REQUEST OF JUDGE IRMA ZITA V. MASAMAYOR, RTC-BR. 52, TALIBON, BOHOL, FOR EXTENSION OF TIME TO DECIDE CIVIL CASE NO. 0020 AND CRIMINAL CASE NO. 98-384.

A.M. No. 98-12-381-RTC. October 05, 1999

Ponente: PANGANIBAN, J.

Read online (full-text search, related cases, audio case brief): https://batas.org/library/a-m-no-98-12-381/

PANGANIBAN, J.:

Judges have a duty to decide their cases within the reglementary period. On meritorious grounds, they may ask for additional time. It must be stressed, however, that their application for extension must be filed before the expiration of the prescribed period.

The Case and the Facts

In a letter[1] dated July 31, 1998, addressed to the Court Administrator, Judge Irma Zita V. Masamayor of the Regional Trial Court (RTC) of Talibon, Bohol (Branch 52) requested an extension of time to decide (1) Civil Case No. 0020, entitled Alejandro Tutor et al. v. Benedicto Orevillo et al., the resolution of which was supposedly due on July 14, 1998; and (2) Criminal Case No. 98-384, entitled People v. Celso Evardo, supposedly due on June 2, 1998. She was subsequently able to complete and promulgate her Decision in the criminal case on August 6, 1998.

On August 17, 1998, Judge Masamayor requested another extension of thirty (30) days to resolve the Motion to Dismiss filed in Civil Case No. 0020.[2] She finally resolved the Motion on August 27, 1998.

On January 19, 1999, the Court, upon the recommendation of the Office of the Court Administrator (OCA), directed her, inter alia, "to EXPLAIN within ten (10) days from notice: (b-1) why she did not specify in her letter-request dated 17 August 1998 that she already requested for extension of thirty (30) days within which to decide Civil Case No. 0020; and (b-2) why she requested an extension of time within which to resolve [Crim.] Case No. 98-384 only after the reglementary period already lapsed."

In her letter[3] dated March 1, 1999, Judge Masamayor explained that her failure to mention that a previous request for extension in Criminal Case No. 98-384 had already been made was not deliberate, and that she was unaware of such omission. She said that she was constrained to immediately make the second request for extension, "because by then thirty days had already elapsed since the due date" for the resolution of Civil Case No. 0020. She also apologized for making the said request only after the reglementary period had lapsed and promised to "strive not to make the same lapse in the future."

Regarding Judge Masamayor's request in Civil Case No. 0020, this Court, in a Resolution dated June 8, 1999, found her liable for violation of Canon 3, Rule 3.05 of the Code of Judicial Conduct, and imposed upon her a fine of five thousand pesos (P5,000).[4]

In a Resolution dated July 6, 1999, Judge Masamayor's explanation regarding Criminal Case No. 98-384 was referred by the Court to the OCA.

The OCA’s Recommendation

In its July 23, 1999 Memorandum to the Office of the Chief Justice, the OCA, through Deputy Court Administrator Bernardo T. Ponferrada, reported that there had been several instances in which Judge Masamayor committed an infraction of the 90-day reglementary period within which to decide cases. Just recently, she was fined P5,000 for failure to decide Criminal Case No. 96-185 within the prescribed period.[5] Deputy Court Administrator Ponferrada, with the approval of Court Administrator Alfredo L. Benipayo, thus recommended that this time she be fined in the amount of P15,000, with a stern warning that a repetition of the same or similar acts in the future would be dealt with more severely.

The Court's Ruling

We agree with the recommendation of the Office of the Court Administrator, but reduce the fine to P10,000.

Time and again, we have impressed upon judges the need to decide cases promptly and expeditiously within the constitutionally mandated 90-day period,[6] and that their failure to do so constitutes gross inefficiency and warrants the imposition of administrative sanction upon them.[7]

In the instant case, as reported by the OCA, there is a propensity on the part of Judge Masamayor to request extensions of time within which to decide cases. Worse, her requests have been made after the reglementary period had already lapsed. These lapses of Judge Masamayor speak of serious neglect in the performance of her obligations to the party-litigants and to the speedy and orderly administration of justice.

