

PEOPLE OF THE PHILIPPINES PLAINTIFF-APPELLEE, VS. KRISTIAN SINGH Y MONTEMAYOR, CICL1, CICL2, AND CICL3, ACCUSED,

G.R. No. 270284-, April 14, 2026

Ponente: DIMAAMPAO, J.

Read online (full-text search, related cases, audio case brief): <https://batas.org/library/g-r-no-270284/>

DIMAAMPAO, J.:

The present Appeal[1] has its precursor in the Decision[2] of the Court of Appeals (CA) in CA-G.R. CR-HC No. 15836, which sustained the conviction of Kristian Singh y Montemayor (Singh) for carnapping under Section 3 of Republic Act No. 10883.[3]

Information

Through the Information dated January 22, 2020, docketed before the Regional Trial Court (RTC) as Criminal Case No. L-13052, Singh and his co-accused, CICL1, CICL2, and CICL3, were indicted for carnapping under Republic Act No. 10883, ostensibly committed as follows:

[]That sometime in the morning of January 20, 2020 in , , Pangasinan and within the jurisdiction of this Honorable Court, the above-named accused including the three (3) minors who acted with discernment, in conspiracy with each other, did, then and there, willfully and unlawfully take with intent to gain the Rusi 150 motorcycle with engine number FR162FMJK4N090716 [sic] and chassis number RFCPCKXJKRB090716 [sic] belonging to JENNIFER L. VILLACORTA without her consent, to her damage and prejudice.[]

Contrary to Section 3 of [Republic Act] No. 10883, The New Anti-Carnapping Law of the Philippines.[4]

Arraigned on January 29, 2020, Singh pled not guilty.[5] On the other hand, CICL1 (aged 17), CICL2 (aged 16), and CICL3 (aged 15)[6] entered similar pleas of guilty.[7] Accordingly, the three children in conflict with the law (CICL) were sentenced in this wise:

As to the three (3) CICL, they shall be accordingly sentenced.

Considering that [CICL1], [CICL2], and [CICL3] entered pleas of "guilty" during their arraignment, they are entitled to the mitigating circumstance of voluntary plea of "guilty" and the privileged mitigating circumstance of minority, and they are each sentenced to suffer the penalty of imprisonment of 20 years and 1 day, as minimum, to 21 years, as maximum.

Considering the minority of the three (3) CICL, they are entitled to automatic suspension of their sentence as provided in Section 38 of [Republic Act No.] 9344.

Accordingly, they shall be committed to the custody of the Center Head of Regional Rehabilitation Center for Youth in Urayong, Bauang, La Union.

The Center Head or the Social Welfare Officer-in-Charge of the three (3) CICL are directed to submit quarterly progress reports on the behavior of the three (3) CICL.[8]

During pre-trial, the prosecution and the defense stipulated on the identity of Singh.[9] Forthwith, trial on the

merits ensued.

Version of the Prosecution

The subject of the present case is a red RUSI motorcycle with engine number RF162FMJK4N090716 and chassis number RFCPCKXJXKB090716, owned by Jennifer L. Villacorta (Villacorta).[10]

On January 20, 2020, at around 7:05 a.m., Villacorta was roused from her sleep by her mother, Zorayda B. Liquiran[11] (Liquiran), to ask where her motorcycle was. She replied that she last saw it at 3 a.m. near the carnival rides in Barangay , , Pangasinan, where her nephew parked it. Villacorta and Liquiran set out to search for the vehicle. However, their efforts proved futile. They then headed towards the barangay hall to divulge the loss, but it was closed.[12]

At around 11:45 a.m., Villacorta and Liquiran went to the Police Station to report the missing motorcycle. Acting on the said information, the police officers conducted a follow-up investigation.[13] Thereupon, they received a tip from a confidential informant that a motorbike was being dismantled in Barangay , , Pangasinan, which was about 500 to 700 meters away from the police station.[14]

In the afternoon of the same day, Police Staff Sergeant (PSSg) Scepter E. Aguinaldo (PSSg Aguinaldo) and PSSg Jimwell N. Cortez, accompanied by Villacorta and Liquiran, proceeded to Barangay . Upon reaching the residential area, they saw a motorcycle being disassembled by four individuals—later identified as Singh and the three CICLs—in front of one of the houses inside a compound. After confirming that the engine number and chassis number of the motorbike being taken apart matched those of Villacorta's based on the certification[15] issued under her name, the law enforcement agents apprised Singh and his co-accused of their constitutional rights before placing them under arrest. They also took photographs[16] of the vehicle at the scene.[17]

