

RE: REPORT ON THE JUDICIAL AUDIT OF CASES IN THE REGIONAL TRIAL COURT, BRANCH 35, IRIGA CITY

A.M. No. 97-8-262-RTC. November 27, 1998

Ponente: MENDOZA, J.

Read online (full-text search, related cases, audio case brief): <https://batas.org/library/a-m-no-97-8-262/>

MENDOZA, J.:

In view of the report, dated July 1, 1997,[1] submitted by a Judicial Audit Team, the Court required Judge Reno R. Gonzales of the Regional Trial Court, Branch 35, at Iriga City, to comment on allegations in the report that he failed (1) to decide three (3) civil cases (Civil Cases Nos. 2080, 2686, and 2532) within three (3) months from the time they had been submitted to him for decision; (2) to act, for an unreasonable period of time, on eight (8) other cases (Civil Cases Nos. 2756, 2824, 2553, and 1865, Land Registration Cases Nos. 215, 212, and 211, and Special Proceeding No. 1402); and (3) to archive ten (10) criminal cases (Criminal Cases Nos. 4182, 4185, 4221, 4222, 4223, 4104, 4107, 4167, 4231, and 4233).

Judge Gonzales retired on the day the report was submitted (July 1, 1997), and in his place, Judge Martin P. Badong, Jr. of the Regional Trial Court, Branch 31, in Pili Camarines Sur was designated. However, as required by this Court, he submitted his explanation,[2] dated October 27, 1997. Regarding the cases which he allegedly failed to decide on time, Judge Gonzales did not mention Civil Case No. 2080 at all, attributed the late disposition of Civil Case No. 2686 to his designation as Acting Presiding Judge of two other salas in 1993 and 1995, and claimed that the date Civil Case No. 2532 was submitted for decision could not be ascertained from the records.[3]

With respect to the cases on which he allegedly failed to act for an unreasonable period of time, Judge Gonzales claimed (1) that Civil Case No. 2756 had been consolidated with Civil Case No. 2686, and the two cases were decided on July 4, 1997; (2) that Civil Case No. 2824 was inadvertently omitted from the calendar from December 18, 1996 to July 31, 1997; (3) that Civil Case No. 2553 had not been progressing because the parties had apparently lost interest; (4) that Civil Case No. 1865 had already been decided on August 18, 1997; (5) that no progress had been made in Land Registration Cases Nos. 215, 212, and 211 because the Land Management Bureau had not submitted the reports required by the court; and (6) that Special Proceeding No. 1402 had been dismissed without prejudice for failure of the petitioner to submit certified true copies of the subject certificate of title as directed by the court.[4]

As for the criminal cases which he allegedly failed to have archived, Judge Gonzales explained that the delay was due to the fact that the Clerk of Court had to undergo surgery for renal cyst.[5]

This matter was referred to the office of the Court Administrator which, on February 28, 1998, submitted a report[6] finding Judge Gonzales to be administratively liable and recommending that he be fined in the amount of P20,000.00 for failure to timely decide, act on, or archive the cases mentioned above.

Art. VIII, §15(1) of the Constitution states:

All cases or matters filed after the effectivity of this Constitution must be decided or resolved within twenty four months from date of submission for the Supreme Court, and unless reduced by the Supreme Court, twelve months for all lower collegiate courts, and three months for all other lower courts.

To implement the constitutional mandate, Canon 3, Rule 3.05 of the Code of Judicial Conduct provides:

A judge shall dispose of the court's business promptly and decide cases within the required periods.

As this Court has stated:[7]

This Court has constantly impressed upon judges - may it not be said without success - the need to decide cases promptly and expeditiously, for it cannot be gainsaid that justice delayed is justice denied. Delay in the disposition of cases undermines the people's faith and confidence in the judiciary. Hence, judges are enjoined to decide cases with dispatch. Their failure to do so constitutes gross inefficiency and warrants the imposition of administrative sanction on them.

In the instant case, Judge Gonzales did not give a satisfactory reason for his failure to decide Civil Cases Nos. 2080, 2686, and 2532 within three (3) months from the dates the same were submitted for decision as required by §5 of the Judiciary Act of 1948 and Art. VIII, §15(1) of the Constitution. He omitted any mention of Civil Case No. 2080 in his explanation, dated October 27, 1997. The reason he gave for the delay in deciding Civil case no. 2686. i.e. that he was designated acting presiding judge of two other salas in 1993 and 1995, is insufficient to justify the same since he could have asked for an extension of the period within which to decide it. Finally his claim that the date Civil Case No. 2532 was submitted for decision could not be ascertained from the records is totally unacceptable since the court keeps logbooks from which the status of cases could easily be verified.

On the prompt resolution of cases, Art. III, §16 of the Constitution states:

All persons shall have the right to a speedy disposition of their cases before all judicial, quasi-judicial, or administrative bodies.

Canon 3, Rule 3.09 of the Code of Judicial Conduct provides:

A judge should organize and supervise the court personnel to ensure the prompt and efficient dispatch of business and require at all times the observance of high standards of public service and fidelity.

