

REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES, COMPLAINANT, VS. JUDGE VICENTE A. HIDALGO, PRESIDING JUDGE OF THE REGIONAL TRIAL COURT OF MANILA, BRANCH 37, RESPONDENT.

A.M. NO. RTJ-05-1959. December 09, 2005

Ponente: CHICO-NAZARIO, J.

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CHICO-NAZARIO, J.:

The instant administrative case arose from the affidavit-complaint[1] dated 19 January 2004 filed by the Republic of the Philippines, represented by Solicitor General Alfredo L. Benipayo, with the Office of the Court Administrator (OCA), charging Judge Vicente A. Hidalgo with Gross Ignorance of the Law, Manifest Partiality and Conduct Prejudicial to the Interest of the Service relative to Civil Case No. 94075 entitled "Tarcila Laperal Mendoza v. The Republic of the Philippines, et al."

Facts of the case:

On 02 June 1999, Tarcila Laperal Mendoza filed an action for the annulment or declaration of nullity of the title and deed of sale, reconveyance and/or recovery of ownership and possession of a four thousand nine hundred twenty-four-square meter (4,924.60 sq. m. to be exact) property against the Republic of the Philippines (in whose name the title to the property was transferred and registered) in the Regional Trial Court (RTC) of Manila, and was docketed as Civil Case No. 94075. The property in question is located at 1440 Arlegui Street, San Miguel, Manila. It is also known as the Arlegui Residence which housed two (2) Philippine presidents and which now holds the Office of the Press Secretary and the News Information Bureau.

The case was initially dismissed by the presiding Judge of the Manila RTC (Branch 35) on the ground of state immunity. A petition for certiorari was filed with the Court of Appeals which reversed the trial court's ruling and remanded the case to the trial court for further proceedings. The Supreme Court sustained the Court of Appeals decision.

Upon the inhibition of the presiding Judge of the Manila RTC (Branch 35), the case was re-raffled to the Manila RTC (Branch 37), with respondent Vicente A. Hidalgo as presiding Judge.

In an Order dated 07 July 2003, Judge Hidalgo declared the Republic in default for failure of Solicitor Gabriel Francisco Ramirez, the handling solicitor, to file the required Answer within the period prayed for in his motion for extension dated 21 May 2003. The plaintiff was allowed to present her evidence ex parte.

On 27 August 2003, Judge Hidalgo rendered a decision[2] in favor of plaintiff Mendoza, the dispositive portion of which reads:

WHEREFORE, judgment is hereby rendered:

- Declaring the deed of sale dated July 15, 1975, annotated at the back of Transfer Certificate of Title No. 118527 as PE:2035/T-118911, as non-existent and/or fictitious, and, therefore, null and void from the

beginning;

- Declaring that Transfer Certificate of Title No. 118911 of the defendant Republic of the Philippines has no basis, thereby, making it null and void from beginning;
- Ordering the defendant Register of Deeds for the City of Manila to reinstate plaintiff's Transfer Certificate of Title No. 118527;
- Ordering the defendant Republic of the Philippines to pay a just compensation in the sum of ONE HUNDRED FORTY THREE MILLION SIX HUNDRED THOUSAN (P143,600,000.00) PESOS, plus interest at the legal rate, until the whole amount is paid in full for the acquisition of the subject property;
- Ordering the plaintiff, upon payment of the just compensation for the acquisition of her property, to execute the necessary deed of conveyance in favour of the defendant Republic of the Philippines and, on the other hand, directing the defendant Register of Deeds, upon presentation of the said deed of conveyance, to cancel plaintiff's Transfer Certificate of Title in favour of the defendant Republic of the Philippines;
- Ordering the defendant Republic of the Philippines to pay the plaintiff the sum of ONE BILLION FOUR HUNDRED EIGHTY MILLION SIX HUNDRED TWENTY SEVEN THOUSAND SIX HUNDRED EIGHTY EIGHT (P1,480,627,688.00) PESOS, representing the reasonable rental for the use of the subject property, the interest thereon at the legal rate, and the opportunity cost at the rate of three (3%) per cent per annum, commencing July 1975 continuously up to July 30, 2003, plus, an additional interest at the legal rate, commencing from this date until the whole amount is paid in full;
- Ordering the defendant Republic of the Philippines to pay the plaintiff attorney's fee, in an amount equivalent to FIFTEEN (15%) PER CENT of the amount due to the plaintiff.