Version of the Defense

Singh attested that he is friends with CICL1, CICL2, and CICL3.[18]

On January 20, 2020, he was at his girlfriend's place in Barangay ,[19] , Pangasinan when CICL1 called and asked him if he could go with him to his partner's residence in Barangay . They agreed to meet at Singh's abode in Barangay .[20]

Once Singh reached his home, he saw CICL1 looking at a RUSI motorcycle with no spare parts and accessories owned by the latter's cousin. They left the vehicle outside Singh's dwelling as it was inoperable, and proceeded to the address of CICL1's girlfriend using Singh's own motorbike.[21]

After arriving at the house of CICL1's girlfriend, Singh fell asleep on a hammock. At around 1 p.m., CICL1's girlfriend woke him up and told him to fetch CICL1 from Barangay . Along the way, Singh encountered CICL1 aboard a police car. Thereafter, Singh was flagged down by the police and commanded to get into their vehicle as he was suspected of stealing a motorcycle together with CICL1. Once additional police officers arrived, they set forth towards Barangay . Eventually, Singh and CICL1 were brought back to the former's house. The police officers then impounded the motorbike left there by CICL1.[22]

Singh averred that he got angry with CICL1 upon learning that the motorcycle was stolen. Yet, CICL1 implicated CICL2 and CICL3. At that time, CICL2 was already surrendered by his parents to the authorities. Thus, upon taking photographs of the subject vehicle at Singh's place, they fetched CICL2 from the police station before picking up CICL3 from his parents' stall at the town plaza. In due course, Singh and the three CICL were detained.[23]

Lastly, Singh insisted that the three CICLs admitted their involvement in the illegal taking of the motorcycle.[24]

For his part, CICL1 professed that he stole Villacorta's motorcycle by himself. He only asked for help from Singh, CICL2, and CICL3 in fixing it. Along the way, he told his friends that he owned the vehicle.[25]

Ruling of the RTC

After weighing the divergent evidence proffered by the prosecution and the defense, the RTC rendered the Decision[26] in Criminal Case No. L-13052, adjudging Singh guilty beyond reasonable doubt of carnapping, viz.:

WHEREFORE, in view of the foregoing, this court finds accused [Singh] GUILTY beyond reasonable doubt of the crime of carnapping under Section 3 of [Republic Act] No. 10883, otherwise known as the "New Anti-Carnapping Act of 2016," and he is hereby sentenced to suffer the penalty of imprisonment for twenty (20) years and one (1) day, as minimum, to twenty-three (23) years, as maximum.

SO ORDERED.[27] (Emphasis in the original)

The RTC ruled that all the elements of the offense were duly proven by the prosecution. While Villacorta did not see who and how her motorcycle was taken, CICL1 himself claimed that he took it on his own. Still, the RTC deduced that he acted in confederation with Singh, CICL2, and CICL3. On this score, the fact that Singh and the three CICL were caught red-handed disassembling the subject vehicle gave rise to the disputable presumption that they were the ones who took it, pursuant to Rule 131, Section 3(j) of the Rules of Court. The defense faltered in its attempt to override this presumption, as the testimonies of Singh and CICL1 were not only riddled with inconsistencies, but were also unsubstantiated by independent witnesses. In light of Singh's weak denial, as well as his failure to adequately explain his participation in the act of dismantling Villacorta's motorcycle, the RTC concluded that his conviction for carnapping was proper.[28]

Ruling of the CA

Unflustered, Singh interposed an appeal before the CA.[29] He maintained that the RTC blundered in convicting him of carnapping on the following grounds:

First. Singh asserted that his warrantless arrest and the resulting search were invalid. For one, the arresting officers had no personal knowledge of the fact of the commission of the offense and had to rely on a tip from a confidential informant. Even Villacorta herself had no inkling who actually took her motorbike. For another, PSSg Aguinaldo revealed that Singh's house cannot be viewed from the outside since it is enclosed by a concrete fence.[30]

Second. The prosecution was unable to demonstrate that Singh conspired with the three CICLs. In this regard, Singh pointed to CICL1's attestation in open court that he alone took Villacorta's motorcycle, and that he led Singh, CICL2, and CICL3 to believe that the said vehicle was his. Besides, the prosecution failed to establish any overt act of taking on Singh's part.[31]

