no administrative sanction be taken against him for deciding the following cases beyond the 90-day reglementary period: Criminal Cases Nos. D-6519, 97-01970, 01-0175, 01-0177, 00-0231, 00-0305, 00-0312, 00-0316, 10739, 02-0193, 02-0194, 02-0195, 00-0144, 00-0076, 01-0651, 01-0652, 01-0653, 02-0452, 94-00218, 04-0574, 01-0244, 00-0405, 00-0577, 01-0278, 01-0277, 94-00732, 02-0019, 02-0020, 02-0021, 02-0022, 02-0023, 02-0024, 02-0025, 02-0026, 02-0027, 02-0028, 02-0029, 02-0030, 02-0031, 02-0032, 02-0034, 02-0036, 02-0037, 02-0038, 02-0040, 02-0042, 02-0043, 02-0045, 02-0046, 00-234, 12225, 8686, 8687, D-6519, 00-0231, 00-0305 and 95-01025 and Civil Cases Nos. 98-012333, 0097, 01-0116, SP 02-0037, SP 00-0123, SP 00-136, SP 99-01603, SP 99-1065, SCA 98-02686, 98-02731, 98-02444, 99-02904, 01-0149, 86-8295, D-10809, 91-01005, 86-8131, 86-8118, SP 01-0104, 02-0003, 01-0070, LRC 00-2107, 10785, 00-0329, 82-6539, 6890, 96-01264, 98-02372, 10792, 98-02573, 00-0040, 99-02847, 98-02530, 94-00113, 92-10383, D-10190, 00-0294, D-10665, SCA 01-0011, 01-0031, 94-00238, D-6944, 83-7099, 98-00718, 94-00153, 95-00678, 96-00888, 99-3233, 98-2515, 96-1081, D-7095, 96-1041 and 95-548.
>
> (b) to EXPLAIN within fifteen (15) days from receipt why no administrative sanction be taken against him for resolving the pending incidents/motions in the following cases beyond the 90- day reglementary period: Criminal Cases Nos. 99-01771, 94-00726, 00-0133, 00-0479, 00-0440, 9763, 9764, 01-0016, 02-0101, 99-03002, 00-0536, 97-01951, 99-03207, 96-01237, 00-0359, 99-02739, 99-02498, 99-02497 and 01-0265, Civil Cases Nos. 99-03068, 99-03237, 0084, 01-0320, 01-0201, 95-0059, D-3040, 99-02974, 98-02832, 98-02454, 00-0239, 01-0166, 01-0091, D-10764, 97-01622, x x x D-9056, 00-0036, 96-01253, 98-02075, 97-01842, 96-01045, 9752, 98-02510, 99-03115, 99-02922, 95-00687, 02-0316, 97-01450, 00-0032, 99-02935, 10439, 10744, 97-01722, 96-00978, 98-02124, 95-00710, 99-02806, 98-02720, 98-02410, 98-02533, 00-0006, 00-0038, 98-00716, 97-00529, 94-00233, 97-01834, 99-03179, 99-03170, LRC D-2081, 96-00827, 98-02733, 99-3085, 96-1007, 99-3257 and 99-3131.
>
> (c) to EXPLAIN within fifteen (15) days from receipt why no administrative sanction be taken against him (sic) for failure to DECIDE the following despite the lapse of the 90-day reglementary period: Criminal Cases Nos. 00-0140, 00-0475, 00-0476, 7020, 97-02019, and Civil Cases Nos. 0148, 00-0254, 01-0186, 02-0026, 95-00482, 02-0156, CAD 00-0060, CAD 02-0071, CAD 02-0062, 96-01163, D-10777 and to RESOLVE the motion or pending incidents in the following cases: Criminal Cases Nos. 01-0147, 02-0424, 00-0480, 02-0463, 02-0621, 02-0629, 02-0493, 00-0084 and 00-0085; and Civil Cases Nos. 01-0177, 01-0269, 00-0151, 01-0276, 02-0198, 02-0169, 02-0277, D-10027, 00-279, 01-0287, 00-0349, 02-0161, 02-0365, 96-00975, 99-03254, 99-03037, 98-02246, 99-8814, 02-0254, 01-0376, SP 1723, SP 97-00541, 01-23, 02-0313, 94-00271, 02-0208, 01-168, 02-103, 02-263 and 94-80.
>
> (d) to DECIDE within thirty (30) days from receipt the following cases which remain undecided despite the lapse of the 90-day reglementary period: Criminal Cases Nos. 00-0140, 00-0475, 00-0476, 7020[,] 97-02019, and Civil Cases Nos. 0148, 00-0254, 01-0186, 02-0026, 95-00482, 02-0156, CAD 00-0060, CA 02-0071, CAD

