REPORT ON THE JUDICIAL AUDIT CONDUCTED IN THE MUNICIPAL TRIAL COURT, BONGABON, NUEVA ECIJA.

A.M. No. 99-6-79-MTC. September 24, 2001

Ponente: VITUG, J.

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VITUG, J.:

A judicial and physical inventory of cases was conducted by the Office of the Court Administrator ("OCA") on the Municipal Trial Court, Bongabon, Nueva Ecija, anticipatory of the compulsory retirement of its presiding judge, the Hon. Judge Eulogio A. Quipse, scheduled on 13 September 1999.

On 11 June 1999, the OCA submitted its memorandum informing the Court that there were eighty six (86) cases pending as of 23 March 1999 before the sala of Judge Quipse. Acting on the memorandum, the Court in its resolution of 20 July 1999 resolved -

> "(T)o DIRECT (1) Hon. Eulogio A. Quipse, MTC, Bongabon, Nueva Ecija, to: (1-a) explain within ten (10) days from notice why no administrative sanction should be imposed on him for failure to render, within the reglementary period, his decision in Criminal Case No. 2818 (People vs. W. Terrago) and his resolution of the preliminary investigation he conducted in Criminal Case No. 2921 (People vs. L. Sanugal); (1-b) immediately decide and resolve the aforementioned two (2) criminal cases; (1-c) take appropriate action on the following eleven (11) cases which were neither further acted upon nor set in calendar after the lapse of considerable length of time, to wit: Criminal Cases Nos. 2843, 2930, 2962, 3003 and 3036, and Civil Cases Nos. 1455, 1468, 1477, 1482, 1483 and 1484, including the three (3) criminal cases involving detention prisoners (Nos. 3007, 3025 and 30390) which were not initially acted upon from their filing; (1-d) issue judgments on the confiscated bailbonds in Criminal Cases Nos. 2815, 2749 and 2916/7; and (1-e) submit report/s to this Court, through the Office of the Court Administrator, within ten (10) days from notice, on the compliance with the preceding directives (1-b) to (1-d) and REMIND Judge Quipse to sign the court orders and the like which he issues before these are attached to the corresponding records of cases; (2) Clerk of Court Macario S. Villanueva, MTC, Bongabon, Nueva Ecija, to (2-a) immediately inform this Court, through the Office of the Court Administrator, whether or not the decision in Criminal Case No. 2815 (People vs. E. Felix) was already promulgated and (2-b) REMIND him to observe the provisions of Rule 114 of the Rules on Criminal Procedure before accepting bailbonds for the approval of Judge Eulogio A. Quipse, and closely supervise the court personnel concerned especially in the accomplishment of the minutes of proceedings in the prescribed form and in the preparation by the stenographers of court orders for the signature of Judge Quipse pertaining to the actions taken on and the postponement or continuation of the hearing of cases, the attachment thereof to the corresponding records of cases and the maintenance of separate compilation of records of pending cases from the records of cases already disposed of or archived and STERNLY WARN Mr. Villanueva and the personnel concerned that a repetition of the infractions in the future will be dealt with more severely; and (3) Eloisa Palompon-Quipse, Court Interpreter, MTC, Bongabon, Nueva Ecija, to (3-a) properly accomplish and/or sign the minutes of the proceedings of the cases and see to it that they are properly attached to the records and (3-b) report to the office regularly and file leave of absence whenever she does not report to work."

In his letter, dated 10 February 2000, Judge Quipse informed the Court, through the Office of the Court

Administrator, that he had already resolved the cases in the aforementioned resolution; thus: Criminal Case No. 2818, entitled "People of the Philippines vs. Sgt. Wilfredo Terrago," was decided on 30 July 1999, and Criminal Case No. 2921, entitled "People of the Philippines vs. Lorenzo Sanugal," was resolved on 07 September 1999.

The letter was referred to the OCA for evaluation, report and recommendation. The OCA, in its memorandum of 21 March 2000, reported that Judge Quipse had not fully complied with the directives of the 20th July 1999 resolution and recommended that the amount of P10,000.00 be withheld from his retirement benefits pending the results of this administrative matter. In its resolution of 02 May 2000, the Court accepted and resolved to adopt the recommendation of the Office of the Court Administrator.