Moreover, the RTC's reliance on the disputable presumption under Rule 131, Section 3(j) of the Rules of Court was misplaced, as CICL1 already explained how the vehicle ended up at Singh's dwelling.[32]

Third. Singh asseverated that Villacorta had no legal personality to institute criminal proceedings against him, considering that she was not authorized by the Board of Directors of Luzon Ramcycles, Inc.—the company which leased her the subject motorcycle—to do so.[33]

Via the repugned Decision, the CA denied Singh's appeal in this wise:

WHEREFORE, the trial court's Decision dated June 23, 2021 convicting accused-appellant [Singh] of carnapping under Section 3, [Republic Act] No. 10883 is affirmed.

SO ORDERED.[34] (Emphasis in the original)

The CA held that both requisites of a hot pursuit arrest under Rule 113, Section 5(b) of the Revised Rules on Criminal Procedure were present. The arresting officers obtained knowledge that a crime had just been committed, and they acted upon such information until they found the missing motorcycle and apprehended Singh and the three CICLs who were in possession thereof. In the same vein, the subsequent search fell under the plain view doctrine, since the arresting officers personally saw Singh and the three CICLs in the act of dismantling the subject vehicle.[35]

Further, the CA elucidated that Singh's overt acts of having Villacorta's motorcycle outside his home, as well as disassembling it together with the three CICLs, bolster the theory that they connived to steal the said vehicle. In this context, Singh failed to overturn the presumption of regularity in favor of the arresting officers with clear and convincing evidence that they did not properly perform their duties or that they were driven by improper motive.[36]

Lastly, the CA brushed aside Singh's assertion that Villacorta had no legal personality to lodge the criminal suit against him. The certificate of registration of the subject motorcycle under Villacorta's name created a strong presumption of ownership in her favor, which remained uncontroverted.[37]

Present Appeal

Unyielding, Singh now seeks refuge before the Court.[38] Both Singh and the People of the Philippines, through the Office of the Solicitor General, manifested their intent to adopt the contentions in their respective appeal briefs and forgo the submission of supplemental briefs.[39]

Issue

Did the CA commit a serious reversible error when it upheld Singh's conviction for carnapping under Republic Act. No. 10883?

Ruling of the Court

The Court resolves the above query in the positive. Perforce, Singh's acquittal is in order.

Prefatorily, it is axiomatic that an appeal in a criminal case throws it wide open for review in all its aspects. It vests the reviewing tribunal with full jurisdiction over the case, thereby rendering it competent to examine the records, revise the decision appealed from, modify the penalty, and cite the correct provision of the penal statute.[40]

Upon perspicacious evaluation of the records of this case, the Court rules and so holds that the prosecution failed to discharge its burden of proving Singh's guilt beyond reasonable doubt.[41]

Section 3 of Republic Act No. 10883 proscribes carnapping, defined as the "taking, with intent to gain, of a motor vehicle belonging to another without the latter's consent, or by means of violence against or intimidation of persons, or by using force upon things." Necessarily, the following elements of the offense must concur:

- The taking of a motor vehicle which belongs to another;
- The taking is without the consent of the owner or by means of violence against or intimidation of persons or by using force upon things; and
- The taking is done with intent to gain.[42] (Citation omitted)

In the present case, it bears emphasis that there is no eyewitness to the actual taking of the subject motorcycle—

[Jennifer Villacorta, on direct examination]

[Pros. Rivera:]

Q

How many of them were brought to the police station?

A

Four (4), ma'am.

Q

Have you known these persons prior to the time that you saw them at the house where the motorcycle was found?

A

No, ma'am.[43] (Emphasis supplied)

[Jennifer Villacorta, on cross-examination]

[Atty. Tugade:]

Q

And you only knew that it was missing when your mother woke you up?

A

Yes, sir, I was awakened by my mother when I was sleeping together with my nephew.

Q

And at that time you did not know who got your motorcycle, correct?

A

Yes, sir.

Q

And you did not also know how it was stole [sic] because you did not notice anything unusual before you learned that your motorcycle was missing?

A

Yes, sir.

....

Q

So they just called you that they found the motorcycle in ?

A

Yes, sir.

Q

You went with them together with your mother?

A

Yes, sir.

Q

You did not know how the motorcycle arrived there, correct?

A

Yes, sir.