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> 02-0062, 96-01163, D-10777 and to FURNISH the Court of the copies of the said decision.
>
> (e) to RESOLVE within thirty (30) days from receipt the motion or pending incidents in the following cases, which remain unresolved despite the lapse of the reglementary period: Criminal Cases Nos. 01-0147, 02-0424, 00-0480, 02-0463, 02-0621, 02-0629, 02-0493, 00-0084 and 00-0085; and Civil Cases Nos. 01-0177, 01-0269, 00-0151, 01-0276, 02-0198, 02-0169, 02-0277, D-10027, 00-0279, 01-0287, 00-0349, 02-0161, 02-365, 96-00975, 99-03254, 99-03037, 98-02246, 99-8814, 02-0254, 01-0376, SP 1723, SP 97-00541, 01-23, 02-0313, 94-00271, 02-0208, 01-168, 02-103, 02-263 and 94-80 and to FURNISH the Court of the copies of the said decision.
>
> (f) to EXPLAIN within fifteen (15) days from receipt why no administrative sanction be taken against him for failure to act on the following cases which have no further action despite the lapse of a considerable length of time, to wit: Civil Cases Nos. 97-01627, 02-0048, 01-0129, 02-0279, 01-0107, 02-0079, 96-00993, 02-0135, 02-0006, 02-0132, 02-0005, 02-0130, 02-0130, 01-0001, 00-0015, 00-0067, 99-00616, 99-03270, 97-01569, SP 02-0091, 97-1526, 95-00445, 01-0074, SP 02-71, CAD 02-53 and CAD 02-30.[8]

The OCA then directed respondent to comply with the above-quoted recommendations in a Memorandum dated 10 November 2003.[9] In compliance, respondent submitted his explanations in two letters[10] dated 23 January 2004 and 9 February 2004 to which he appended copies of the decisions and orders in all the cases subject of the Memorandum of 10 November 2003.

Respondent primarily attributed the delay in deciding cases submitted for decision and in resolving motions to various medical ailments. He claimed that he was hospitalized from 26 February 2001 to 13 March 2001 for acute tonsillo-pharyngitis with severe hoarseness, esophagitis with partial obstruction, osteoarthritis lower extremities and lumbar area, severe migraine with dizziness and R/O diabetes mellitus.[11] Due to his medical condition that made walking and standing very difficult, he went on sick leave from 14 March 2001 to 29 April 2001, on 30 April 2001 and from 2 May 2001 to 4 May 2001.[12] He argued however that he had already decided the subject cases, albeit beyond the reglementary period, and so there had been substantial compliance with the law.

Respondent also pointed to the frequent changes of branch clerks as a contributing factor to the delay in the disposition of cases. He averred that the court had had no branch clerk of court for several years since Atty. Juvy Fuentes, the former clerk of court, transferred to the Public Attorney's Office. Considering that he had been in the service for twenty-one (21) years, respondent prayed that he be allowed to continue in office for the remaining period of nine (9) months until his retirement on 19 November 2004.