With pronouncement as to the costs of the suit.[3]

Upon receipt by the Office of the Solicitor General of the judgment by default, the Republic moved for new trial on the ground that the gross and inexcusable negligence of Solicitor Ramirez in handling the case does not bind the Republic of the Philippines. It argued that it is entitled to due process of law considering the enormous amount of the alleged obligations involved. It maintained that plaintiff's cause of action has long prescribed and is legally barred by laches, and that the title registered in the name of the Republic has become infeasible.

The respondent Judge denied the motion for new trial[4] and the subsequent motion for reconsideration[5] filed by the Republic. A notice of appeal[6] dated 27 November 2003 was filed, but the same was denied[7] on 17 December 2003 on the ground that it was filed beyond the reglementary period. A certificate of finality[8] of judgment was issued by the Branch Clerk of Court, Atty. Michael B. Robles, on 27 November 2003.

On 10 December 2003, respondent issued an order[9] directing the issuance of a writ of execution. On 22 December 2003, a writ of execution[10] was issued, which reads, thus:

TO: THE BRANCH SHERIFF
OF BRANCH 37, RTC, MANILA

WE COMMAND you to demand that of the goods and chattels of THE REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES you cause to be made the sum of ONE HUNDRED FORTY THREE MILLION SIX HUNDRED THOUSAND PESOS (P143,600,000.00) Philippine Currency, as payment for just compensation plus interest at the legal rate, until the whole amount is paid in full for the acquisition of the subject property; and the further sum of ONE BILLION FOUR HUNDRED EIGHTY MILLION SIX HUNDRED TWENTY SEVEN THOUSAN SIX HUNDRED EIGHTY EIGHT (P1,480,627,688.00) PESOS, representing the reasonable rental for the use of the subject property, the interest thereon at the legal rate, and the opportunity cost at the rate of three (3%) per cent per annum, commencing July 1975 continuously up to July 30, 2003, plus, an

additional interest at the legal rate, commencing from this date until the whole amount is paid in full, the plaintiff attorney's fee, in an amount equivalent to FIFTEEN (15%) PER CENT of the amount due to the plaintiff plus the cost of suit, together with your lawful fees for service of this execution all in money of the Philippines, which the plaintiff recovered in our Court, Regional Trial Court of Manila on the 27[th] day of August 2003 against the Republic of the Philippines, Inc. with interest and costs, and that you render the same to said Tarcila Laperal aside from your own fees on this execution, and to likewise return this Writ into this Court within sixty (60) days from the date of receipt hereof with your proceedings endorsed thereon.

On 30 December 2003, Sheriff IV Carmelo V. Cachero directed Eduardo Sergio G. Edeza of the National Treasurer of the Bureau of Treasury to effect the payment of the sum stated in the decision, thus:

TO: Honorable EDUARDO SERGIO G. EDEZA
National Treasurer of the Philippines, Bureau of Treasury
Palacio del Gobernador, Intramuros
M a n i l a

G R E E T I N G S:

Attached herewith you will find a copy of the WRIT OF EXECUTION issued by the HON. VICENTE A. HIDALGO, Judge of the Regional Trial Court, Branch 37, Manila, in the above-entitled case for your ready reference.

By virtue of the said Writ you are hereby directed to cause and or effect the payment of the sum of ONE HUNDRED FORTY THREE MILLION SIX HUNDRED THOUSAND PESOS (P143,600,000.00), Philippine Currency, as payment for just compensation, plus interest at the legal rate, until the whole amount is paid in full and the further sum of ONE BILLION FOUR HUNDRED EIGHTY MILLION SIX HUNDRED TWENTY SEVEN THOUSAND SIX HUNDRED EIGHTY EIGHT PESOS (P1,480,627,688.00) representing the reasonable rental for the use of the subject property, the interest thereon at the legal rate, and the opportunity cost at the rate of three (3%) per annum, commencing July 1975 continuously up to July 30, 2003, plus, an additional interest at the legal rate, commencing from this date until the whole amount is paid in full, the plaintiff's attorney's fee, in an amount equivalent to FIFTEEN (15%) PERCENT of the amount due to the plaintiff plus costs of suit together with all the lawful fees and expenses for the service of the Writ of Execution in favor of the above-named plaintiff.[11]

On 07 January 2004, Sheriff Cachero further directed the National Treasurer to cause payment of P1,942,576,312.45, thus:

TO: Honorable EDUARDO SERGIO G. EDEZA
National Treasurer of the Philippines, Bureau of Treasury
Palacio del Gobernador, Intramuros, M a n i l a

S i r:

Pursuant to the WRIT OF EXECUTION issued by the Hon. VICENTE A. HIDALGO, Judge of the Regional Trial Court, Branch 37, Manila, in the above-entitled case, which was served upon your good office on December 30, 2003, kindly effect and/or cause the payment of the total amount of ONE BILLION NINE HUNDRED FORTY TWO MILLION FIVE HUNDRED SEVENTY SIX THOUSAND THREE HUNDRED TWELVE PESOS AND FORTY FIVE CENTAVOS (P1,942,576,312.45), Philippine Currency, made payable to:

- TARCILA I. MENDOZA and/or FORTUNATO I. MENDOZA – P828,356,119.86 to be deposited with the Land Bank of the Philippines, Main Office, M.H. del Pilar St., Ermita, Manila under CURRENT ACCOUNT NO. 003402-0014-95;

- TARCILA I. MENDOZA and/or APOLONIA C. SOGUILON – P1,065,555,684.78 to be deposited with the Land Bank of the Philippines, Main Office, M.H. del Pilar St., Ermita, Manila under CURRENT ACCOUNT NO. 003402-0015-17;
- CLERK OF COURT, RTC – MANILA – P38,851,606.25 to be deposited with the Land Bank of the Philippines, YMCA Branch, Arroceros St., Ermita, Manila under ACCOUNT NO. 0591-0116-34;
- CLERK OF COURT, RTC – MANILA – P9,712,901.56 to be deposited with the Land Bank of the Philippines, YMCA Branch, Arroceros St., Ermita, Manila under ACCOUNT NO. 0591-1744-28.[12]

The foregoing antecedents begot the instant administrative complaint[13] raising the following allegations against respondent Judge:

- The respondent judge assumed jurisdiction and took cognizance of the plaintiff's complaint despite a clear showing that the action had long prescribed and is already barred by laches. The Republic contends that since the complaint showed on its face that the action had prescribed and that the plaintiff's inaction for a period of almost twenty-four years undoubtedly amounts to laches, the respondent judge was duty bound to dismiss it *motu proprio*;
- The money judgment by default rendered by the respondent judge in the colossal amount of almost two billion pesos (P2,000,000,000.00) is grossly in excess of the claim alleged in the complaint in patent violation of Section 3(d), Rule 9 of the 1997 Rules of Civil Procedure and grossly disproportionate to the total amount of docket fees paid;
- The respondent judge violated the Constitution and the fundamental rule that government funds are exempt from execution or garnishment;
- The respondent judge ordered the Republic to pay the plaintiff's attorney's fees with pronouncement as to the costs of the suit in violation of the clear provision of Section 1, Rule 142 which provides that no costs shall be allowed against the Republic of the Philippines unless otherwise provided by law;
- The respondent judge condemned the Republic to suffer the obligation of almost two billion (P2,000,000,000.00) in violation of its right to due process;
- Awarding the amount of two billion pesos (P2,000,000,000.00) when the property involved is only valued at more than two million pesos (P2,000,000.00) and the amount of claim alleged in the complaint is more or less three hundred seventy-one million (P371,000,000.00) shows that the respondent judge had been partial in favor of the plaintiff;
- The certificate of finality of the judgment by default was hastily issued on 27 November 2003, the very same day the Republic filed a notice of appeal;
- The Republic had until 20 December 2003 to submit its opposition to the motion for the issuance of the writ of execution, yet the respondent judge denied the Republic's notice of appeal on 17 December 2003 for being allegedly filed out of time;
- The Republic filed its opposition to the motion for the issuance of a writ of execution on 19 December 2003 and on the same day, the respondent judge with astonishing speed granted the plaintiff's motion to issue a writ of execution.

The Republic avers that the respondent Judge is liable for these unjustified and irregular acts which constitute gross ignorance of the law, manifest partiality and conduct prejudicial to the best interest of the service.

On 12 February 2004, OCA required[14] respondent Judge to submit his comment within ten (10) days from receipt.

In his COMMENT[15] dated 15 March 2004, respondent Judge Vicente A. Hidalgo claims that the instant administrative complaint was instituted against him in order to "hide from view a monstrous fiasco." The respondent Judge maintains that the Office of the Solicitor General, having failed to fulfil its duty as counsel for the defendant, is trying to "escape criticism and responsibility for bungling the case by the simple expedient smokescreen of making the respondent a convenient scapegoat for its ineptitude and inefficiency."

The Office of the Solicitor General faults Judge Hidalgo in failing to dismiss the civil case on the grounds of prescription and laches. The respondent Judge counters that such grounds do not apply since the deed of sale upon which the Republic's title to the property is based is inexistent and absolutely simulated or fictitious.