Q

You also do not know who took the motorcycle to that place, correct?

A

Yes, sir.

....

Q

And they brought you to identify the motorcycle, if it was yours, correct?

A

Yes, sir.

Q

And four (4) persons were with them?

A

Yes, sir.

Q

And they already told you that they were the suspects who took the motorcycle, correct?

A

Yes, sir.

Q

But before that, you did not see any of them?

A

Yes, sir.[44] (Emphasis supplied)

[PSSg Scepter E. Aguinaldo, on cross-examination]

Atty. Tugade[:]

Q

Mister Witness, in the report by one Jennifer Villacorta, she does not also know who took her motorcycle, correct?

A

Yes, sir.

....

Q

Did you also come to know that before the motorcycle was lost, it was in the possession of someone, correct?

A

She reported at the police station first, and entered the incident in the blotter, that on January 19, her motorcycle was lost when she left it unattended at the plaza.

Q

And so that she was not able to tell you how, when, and who the alleged person who took her motorcycle, correct?

A

Yes, sir.[45] (Emphasis supplied)

Meanwhile, PSSg Aguinaldo avouched that he witnessed Singh and the three CICLs disassembling the subject vehicle outside Singh's residence in Barangay :

[Pros. Rivera:]

Q

When you arrived thereat, what did you see?

A

When we proceeded to that area, together with the witness, we saw four (4) persons dismantling a motorcycle, ma'am.

Q

Did you come to know the names of these male persons?

A

Not yet, ma'am.

Q

Did you ever come to know their names?

A

We later learned when they identified themselves, ma'am.

Q

Could you please tell the names of the persons who identified themselves that you saw?

A

Yes, ma'am.

Q

Who were they?

A

They were [Singh] and [CICL1], and the other two (2) were held by my co-corresponder, [sic] ma'am.[46]

Thence, the CA treated the circumstance that Singh was seen dismantling Villacorta's motorcycle together with the three CICLs at his address as an overt act of criminal conspiracy. Additionally, the CA ingeminated the RTC's application of the disputable presumption that a person found in possession of a thing taken in the doing of a recent wrongful act is the taker and doer of the whole act.[47]

Indeed, the disputable presumption under Rule 131, Section 3(j) of the Rules of Court, as amended, applies equally to theft, robbery, and carnapping alike,[48] the concept of unlawful taking in these offenses being the same.[49] Still and all, it is jurisprudentially settled that this presumption holds true only where the possession is either unexplained, or that the proffered justification for such possession is rendered implausible by independent evidence inconsistent therewith.[50]

Here, Singh avowed that it was CICL1 who left Villacorta's motorcycle at his place:

[Atty. Tugade:]

Q

What was he doing at that time when you arrived to meet him in your house in Brgy. before going to the house of his girlfriend?

A

He was looking at the motorcycle that he parked sir[.]

Q

You mean to say that when you arrived in your house, [CICL1] has a motorcycle?

A

Yes sir[.]

Q

What kind of motorcycle does he have at that time when you met him in your house?

A

Rusi sir[.]

Q

Could you describe the condition of the motorcycle at that time when you arrived?

A

It has no spare parts and no accessories sir[.]

Q

Considering that [CICL1] has a motorcycle with him, why did he ask you to accompany him in going to the house of his girlfriend?

A

Because the motorcycle that he brought will not start sir[.]

Q

What did you do with that motorcycle that he brought before going to the house of the girlfriend?

A

We left it in my house in Brgy. , sir[.][51] (Emphasis supplied)

Singh's account was materially corroborated by CICL1's testimony. In so doing, CICL1 categorically and consistently took sole responsibility for the taking of the subject vehicle:

[CICL1, on direct examination]

[Atty. Tugade:]

Q

Mister witness you admitted the carnapping case by taking a certain motorcycle, do you still maintain that?

A

Yes sir[.]

Q

Could you please tell us mister witness, who were with you when you took this motorcycle?

A

Actually it was only me, and the other three (3) were just included, I only called them in the house of Kristian Singh to help me fix the motorcycle sir[.]

Q

Could you please tell us, where did you take that motorcycle?

A

At the plaza sir[.]

Q

After taking the motorcycle, where did you bring it?

A

In our house sir[.]

Q

After bringing the motorcycle in your house, what did you do with it?

A

I dismantled it sir[.]

Q

After dismantling it what did you do with it?

A

I went to the house of [Singh] to have the motorcycle get started again sir[.]