> In the Final Audit Report[13] dated 2 July 2004, the OCA observed that respondent had been remiss in the performance of his duties as a presiding judge. Although he had substantially complied with what was incumbent upon him, by deciding all the cases submitted to him for decision and resolving pending motions, he did so beyond the period mandated by the Constitution. He likewise failed to ask the Court for an extension of time to decide said cases. The OCA also considered respondent's excuses as flimsy and insufficient to justify the delay. It then made the following recommendations, to wit:
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> In view of the foregoing, it is respectfully recommended that:
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> (a) this report be docketed as a regular administrative matter against Judge Laron for gross inefficiency; and
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> (b) Judge Crispin Laron, Presiding Judge of the Regional Trial Court, Branch 44, Dagupan City be FINED in the amount of P50,000.00 for his failure to decide 131 cases, resolve 105 pending motions and act on 67 cases which have been dormant for a long period of time payable directly to the court.[14]

On 30 August 2004, the Court resolved to refer this administrative matter to Excutive Judge Silverio Q. Castillo of the RTC, Dagupan City for investigation, report and recommendation.[15] Judge Castillo, however, voluntarily

inhibited himself from the investigation to avoid any suspicion of bias and prejudice since he was a Pairing Judge of respondent and the latter was also the godfather of his youngest son.[16]

In its Agenda Report[17] in the matter of the Order of Inhibition of Judge Castillo, the OCA observed that an investigation of the delay of several cases pending before respondent may no longer be needed considering that respondent had already retired from the service. It recommended that Judge Castillo's Order of Inhibition be noted and that respondent be immediately sanctioned with a fine of twenty thousand pesos (P20,000.00) for the delay already committed.

Upon this Court's directive[18] for the parties to manifest their willingness to submit the case for decision based on the pleadings filed, respondent filed a Manifestation and Motion[19] dated 22 March 2005 praying that he be first informed if his letters dated 23 January 2004 and 9 February 2004 were already attached to the records of the case. Respondent filed another Manifestation and Motion[20] on 20 June 2005 praying that he be furnished copies of the charge, resolution, recommendation, pleadings and documents relative to the case and that he be granted a period of ten (10) days within which to file the required manifestation.

Finding that his letters were not attached to the records, this Court resolved to require the OCA to comment on respondent's manifestation and motion.[21]

In its comment,[22] the OCA explained that respondent's letters were not included in the records due to inadvertence when the same was forwarded to the Office of the Chief Justice on 3 January 2005. They are now attached to the records of this case. It reiterated its previous findings and recommendations and submitted the case for decision based on the pleadings.

We adopt the OCA's findings.

It bears stressing that the public's faith and confidence in the judicial system depends largely on the judicious and prompt disposition of cases and other matters pending before the courts.[23] No less than the Constitution mandates all lower courts to decide or resolve cases or matters within three (3) months from their date of submission.[24] Consequently, Rule 3.05, Canon 3 of the Code of Judicial Conduct, directs judges to "dispose of the court's business promptly and decide cases within the required periods."[25] However, if a judge finds himself unable to comply with this 90-day requirement for deciding cases or matters, he can, for good reasons, ask for an extension and such request is generally granted.[26]

Be that as it may, valid reasons that a judge may have for such delay like poor health, old age, heavy caseload, among others, do not totally absolve him from liability but only serve to mitigate the penalty.[27]

In the instant case, respondent was obviously remiss in his duties as presiding judge. He admitted to failing to decide, resolve or act upon the cases mentioned in the Memorandum of 10 November 2003. The explanations he set forth do not sufficiently justify the enormous delay in the disposition of the court's business. The OCA correctly observed, thus:

> It is undisputable that Judge Laron had not been deciding and resolving cases expeditiously. The 131 cases which he failed to decide within the reglementary period, the 105 cases with pending motions which he failed to resolve on time and the 67 cases which he has not acted upon for a considerable length of time, undeniably reflects on Judge Laron's lack of dedication to the office he had sworn to serve with utmost competence, integrity, honesty and diligence. His failure to decide/resolve cases promptly is the same observation of the two teams who earlier conducted an audit in his court. The 1996 audit revealed that out of the 37 cases submitted for decision, 17 were beyond the reglementary period and 19 of the 26 cases submitted for resolution had not been resolved within the period. Also, 15 cases were noted to have no further action for a considerable length of time. In the 2000 audit, the team reported 54 cases which were not decided within the period, 101 cases with