With respect to the money judgment granted, the respondent Judge maintains that the amount awarded to the plaintiff was based on testimonies of experts. The amount of damages given, the respondent explains, is "within the four corners of the prayer made in the complaint, i.e., such other relief, just and equitable, under the premises."

The Office of the Solicitor General insists that the motion for new trial should be granted because the gross and inexcusable negligence of Solicitor Ramirez has impaired the rights of the Republic, depriving it of its property without due process of law. The respondent Judge contends that the Office of the Solicitor General is no ordinary advocate which, due to various constraints and limitations, can be conceded to commit acts constitutive of negligence, mistake or lack of competence. He notes that all pleadings bear at least three (3) signatures -that of the handling solicitor, the assistant solicitor general and the solicitor general, showing that pleadings go through the rung of the ladder of authority ensuring their conformity to existing jurisprudence and compliance with procedural rules.

It is also contended by the Republic that the certificate of finality of the judgment by default was hastily issued, showing the manifest partiality of the respondent Judge for the plaintiff. The respondent Judge avers that upon the denial of the motion for new trial which the Office of the Solicitor General received on 09 October 2003, the Republic had only one (1) day left or until 10 October 2003 to file its appeal. Instead of filing its appeal, it filed a motion for reconsideration on 24 October 2003 which the respondent denied in an order dated 25 November 2003. This is contrary to the provision in the Rules of Court that "(a)n order denying a motion for new trial or reconsideration is not appealable, the remedy being an appeal from the judgment or final order" (Sec. 9, Rule 37, 1997 Rules of Civil Procedure). The respondent Judge argues that the filing of the notice of appeal on 27 November 2003, forty-eight (48) days from the last day to perfect appeal, was made too late because the decision had already become final and executory.

In its REPLY[16] dated 03 March 2004, the Republic reiterates its charges of gross ignorance of the law, manifest partiality, violation of due process and conduct prejudicial to the best interest of the service against Judge Hidalgo. The Republic insists that the respondent Judge deserves to be dismissed from the service for being guilty of the foregoing offenses.

The Republic asserts that the motion for new trial was filed to rectify the grossly negligent act of the handling solicitor which gravely prejudiced its interest. It maintains that the Judge violated its right to due process when he proceeded to hold it liable for the omissions and negligence of a lawyer who had ceased to be the authorized agent of the government.

It is also contended that the respondent Judge violated the Constitution and the fundamental rule that government funds are exempt from execution or garnishment when he caused the issuance of the writ of execution against the Republic. It is likewise asserted that in ordering the Republic to pay the attorney's fees of plaintiff and the cost of the suit, the respondent violated the clear provision of Section 1, Rule 142 of the Rules of Court heretofore cited.

In these two issues, the Republic observes that the respondent is conspicuously silent because he cannot offer any defense, as his actions are glaringly illegal.

Anent the accusation of the respondent that he is being used by the Office of the Solicitor General as a scapegoat for allegedly bungling the case, the Republic counters that the respondent himself cannot justify his actions by hiding under the cloak of speedy disposition of the case as prescribed by the Court.

On 14 April 2005, the OCA issued its recommendation,[17] thus:

In view of the foregoing, we respectfully submit for the consideration of the Honorable Court the following recommendation:

- That the instant administrative complaint be RE – DOCKETED as a regular administrative matter;
- That Judge Vicente A. Hidalgo, Presiding Judge, Regional Trial Court (Branch 37), Manila be found administratively liable for GROSS IGNORANCE OF THE LAW OR PROCEDURE under Sec. 8 (9), Rule 140 of the Rules of Court; and
- That Judge Hidalgo be FINED in the amount of forty thousand pesos (P40,000.00) and be WARNED that a repetition of the same or similar acts will be dealt with more severely.

The recommendation of the OCA is well-taken.

In the present case, respondent Judge patently committed two inexcusable procedural errors – the pronouncement of costs against the government and the subsequent issuance of the writ of execution, in violation of settled rules and jurisprudence.

In the decision dated 27 August 2003, respondent Judge declared the Republic liable for payment of attorney's fees and cost of suit, pertinent portion of which reads:

- Ordering the defendant Republic of the Philippines to pay the plaintiff attorney's fee, in an amount equivalent to FIFTEEN (15%) PER CENT of the amount due to the plaintiff.