Q

Before going there what did you tell him?

A

For him to help me start the motorcycle sir[.]

Q

Were you able to start it again?

A

No sir[.]

Q

Which you and [Singh] were not able to start the motorcycle, what did you do?

A

I hid it at the back of their house sir[.]

Q

By the way, did you tell [Singh] who owns that motorcycle?

A

No I told him that it is mine sir[.]

Q

When you were not able to start the motorcycle with [Singh], what did you do if any?

A

Nothing else, I left the motorcycle in their house and I did not mind about it anymore sir[.][52] (Emphasis supplied)

....

Q

You are affirming that this [Singh], [CICL3,] and [CICL2] has nothing to do with the taking of the motorcycle?

A

Yes sir[.]

....

Q

Did you tell [CICL2], [CICL3,] and [Singh] who owns that motorcycle while you were trying to start the motorcycle?

A

No I just told them that I own it sir.[.][53] (Emphasis supplied)

[CICL1, on cross-examination]

[Pros. Rivera:]

Q

It was only you who took the motorcycle?

A

Yes mam[.][54] (Emphasis supplied)

Singh's clarification as to how Villacorta's motorcycle ended up at his house is concededly far from flawless. All the same, it behooved the prosecution to adduce evidence that would make such explanation untenable:

Though the explanation is not seamless, once the explanation is made for the possession, the presumption arising from the unexplained possession may not anymore be invoked, and the burden shifts once more to the prosecution to produce evidence that would render the defense of the accused improbable.[55] (Emphasis supplied)

Regrettably, not a tinge of evidence was ever presented by the prosecution to satisfy the abovementioned evidentiary burden. Worse, the CA merely echoed the RTC's reasoning that Villacorta's motorbike only reached Singh's abode through the concerted efforts of Singh and the three CICLs,[56] without even taking into account CICL1's explication that he sought the help of a tricycle driver to tow the said vehicle.[57]

Plain as day, the disputable presumption under Rule 131, Section 3G) of the Rules of Court, as amended, is inoperative in the case at bench—

Evidently, the disputable presumption cannot prevail over accused-appellant's explanation for his possession of the missing vehicle. The possession having been explained, the legal presumption is disputed and thus, cannot find application in the instant case. To hold otherwise would be a miscarriage of justice as criminal convictions necessarily require proof of guilt of the crime charged beyond reasonable doubt and in the absence of such proof, should not be solely based on legal disputable presumptions.[58] (Emphasis supplied)

Once again, it bears noting that there is no eyewitness account of the subject incident in the present case. The only circumstance tying Singh to the crime is being caught by the arresting officers in the act of dismantling Villacorta's motorcycle together with the three CICLs. Inasmuch as CICL1 already owned up to seizing Villacorta's motorbike, it is ineludible that the prosecution's body of evidence is woefully inadequate to support Singh's conviction.

Anent the criminal liability of the three CICLs, only the conviction of CICL1 is sustained, as will be expounded below.

The seminal case of *CICL XXX v. People*[59] introduced the following guidelines in determining whether a CICL acted with discernment:

- Discernment is the capacity of the child at the time of the commission of the offense to understand the difference between right and wrong and the consequences of the wrongful act.

- The task of ascertaining discernment is undertaken preliminarily by a social worker, and finally by the court. The determination of discernment shall take into account the ability of a child to understand the moral and psychological components of criminal responsibility and the consequences of the wrongful act; and whether a child can be held responsible for essentially antisocial behavior. The assessment of a social worker is merely evidentiary and is not binding upon the court. Ultimately, the court finally determines discernment, based on its own appreciation of all the facts and circumstances in each case.

- In our jurisdiction, there is no presumption that a minor acts with discernment. The prosecution must specifically prove as a separate circumstance that the alleged crime was committed with discernment. For a minor at such an age to be criminally liable, the prosecution is burdened to prove beyond reasonable doubt, by direct or circumstantial evidence, that [they] acted with discernment.