> pending motions had not been resolved on time and 52 cases had no further action despite the lapse of a period of time.
>
> While Judge Laron has decided all the cases submitted to him for decision, resolved pending motions and acted on dormant cases, the fact remains that he did so beyond the period mandated by the Constitution. Contra factorum n on habet argumentum. The explanations proferred by him is [sic] not sufficient to justify the delay. If he thinks that his health problems severely impaired his ability to decide and resolve cases promptly, he should have requested the Court extension of time to decide, which is, almost invariably granted.
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> Nonetheless, his health problems could not excuse his delay in deciding and resolving cases which were submitted for decision before his ailment in 2001. Judge Laron never mentioned he was suffering from any of these ailments at that time. Note Criminal Cases Nos. 8686 and 8687 entitled "People vs. Lorenzo Gonzales" for slight physical injuries and trespass to dwelling. The case was submitted for decision on August 12, 1988 when accused filed his Memorandum. The case was decided acquitting the accused only on December 16, 2202 (sic) or fourteen (14) years after. It must be stressed that slight physical injuries and trespass to dwelling falls under the Rules on Summary Procedure. Section 10 of the Rules directs a judge to decide the case within thirty (30) days from date after receipt of the last affidavits and position papers, or the expiration of the period for filing the same. The Revised Rules on Summary Procedure was precisely enacted to achieve an expeditious and inexpensive determination of cases. It is, therefore, not encouraging when it is the judge himself who occasions the delay sought to be prevented by the rule. Certainly, deciding the case after 14 years is not an expeditious determination of the case.
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> Similarly, Civil Case No. 86-8131 was submitted for decision on 20 October 1986. The case was decided on October 21, 2001, or after sixteen (16) years. Likewise, Civil Case No. 86-8118 was submitted for decision on November 4, 1986. The case was decided on October 21, 2002 or after almost 11 years. These two cases were not audited by the two other teams who conducted an audit on the court, giving us the impression that the case records were purposely kept from the two audit teams.[28]

Furthermore, proper and efficient court management is the responsibility of the judge.[29] Hence, the absence of a branch clerk of court should not affect the prompt disposition of cases as judges are responsible not only for dispensing justice but also for managing their dockets in order to accomplish their work with reasonable dispatch. It is also his duty to recommend to this Court the immediate appointment of a branch clerk of court. In the meantime, the court had adequate personnel who performed their assigned tasks and who only needed to be utilized and supervised by respondent.

Another indication of respondent's poor court management is the lack of an orderly system of filing and docket inventory. As found by the OCA, to wit:

> The audit team has witnessed the court personnel's quandary with regard to the court's affairs. During the meeting with them, the personnel expressed their frustration, exasperation and dissatisfaction over Judge Laron's management style and utter lack of sensitivity.
>
> Regrettably, the two audits conducted on the court had no effect on the court. No improvement or changes were noticed. As pending cases were still kept in the judge's chamber. Some of the records are being brought out on a piecemeal basis for examination. In fact[,] 110 cases which were included in the docket inventory were not presented to the team. Moreover, the court has not adopted an efficient recording and filing system. Records of active cases are on the tables of the stenographers or scattered on the floor. Also record of cases which have long been closed and terminated fifteen (15) years ago are still on file in the storage room. Proper disposal and destruction of the said records pursuant to existing Rules could have been made to give room to the records of active cases.[30]

It is noteworthy that despite two previous audits, respondent remained unperturbed. It was only in the last quarter

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of 2002 until he retired in 2004 that he began expediting the disposition of cases before him.[31] Undeniably, respondent should be sanctioned for gross inefficiency for his undue delay in rendering decisions and orders.