This Court has always reminded judges that it is their duty to devise an efficient recording and filing system in their courts to enable them to monitor the flow of cases and to manage their speedy and timely disposition.[8] They should keep a record of the cases submitted for decision and ought to know when they should dispose of them. Canon 3 of the Code of Judicial Conduct exacts the following:

> “Rule 3.08 - A judge should diligently discharge administrative responsibilities, maintain professional competence in court management, and facilitate the performance of administrative functions of other judges and court personnel.
>
> Rule 3-09 - A judge should organize and supervise the court personnel to ensure prompt and efficient dispatch of business, and require at all times the observance of high standards of public service and fidelity.”

The public trust character of their office imposes upon judges the highest degree of duty and responsibility in the discharge of their functions, particularly to decide cases promptly, fairly and competently.[9] Judges should be able to manage their dockets efficiently in order to accomplish their work with reasonable dispatch. Needless to say, any delay in the resolution of a case is, at bottom, a delay of justice and thus a denial thereof.[10]

The Court is well-aware of the monumental challenges faced by trial judges in the performance of their duties, manifested particularly in the sheer volume of their case load. This is precisely why we almost invariably grant, upon proper application and on meritorious grounds, additional time to decide cases beyond the 90-day period. Nonetheless, a heavy case load is not an excuse for the late resolution of cases.[11] Judges should give full dedication to their primary and fundamental task of administering justice efficiently, in order to restore and maintain the people's confidence in the courts. At least, they should file their requests for extension before the expiration of the prescribed period.

Based on the foregoing principles, we find that Judge Masamayor has not fully lived up to her responsibility for the orderly administration of justice. Her repeated failure to decide cases within 90 days from the date they were submitted for resolution, aggravated by her failure to file timely requests for additional time to dispose of them,

Bar review courses, mock exams and a study planner that keeps you on pace - batas.org

constitutes gross inefficiency. She is reminded to be more assiduous and conscientious in the disposition of her responsibilities as an officer of the court.

WHEREFORE, the Court hereby HOLDS Judge Irma Zita V. Masamayor LIABLE for gross inefficiency and ORDERS her to pay a FINE of ten thousand pesos (P10,000), with a STERN WARNING that a repetition of the same or similar acts in the future will be dealt with more severely.

SO ORDERED.

Melo, Puno, Vitug, Mendoza, Quisumbing, Purisima, Pardo, Buena, Gonzaga-Reyes, and Ynares-Santiago, JJ., concur.

Davide, Jr., C.J., Bellosillo, and Kapunan, JJ., abroad on official business.

---

[1] Rollo, p. 3.1

[2] Rollo, p. 11.2

[3] Rollo, pp. 7-8.31

[4] Resolution dated June 8, 1999 in AM No. 98-10-338-RTC.4

[5] AM No. 99-1-16-RTC, June 21, 1999.

[6] Sec. 15 (1), Art. VII of the Constitution, provides:

> "Sec. 15. (1) 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."

[7] Sanchez v. Vestil, AM No. RTJ-98-1419, October 13, 1998; Report on the Judicial Audit Conducted in RTC-Branches 29 and 59, Toledo City, 292 SCRA 8, July 8, 1998; Report of the Judicial Audit Conducted in Municipal Trial Court, Sibilan, Negros Oriental, 282 SCRA 463, December 5, 1997; Lambino v. De Vera, 275 SCRA 60, July 7, 1997; Report of Audit and Physical Inventory of the Records of Cases in MTC of Peñaranda, Nueva Ecija, 276 SCRA 257, July 28, 1997; Abarquez v. Judge Rebosura, 285 SCRA 109, January 28, 1998; Office of the Court Administrator v. Judge Butalid, 293 SCRA 589, August 5, 1998; Bernardo v. Judge Fabros, AM No. MTJ-99-1189, May 12, 1999.

[8] Office of the Court Administrator v. Judge Villanueva, 279 SCRA 267, September 18, 1997.

[9] Office of the Court Administrator v. Judge Benedicto, AM No. 96-5-176-RTC, September 25, 1998. See also Office of the Court Administrator v. Judge Villanueva, ibid.

[10] Canon 6, Canons of Judicial Ethics. Report of the Judicial Audit Conducted in RTC, Branches 4 & 23, Manila and MTC, Branch 14, Manila, 291 SCRA 10, June 18, 1998; Abarquez v. Judge Rebosura, supra.

[11] Perez v. Judge Andaya, 286 SCRA 40, February 6, 1998.

Study hands-free: podcast-style lessons with read-along highlighting - batas.org

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.