- In determining discernment, courts shall consider the totality of facts and circumstances in each case. Such circumstances include, but are not limited to: (i) the very appearance, the very attitude, the very comportment and behavior of said minor, not only before and during the commission of the act, but also after and even during trial, (ii) the gruesome nature of the crime, (iii) the minor's cunning and shrewdness, (iv) the utterances of the minor, (v) [their] overt acts before, during[,] and after the commission of the crime, (vi) the nature of the weapon used, (vii) [their] attempt to silence a witness, and (viii) [their] disposal of evidence or [their] hiding the corpus delicti.[60] (Emphasis supplied, citations omitted)

Here, the Municipal Social Welfare and Development Office certified that all the three CICLs-CICL1, CICL2, and CICL3—acted with discernment.[61] Subsequently, they pled guilty to the charge of carnapping. Upon this point, Section 41 of the 2019 Supreme Court Revised Rule on Children in Conflict with the Law[62] provides:

Arraignment and Plea. – The provisions of Rules 116 and 117 of the Revised Rules of Criminal Procedure shall apply to the arraignment of the child in conflict with the law. The arraignment shall be scheduled within three (3) days from the date of receipt of the complaint or [i]nformation by the court, unless a shorter period is provided for by law. In case the child is not assisted by a private counsel, the court shall immediately appoint its Public Attorney as the child's counsel de oficio.

Arraignment shall be held in chambers and conducted by the judge by furnishing the child and counsel a copy of the complaint or [i]nformation, reading the same in a language or dialect known to and understood by the child, explaining the nature and consequences of a plea of guilty or not guilty and asking the child's plea. (Emphasis supplied)

Parenthetically, Rule 116, Section 4 of the Revised Rules of Criminal Procedure governs a plea of guilty in a criminal case involving a non-capital offense, such as carnapping sans any modifying circumstances:

Plea of guilty to non-capital offense; reception of evidence, discretionary. — When the accused pleads guilty to a non-capital offense, the court may receive evidence from the parties to determine the penalty to be imposed. (Emphasis supplied)

As adumbrated above, CICL1 shouldered full responsibility for the unlawful taking of Villacorta's motorcycle. Notably, the prosecution, the defense, and the RTC were all able to propound questions concerning discernment to CICL1 in open court, thusly:

[CICL1, on direct examination]

[Atty. Tugade:]

Q

After telling the officer that the motorcycle was left at the house of [Singh], what else happened?

A

They told me where are my other companions and [i]f I tell them who were they, [sic] they will release me sir[.]

Q

What was your reply to them?

A

I told the names of [Singh], [CICL2], and [CICL3] sir[.]

Q

Why did you tell their names when according to you, it was only you who took the motorcycle at the plaza?

A

Because since I asked them to accompany me to fix the motorcycle and we were not able to fix it, that is the time I was feeling afraid already, that is why I told them their names sir[.][63] (Emphasis supplied)

[CICL1, on cross-examination]

[Pros. Rivera:]

Q

Mister witness, when the policemen arrested you because of this motorcycle which you now admit to have [sic] taken, did you not inform the policemen or at least tell them honestly that you were the only person who took that motorcycle?

A

I told them but they said that I must not fool them mam[.]

Q

If you dragged three (3) innocent persons as you claimed in this case, how do you feel about it now?

A

I feel bad mam[.][64] (Emphasis supplied)

[CICL1, on questioning from the RTC]

Q

From the time that you took the motorcycle from the plaza and used it in going to your house, the motorcycle was at that time in good running condition correct?

A

Yes mam[.]

Q

Then, why did you dismantle it?

A

So that they will not recognize it mam[.][65] (Emphasis supplied)

Invariably, CICL1's answers demonstrate that he is not only capable of telling apart what is right from what is wrong, but he is also aware of the consequences of his deeds. Ergo, CICL1 carried out the carnapping with discernment.

The same cannot be said of CICL2 and CICL3.

While the reception of evidence in cases where the accused pleads guilty to a non-capital offense remains discretionary on the part of the RTC under Rule 116, Section 4 of the Revised Rules of Criminal Procedure, the prevailing framework on criminal cases involving children in conflict with the law under Republic Act No. 9344,[66] as amended by Republic Act No. 10630,[67] together with the 2019 Supreme Court Revised Rule on Children in Conflict with the Law, as encapsulated in CICL XXX, dictates that discernment be separately established beyond reasonable doubt.

Significantly, the prosecution in this case neglected to specifically prove that CICL2 and CICL3 acted with discernment. Such lapse led to a vacuum in the evidence, engendering reasonable doubt as to their culpability. As a result, CICL2 and CICL3 must be absolved.