With pronouncement as to the costs of the suit.[18]

In declaring the government answerable to the attorney's fees of the plaintiff and other costs of the suit, the respondent utterly disregarded the well-established rule that costs of suit are not recoverable against the government (Section 1, Rule 142, Rules of Court). As early as 15 November 1918, we ruled in the case of *Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation v. Rafferty*[19] that no costs shall be allowed against the government of the Philippine Islands where the government is the unsuccessful party. This was reiterated in the case of *Philippines Veterans Affairs Office v. Anover*[20] and *The Philippine Veterans Affairs Office v. Tamayo*,[21] when we ruled that court costs are not recoverable from a government agency.

Upon finality of the decision dated 27 August 2003, respondent Judge directed the issuance of the writ of execution and subsequently issued the writ of execution on 22 December 2003.

It is settled that when the State gives its consent to be sued, it does not thereby necessarily consent to an unrestrained execution against it. Tersely put, when the State waives its immunity, all it does, in effect, is to give the other party an opportunity to prove, if it can, that the state has a liability. In *Republic v. Villazor*[22] this Court, in nullifying the issuance of an alias writ of execution directed against the funds of the Armed Forces of the Philippines to satisfy a final and executory judgment, has explained, thus —

. . . The universal rule that where the State gives its consent to be sued by private parties either by general or special law, it may limit claimant's action "only up to the completion of proceedings anterior to the stage of

execution" and that the power of the Courts ends when the judgment is rendered, since government funds and properties may not be seized under writs of execution or garnishment to satisfy such judgments, is based on obvious considerations of public policy. Disbursements of public funds must be covered by the correspondent appropriation as required by law. The functions and public services rendered by the State cannot be allowed to paralyzed or disrupted by the diversion of public funds from their legitimate and specific objects, as appropriated by law.[23]

In Administrative Circular No. 10-2000 dated 25 October 2000, all judges of lower courts were advised to exercise utmost caution, prudence and judiciousness in the issuance of writs of execution to satisfy money judgments against government agencies and local government units. Judges, thus, cannot indiscriminately issue writs of execution against the government to enforce money judgments.

It is clear that respondent Judge ought to be sanctioned for his failure to properly apply the court procedure. As can be seen, the law involved is simple and elementary. When the law is sufficiently basic, a judge owes it to his office to simply apply it, and anything less than that would be constitutive of gross ignorance of the law. In short, when the law is so elementary, not to be aware of it constitutes gross ignorance of the law.[24] When the inefficiency springs from a failure to consider so basic and elementary a rule, a law or principle in the discharge of his duties, a judge is either too incompetent and undeserving of the position and title he holds or is too vicious that the oversight or omission was deliberately done in bad faith and in grave abuse of judicial authority.[25]

Canon 4 of the Canon of Judicial Ethics requires that a judge should be studious of the principles of law; while Canon 18 mandates that he should administer his office with due regard to the integrity of the system of the law itself, remembering that he is not a depositary of arbitrary power, but a judge under the sanction of law.[26] The maxim "ignorance of the law excuses no one" has special application to judges, who, under Rule 1.01 of the Code of Judicial Conduct, should be the embodiment of competence, integrity, and independence. Competence is a mark of a good judge. When a judge displays an utter lack of familiarity with the rules, he erodes the public's confidence in the competence of our courts.[27] It is highly imperative that judges be conversant with the law and basic legal principles.[28] Basic legal procedures must be at the palm of a judge's hands.[29]

In the case at bar, respondent Judge not only failed to perform his duties in accordance with the Rules, but he also acted wilfully and in gross disregard of the law and controlling jurisprudence. He was ignorant of the basic and simple procedural rules by issuing the writ of execution and pronouncing the costs of suit against the government. Verily, respondent Judge's actions visibly indicate his lack of sufficient grasp of the law.

For issuing the writ of execution and pronouncing the costs of the suit against the government, we deem that the respondent Judge is liable for gross ignorance of the law or procedure under Rule 140 of the Rules of Court.

Under Rule 140, Section 8, of the Rules of Court, as amended by A.M. No. 01-8-10 SC, gross ignorance of the law or procedure is classified as a serious charge. As to the penalty imposed, Section 11 of the same Rule provides:

SEC. 11. Sanctions. - A. If the respondent is guilty of a serious charge, any of the following sanctions may be imposed:

- Dismissal from the service, forfeiture of all or part of the benefits as the Court may determine, and disqualification from reinstatement or appointment to any public office, including government-owned or controlled corporations: Provided, however, that the forfeiture of benefits shall in no case include accrued leave credits;
- Suspension from office without salary and other benefits for more than three (3) but not exceeding six (6) months; or

- A fine of more than P20,000.00 but not exceeding P40,000.00.