Under A.M. No. 01-8-10-SC[32] dated 11 September 2001 which amended Rule 140 of the Rules of Court, undue delay in rendering a decision or order is a less serious charge punishable by a fine of not less than P10,000.00 but not more than P20,000.00, or suspension from office without salary and other benefits for not less than one month but not more than three months. The fines imposed vary in each case, depending chiefly on the number of cases or matters undecided or unresolved, respectively, within the reglementary period and the presence of aggravating or mitigating circumstances.[33] In some cases, fines more than the maximum amount were imposed when the undue delay was coupled with other offenses. In Office of the Court Administrator v. Judge Aniceto L. Madronio, Sr.,[34] we held:

> x x x Thus, in a number of cases, the fines were set at ten thousand pesos (P10,000.00), for the judge failed to decide one (1) case within the reglementary period, without offering an explanation for such delay; for one (1) motion left unresolved within the prescriptive period; and for eight (8) cases left unresolved beyond the extended period of time granted to the judge, taking into consideration that the judge was understaffed, burdened with heavy caseload, and hospitalized for more than a month. In another case, the judge was fined ten thousand one hundred pesos (P10,100.00) for failing to act on one (1) motion. In other cases, the fine was set at eleven thousand pesos (P11,000.00) for the judge failed to resolve a motion for reconsideration and other pending incidents relative thereto, alleging lack of manpower in his sala as an excuse; decided a case for forcible entry only after one year (1) and more than seven (7) months from the time it was submitted for resolution, considering that respondent judge was grieving due to the untimely demise of his daughter; resolved one (1) motion only after an undue delay of almost eight (8) months in one case or 231 days in another case; failed to resolve three (3) cases within the reglementary period; and failed to resolve a motion to cite a defendant for contempt, mitigated by the judge's immediate action to determine whether the charge had basis. In another case, the judge was fined twelve thousand pesos (P12,000.00) for his failure to decide one (1) criminal case on time, without explaining the reason for the delay. Still in other cases, the maximum fine of twenty thousand pesos (P20,000.00) was imposed on the judges for delay in rendering decisions in nine (9) criminal cases and failing altogether to render decisions in eighteen (18) cases, taking note that the judge also promulgated his decisions in seventeen (17) cases even after he already retired; failure to decide forty-eight (48) cases on time and failing to resolve pending incidents in forty-nine (49) cases despite the lapse of considerable length of time; undue delay in deciding twenty-six (26) cases, even considering the judge's poor health; and failing to decide fifty-six (56) cases despite the judge's explanation of heavy caseload, intermittent electrical brownouts, old age and operation of both his eyes, considering that the same was his second offense. There were other cases in which the Court did not strictly apply the Rules as when it only imposed a fine of one thousand pesos (P1,000.00) for a delay of nine (9) months in resolving complainant's Amended Formal Offer of Exhibits, after finding that there was no malice in the delay and that the delay was caused by the complainant himself. In two cases, we imposed a fine of five thousand pesos (P5,000.00) on a judge who was suffering from cancer, for failing to decide five (5) cases within the reglementary period and failing to decide pending incidents in nine (9) cases; and on a judge who suffered from a serious illness diagnosed as "end stage renal disease secondary to nephrosclerosis," who in fact died barely a year after his retirement, for his failure to decide several criminal and civil cases submitted for decision or resolution and to act upon over a hundred criminal and civil cases assigned to the two branches in which he was presiding. In other cases, the fines were variably set at more than the maximum amount when the undue delay was coupled with other offenses. In one case, the judge was fined twenty- five thousand pesos (P25,000.00) for undue delay in rendering a ruling and for making a grossly and patently erroneous decision. In another case, the judge was fined forty thousand pesos (P40,000.00) for deciding a case only after an undue delay of one (1) year and six (6) months and for simple misconduct and gross ignorance of the law, considering also that said undue delay was
>
> his second offense. Finally, the fine of forty thousand pesos (P40,000.00) was also imposed in a case for the

> judge's failure to resolve one (1) motion, considering that he was already previously penalized in two cases for violating the Code of Judicial Conduct and for Gross Ignorance of Procedural Law and Unreasonable Delay.[35]

In sum, respondent failed to decide 131 cases within the reglementary period, failed to resolve the motions in 105 cases within the required period, and failed to act upon 67 cases for a considerable length of time. In view of the peculiar circumstances of the instant case namely, the unusually huge number of cases or matters undecided or unresolved within the prescribed period and the unreasonable delay in their disposition coupled with the fact that most of these cases were subject of two previous audits, the imposition of a fine of fifty thousand pesos (P50,000.00) is in order.