Judge Quipse then submitted a certification, dated 03 April 2000, issued by Clerk of Court Macario S. Villanueva that Judge Quipse had since resolved the following cases; to wit: Criminal Case No. 2815 ("People of the Philippines vs. Erlinda Felix") on 10 February 1999, Criminal Case No. 2749 ("People of the Philippines vs. Renato Eugenio, et al.") on 14 July 1999, and Criminal Cases No. 2916 and No. 2917 ("People of the Philippines vs. Violeta Brobio") on 02 September 1999. On 29 May 2000, another certification was submitted to the effect that additional cases were likewise resolved; to wit: Criminal Case No. 2843 ("People of the Philippines vs. Federico Cabral), Criminal Case No. 2930 ("People of the Philippines vs. Reynante de Guzman"), Criminal Case No. 2962 ("People of the Philippines vs. Mike Barrera"), Criminal Case No. 3003 ("People of the Philippines vs. Mariano Mariano"), Criminal Case No. 3036 ("People of the Philippines vs. Guillermo Sarmiento"), Criminal Case No. 3007 ("People of the Philippines vs. Danito Castro"), Criminal Case No. 3025 ("People of the Philippines vs. Emelita Manuel, et al."), Criminal Case No. 3039 ("People of the Philippines vs. Carlito Marcelo"), Civil Case No. 1455 ("Lydia Apostol, et al. vs. Aurelio Manuel, et al."), Civil Case No. 1468 ("Michael Moreno vs. Eliong Salvador"), Civil Case No. 1477 ("Cooperative Rural Bank of Guimba, Bongabon Branch vs. Cristina Natalio"), Civil Case No. 1483 ("Cooperative Rural Bank of Guimba, Bongabon Branch vs. Oscar Ramos"), Civil Case No. 1482 ("Cooperative Rural Bank of Guimba, Bongabon Branch vs. Tranquilino Andres, et al."), and Civil Case No. 1484 ("Cooperative Rural Bank of Guimba, Bongabon Branch vs. Arturo Alcantara").

The OCA, to which office the certification was referred, submitted its memorandum report, dated 03 August 2000, stating that Judge Quipse had only failed to decide and resolve Criminal Cases No. 2815, No. 2818 and No. 2921 within the ninety-day reglementary period. The OCA recommended that respondent judge be "FINED" in the amount of P1,500.00, deductible from the ten thousand pesos (P10,000.00) which was withheld from his retirement benefits under the Court's resolution of 02 May 2000.

Respondent judge admitted that he was unable to decide Criminal Case No. 2818 and Criminal Case No. 2921 within the ninety-day reglementary period but said that Criminal Case No. 2815 was resolved on 10 February 1999.

Article XVIII, Section 15, of the Constitution mandates that lower courts have three months within which to decide cases submitted for resolution. Similarly, Canon 3, Rule 3.05, of the Code of Judicial Conduct provides that a judge shall dispose of the court's business promptly and decide cases before him within the prescribed periods therefor. The Court has always impressed upon judges the need to decide cases with dispatch, for any delay in the disposition of cases can easily undermine the people's faith and confidence in the judiciary. An unjustified delay in the resolution of matters before a court is said to constitute gross inefficiency and warrants the imposition of administrative sanctions on the offender.[1] Aware of the heavy caseload of judges and the great burden that the rules place on them, the Court has almost invariably acted favorably on requests for extensions. Unfortunately, respondent judge has failed even to ask for such an extension.

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Considering that only two cases were not decided by respondent judge within the reglementary period, one could appreciate the light sanction recommended by the OCA.

WHEREFORE, the Court finds Judge Eulogio A. Quipse of the Municipal Trial Court, Bongabon, Nueva Ecija, guilty of having failed to decide seasonably two criminal cases, aforenumbered, and hereby imposes a FINE of ONE THOUSAND FIVE HUNDRED PESOS.

The Financial Management Office, Office of the Court Administrator is authorized to deduct the said amount from the Ten Thousand Pesos (P10,000.00) withheld from retirement benefits of Judge Quipse.

SO ORDERED.

Melo, (Chairman), Panganiban, Gonzaga-Reyes, and Sandoval-Gutierrez, JJ., concur.

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[1] 298 SCRA 1.

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