Taking into consideration the length of service^[30] rendered by respondent Judge and following our rulings in *Gamas v. Oco*,^[31] and *Sule v. Biteng*,^[32] a fine of P20,000.00 is justified.

The other charges against Judge Hidalgo and the issues arising therefrom are judicial matters not subject to administrative scrutiny. The Republic has, in fact, filed a petition for certiorari on 30 January 2004 against the respondent, docketed as G.R. No. 161657, and remains pending before the Third Division. The present administrative case is without prejudice to any other action which may be taken on said petition.

All told, this Court once again seizes the moment to remind judges to keep abreast of the rules and recent pronouncements of this Court, so they may evolve into more effective dispensers of justice -- magistrates of the law in the truest sense of the word.^[33]

WHEREFORE, the Court finds respondent Judge Vicente A. Hidalgo administratively liable for gross ignorance of the law and is accordingly fined the amount of Twenty Thousand (P20,000.00) Pesos with a stern warning that a repetition of the same or similar act will be dealt with more severely.

SO ORDERED.

Puno, (Chairman), Austria-Martinez, Callejo, Sr., and Tinga, JJ., concur.

[1] Rollo, pp. 1-28.

[2] Rollo, pp. 56-57; Decision dated 27 August 2003.

[3] Rollo, pp. 55-56.

[4] Rollo, pp. 77-84.

[5] Rollo, p. 85.

[6] Rollo, pp. 86-87.

[7] Rollo, pp. 91-92.

[8] Rollo, p. 89.

[9] Rollo, p. 93.

[10] Rollo, p. 94.

[11] Rollo, p. 95.

[12] Rollo, p. 96.

[13] Rollo, pp. 1-28.

[14] Rollo, p. 98.

[15] Rollo, pp. 102-119.

[16] Rollo, pp. 132-149.

[17] Rollo, pp. 151-157.

[18] Rollo, pp. 55-56.

[19] 39 Phil. 145 (1918).

[20] G.R. No. L-39835, 27 October 1983, 125 SCRA 354.

[21] G.R. No. L-74322, 29 July 1988, 163 SCRA 776.

[22] G.R. No. L-30671, 28 November 1973, 54 SCRA 83.

[23] See also Commissioner of Public Highways v. San Diego, G.R. No. L-30098, 18 February 1970, 31 SCRA 616, citing among others the following decisions: Meritt v. Government of the Philippine Islands, 34 Phil. 311 (1916); Visayan Refining Co. v. Camus and Paredes, 40 Phil. 550 (1919); Director of Commerce and Industry v. Concepcion, 43 Phil. 384 (1922); Belleng v. Republic, G.R. No. L-19856, 16 September 1963, 9 SCRA 6; Republic v. Palacio, G.R. No. L-20322, 29 May 1968, 23 SCRA 899.

[24] Canas v. Castigador, G.R. No. 139844, 15 December 2000, 348 SCRA 425.

[25] Almojuela, Jr. v. Ringor, A.M. No. MTJ-04-1521, 27 July 2004, 435 SCRA 261; Lim v. Fineza, A.M. No. RTJ-02-1705, 05 May 2003, 402 SCRA 534.

[26] Jason v. Ygaña, A.M. RTJ-00-1543, 04 August 2000, 337 SCRA 264.

[27] Guillen v. Canon, A.M. No. MTJ-01-1382, 41 January 2002, 373 SCRA 70.

[28] Borja-Manzano v. Sanchez, A.M. No. MTJ-00-1329, 08 March 2001, 354 SCRA 1.

[29] Pesayco v. Layague, A.M. No. RTJ-04-1889, 22 December 2004, 447 SCRA 450.

[30] 28 years.

[31] A.M. No. MTJ-99-1231, 17 March 2004, 425 SCRA 588. In this case, respondent Judge was found guilty of gross ignorance of the law for failure to comply with the requirements of Section 1(a) of Rule 116, by failing to furnish complainants therein a copy of the information with the list of the witnesses and was meted a fine of P20,000.00.

[32] A.M. No. MTJ-95-1018, 18 April 1995, 243 SCRA 524. In this case, respondent Judge was found guilty of gross ignorance of the law when he granted bail solely on account of the voluntary surrender of the accused and was meted a fine of P20,000.00.

[33] Comia v. Antona, A.M. No. RTJ-99-1518, 14 August 2000, 337 SCRA 656.

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