Judge Gonzales satisfactorily explained the lack of progress of some of the cases mentioned in the report of the Judicial Audit Team. It appears that Civil Case No. 2756 was indeed consolidated with Civil Case No. 2686, and the two cases were later decided on July 4, 1997. On the other hand, the reason Civil Case No. 2553 had not been progressing, according to Judge Gonzales, was because the parties had apparently lost interest therein, although he could have ascertained whether this was so and thus could have acted accordingly instead of leaving it in limbo. As for Civil Case No. 1865, it appears that the case was decided on August 18, 1997 as claimed by Judge Gonzales. It also appears that Special Proceeding No. 1402 was in fact dismissed without prejudice for failure of the petitioner therein to submit certified true copies of the certificate of title as directed by the court. With respect to Land Registration Cases Nos. 215, 212, and 211, said cases are indeed still pending because the Land Management Bureau has not submitted its reports as required by the court.

However, no satisfactory reason has been offered for Judge Gonzales' failure to act on Civil Case No. 2824 for an unreasonable period of time. He claims that it was inadvertently omitted from the calendar from December 18, 1996 to July 31, 1997. But Canon 3, Rule 3.09 requires judges to manage their dockets in such a manner that the work of their court is accomplished with reasonable dispatch.

On the matter of archiving criminal cases, Administrative Circular No. 7-A-82, dated June 21, 1993, provides that

"a criminal case may be archived only if after the issuance of the warrant of arrest, the accused remains at large for six (6) months from the delivery of the warrant to the proper peace officer." Judge Gonzales claims that he failed to have Criminal Cases Nos. 4182, 4185, 4221, 4222, 4223, 4104, 4107, 4167, 4231, and 4233 archived because the Clerk of Court had to undergo surgical operation for renal cyst. This is not a good excuse for Judge Gonzales' failure to comply with Administrative Circular No. 7-A-82. He could have directed other court personnel to do this.

In one case,[8] a fine of P50,000.00 was imposed on a judge for his failure to seasonably decide six (6) criminal and five (5) civil cases. In another case,[9] a judge was fined P1,000.00 for his failure to act on two (2) civil cases and one (1) criminal case for an unreasonable period of time. Hence, the imposition of a fine of P20,000.00 on Judge Gonzales as recommended by the Office of the Court Administrator is commensurate considering the number of cases which he failed to timely decide, act on, or archive.

Judge Martin P. Badong, Jr., who had been designated to take over the sala of Judge Reno R. Gonzales, filed a request on August 3, 1998 to be relieved of his designation on the ground that he is still suffering from hypertension.[10] The Office of the Court Administrator recommends approval of the request and the designation of Judge Ernesto B. Amisola of the Regional Trial Court, Branch 37, Iriga City in place of Judge Badong, Jr.[11]

WHEREFORE, a fine of P20,000.00 to be deducted from his retirement benefits is hereby IMPOSED on Judge Reno R. Gonzales.

Judge Martin P. Badong, Jr.'s request to be relieved as Acting Judge of the Regional Trial Court, Branch 35, Iriga City is GRANTED and Judge Ernesto B. Amisola of the Regional Trial Court, Branch 37, Iriga City, is designated as Acting Presiding Judge of the Regional Trial Court, Branch 35, Iriga City vice Judge Martin P. Badong, Jr.

SO ORDERED.

Narvasa, C.J., Davide, Jr., Romero, Bellosillo, Melo, Puno, Vitug, Kapunan, Panganiban, Martinez, Quisumbing, Purisima, and Pardo, JJ., concur.

[1] Rollo, pp. 1-6.

[2] Id., pp. 65-71.

[3] Id., pp. 68-71.

[4] Id., pp. 65-67.

[5] Id., pp. 67-68.

[6] Id., pp. 85-96.

[7] Office of the Court Administrator v. Judge Walerico B. Butalid, A.M. No. RTJ-96-1337 and A.M. No. 97-8-242-RTC, August 5, 1998, at p. 11.

[8] Report on the Judicial Audit Conducted in the Regional Trial Court, Branches 29 and 59, Toledo City, A.M. No. 97-9-278-RTC, July 8, 1998.

[9] Report on the Judicial Audit Conducted in the Municipal Trial Court, Sibulan, Negros Oriental, A.M. No. 97-1-08-MTC, December 15, 1997.

[10] Rollo, pp. 88-89.

[11] Id., pp. 91-95.

ABOUT BATAS.ORG

Study smarter at BATAS.org

The Philippine bar review and law-school companion built around how your brain actually remembers.

The complete Philippine law library - free for everyone.

More than 100,000 Supreme Court decisions, Republic Acts, and executive issuances - full-text searchable, browsable by category and year, and always free. No paywall, no login. This PDF came from it.

Audio case-brief lectures.

Any decision becomes a podcast-style lecture - facts, issues, ruling, and doctrine - with read-along highlighting and a hands-free presentation mode. Study while commuting, working out, or resting your eyes.

Bar review built on the science of memory.

Complete, sequenced courses for all eight bar subjects, narrated like podcasts and reinforced with retrieval practice and spaced review - the study techniques with the strongest evidence behind them.

The full law-school curriculum.

One subscription unlocks the entire J.D. curriculum - every subject, every lesson, with your progress tracked down to the paragraph so you can pick up exactly where you left off, on any device.

Mock exams that tell you where you stand.

Timed multiple-choice exams graded instantly, with per-subject score breakdowns and focus suggestions that point you at your weakest topics first.

A study planner that keeps you on pace.

Set your schedule and BATAS tells you every day whether you are on track for bar day - and exactly which lesson to take next.

Start free at <https://batas.org>

The law library is free forever - and your first lesson is one click away.

The text of this document is an official public record and remains in the public domain. Formatting, presentation, and compilation © 2026 batas.org.

Downloaded free from the batas.org Law Library. Share it freely - the library is free for every law student, bar reviewee, and practitioner.