As aptly observed by the OCA, "the snail pace movement of cases in this court is a classic example of justice delayed, justice denied. It is unfortunate that the court, the temple of justice, has violated the party litigants' right to speedy trial as mandated by no less tha[n] the Constitution. We only have sympathies for the litigants."[36]

WHEREFORE, we hold retired Judge Crispin C. Laron administratively liable for gross inefficiency for his undue delay in rendering decisions and orders and he is ordered to pay a FINE of

Fifty Thousand Pesos (P50,000.00), to be deducted from the retirement benefits due him. The remainder of the withheld amount is ordered released to him.

SO ORDERED.

Puno, C.J., Quisumbing, Ynares-Santiago, Carpio, Austria-Martinez, Corona, Carpio-Morales, Azcuna, Chico-Nazario, Garcia, Velasco, Jr., and Nachura., JJ., concur.
Sandoval-Gutierrez, J., on leave.

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[1] A report on the audit was submitted to the Court on 18 November 1996 and docketed as Administrative Matter No. 96-12-926-RTC. A copy of said report is not included in the records.

[2] Rollo, Vol. I, p. 62.

[3] Id. at 62-63.

[4] Id. at 63.

[5] A copy of said report is not included in the records.

[6] Rollo, Vol. I, p. 63.

[7] Id. at 8-30.

[8] Id. at 27-29.

[9] Id. at 31-33.

[10] Rollo, Vol. III, pp. 1-2 and 259-262.

[11] Per the medical certificate issued by Lorma Medical Center; id. at 264.

[12] Annexes "C," "D," and "E;" id. at 265-267.

[13] Rollo, Vol. II, pp. 29-35.

[14] Id. at 34-35.

[15] Rollo, Vol. I, p. 41.

[16] Per Order of Inhibition dated 25 October 2004 issued by Judge Castillo; id. at 44.

[17] Id. at 47-49.

[18] Per Resolution dated 21 February 2005; id. at 50.

[19] Id. at 52.

[20] Id. at 58-59.

[21] Per Resolution dated 27 July 2005; id. at 61.

[22] Id. at 62-73.

[23] Vda. De Castro v. Cawaling, A.M. No. MTJ-02-1465. 6 February 2006, 481 SCRA 535, 538.

[24] Art. VIII, Sec. 15(1).

[25] Sec. 5, Canon 6 of the "New Code of Judicial Conduct for the Philippine Judiciary" (A.M. No. 03-05-01-SC) which took effect on 1 June 2004, similarly directs judges to "perform all judicial duties, including the delivery of reserved decisions, efficiently, fairly and with reasonable promptness."

[26] Office of the Court Administrator v. Judge Aniceto L. Madronio, Sr., A.M. No. MTJ-04-1571, 14 February 2005, 451 SCRA 206, 211.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Rollo, Vol. I, pp. 65-66.

[29] Report on the On-the-Spot Judicial Audit Conducted in the Regional Trial Court, Branches 45 and 53, Bacolod City, A.M. No. 00-2-65-RTC, 15 February 2005, 451 SCRA 303, 316.

[30] Rollo, Vol. I, p. 67.

[31] Id.

[32] Sec. 9(1) in relation to Sec. 11(B); En Banc Resolution in A.M. No. 01-8-10-SC dated 11 September 2001 (Re: Proposed Amendment to Rule 140 of the Rules of Court Regarding the Discipline of Justices and Judges).

[33] Office of the Court Administrator v. Madronio, Sr, supra note 26.

[34] Id.

[35] Id. at 212-215; citations omitted.

[36] Rollo, Vol. I, p. 65.

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