

**PEOPLE OF THE PHILIPPINES, PLAINTIFF AND APPELLANT, VS.
VICTORIANO VILLANUEVA, DEFENDANT AND APPELLEE.***G.R. No. 15014. April 29, 1961*

Ponente: REYES, J.B.L., J.

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In Criminal Case No. 2801 of the Justice of the Peace Court of Batangas, Batangas, Victoriano Villanueva was accused of the crime of serious and less serious physical injuries with damage to property in the amount of P2,636.00 through reckless imprudence. After the accused had pleaded "not guilty" to the charge and before the hearing of the case, the private prosecutor filed a memorandum raising the question of the jurisdiction of the justice of the peace court to try the case on the ground that the amount of the fine imposable upon the accused, aside from the penalty for the physical injuries committed, is beyond the jurisdiction of the justice of the peace court. On the strength of this memorandum, the justice of the peace court issued an order on November 24, 1958 declaring itself without jurisdiction to try the case, and forwarding it to the Court of First Instance for further proceedings.

In the latter Court, a similar information was filed by the provincial fiscal against the accused. Before the arraignment of the accused, however, his counsel moved to quash the information on the ground that the court had no jurisdiction over the complex crime charged. Finding merit in the motion, the Court of First Instance, in an order dated January 21, 1959, declared itself without jurisdiction over the complex crime charged on the ground that the penalty for the more serious offense of physical injuries through reckless imprudence is only *arresto mayor* in its minimum and medium periods, and even applied in its maximum degree (for the complex crime), it would remain within the jurisdiction of the justice of the peace court. It, therefore, ordered the return of the case to the justice of the peace for trial on the merits. From this order, the provincial fiscal appealed to this Court.

We find the appeal well-taken, for this case comes squarely under the rule laid down by us in *Angeles, et al., vs. Jose*, 96 Phil., 151, 50 Off. Gaz. No. 12, 5764, wherein we held that:

"The above-quoted provision (Art. 365, par. 3, Revised Penal Code) simply means that if there is only damage to property the amount fixed therein shall be imposed, but if there are also physical injuries there should be an additional penalty for the latter. The information cannot be split into two; one for the physical injuries and another for the damage to property, for both the injuries and the damage committed were caused by one single act of the defendant and constitute what may be called a complex crime of physical injuries and damage to property. It is clear that the fine fixed by law in this case is beyond the jurisdiction of the municipal court and within that of the court of first instance."

Considering that it is the court of first instance that would undoubtedly have jurisdiction if the only offense that resulted from appellant's imprudence were the damage to property in the amount of P2,636.00, it would be absurd to hold that for the graver offense of serious and less serious physical injuries combined with damage to property through reckless imprudence, jurisdiction would lie in the justice of the peace court. The presumption is against absurdity, and it is the duty of the courts to interpret the law in such a way as to avoid absurd results. Our system

of apportionment of criminal jurisdictions among the various trial courts proceeds on the basic theory that crimes cognizable by the Courts of First Instance are more serious than those triable in justice of the peace or municipal courts.

Moreover, we cannot discard the possibility that the prosecution may not be able to prove all the supposed offenses constituting the complex crime charged. Were we to hold that it is the justice of the peace court that has jurisdiction in this case, if later the prosecution should fail to prove the physical injuries aspect of the case and establish only the damage to property in the amount of P2,636.00, the inferior court would find itself without jurisdiction to impose the fine for the damage to property committed, since such line can not be less than the amount of the damage. Again, it is to avoid this further absurdity that we must hold that the jurisdiction lies in the court of first instance in this case.

Wherefore, the order appealed from is reversed, and the records are remanded to the court a quo for trial on the merits.

Bengzon, C.J., Padilla, Bautista Angelo, Labrador, Concepcion, Barrera, Paredes, and Dizon, JJ., concur.

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