In synthesis, Singh, CICL2, and CICL3's exoneration from the charge of carnapping under Republic Act No. 10883 is warranted on the ground of reasonable doubt. Withal, the Court discerns no compelling reason to tackle the other issues raised by Singh, such as the validity of his warrantless arrest, as well as Villacorta's legal personality to file a criminal case against him.

The Court now reckons with the appropriate penalty against CICL1.

Under Section 3 of Republic Act No. 10883, carnapping is punishable by imprisonment of not less than 20 years and one day, but not more than 30 years, when it is committed without violence against or intimidation of persons, or force upon things. In fealty to Section 1 of the Indeterminate Sentence Law,[68] if the offense is sanctioned by a special penal law, the court shall impose a prison term, the minimum of which shall not be less than the minimum term provided by law, and the maximum of which shall not exceed the maximum term fixed by law.

In the present case, the RTC sentenced CICL1 to suffer the sentence of 20 years and one day as minimum, to 21 years as maximum. Considering that such sentence falls within the range of the imposable penalty provided by statute, the CA did not err in affirming the same.

Likewise, CICL1 is no longer entitled to the suspension of his sentence under Section 38 of Republic Act No. 9344, as the same may only be suspended until the offender has reached 21 years of age, following Section 40 of the same law.[69]

At any rate, CICL1 may enjoy the benefits of Section 51 of Republic Act No. 9344, which reads:

Confinement of Convicted Children in Agricultural Camps and Other Training Facilities. – A child in conflict with the law may, after conviction and upon order of the court, be made to serve his/her sentence, in lieu of confinement in a regular penal institution, in an agricultural camp and other training facilities that may be established, maintained, supervised and controlled by the [Bureau of Corrections], in coordination with the [Department of Social Welfare and Development].

In *People v. CICL XXX265302*,[70] the Court had occasion to elucidate that Section 51 applies so long as the offender committed the offense when he or she was still of tender age.[71]

FOR THESE REASONS, the Appeal is GRANTED. The March 7, 2023 Decision of the Court of Appeals in

CA-G.R. CR-HC No. 15836 is REVERSED and SET ASIDE.

Accused-appellant Kristian Singh y Montemayor is ACQUITTED of carnapping under Section 3 of Republic Act No. 10883 in Criminal Case No. L-13052 before Branch , Regional Trial Court, , Pangasinan, on the ground of reasonable doubt. He is ORDERED IMMEDIATELY RELEASED from detention, unless he is being confined for any other lawful cause.

Accused CICL1 is found GUILTY beyond reasonable doubt of carnapping under Section 3 of Republic Act No. 10883 in Criminal Case No. L-13052 before Branch , Regional Trial Court, , Pangasinan. He is SENTENCED to suffer the penalty of 20 years and one day to 21 years of imprisonment.

Criminal Case No. L-13052 before Branch , Regional Trial Court, , Pangasinan is DISMISSED as against accused CICL2, and CICL3 on the ground of reasonable doubt. They are ORDERED IMMEDIATELY RELEASED from the custody of the Regional Rehabilitation Center for Youth, Bauang, La Union, unless they are being held for any other lawful cause.

The case is REMANDED to Branch , Regional Trial Court, , Pangasinan, for proper disposition in accordance with Section 51 of Republic Act No. 9344.

Let copies of this Decision be FURNISHED to the following:

- The Director General of the Bureau of Corrections, Muntinlupa City, for immediate implementation. Furthermore, the said Director General is DIRECTED to REPORT to this Court, within five days from receipt of this Decision, the action taken in compliance with this order.
- The Chief of the Philippine National Police for their information;
- The appropriate local social welfare and development officer for immediate implementation pursuant to the provisions of Republic Act No. 9344, as amended by Republic Act No. 10630, as well as the 2019 Supreme Court Revised Rule on Children in Conflict with the Law. The local social welfare and development officer is DIRECTED to REPORT to this Court, within five days from receipt of this Decision, the action taken in compliance with this order; and
- The Executive Director of the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Council for their information.

Finally, let entry of judgment with respect to accused-appellant Kristian Singh y Montemayor, and accused CICL2 and CICL3 be ISSUED IMMEDIATELY.

SO ORDERED."

Caguioa (Chairperson), Inting, and Gaerlan, JJ., concur.
Singh,[-] J., on leave.

[*] Not related to Associate Justice Maria Filomena D. Singh.

[-] The identity of the victims or any information which could establish or compromise their identities, as well as those of their immediate family or household members, shall be withheld pursuant to Amended Administrative Circular No. 83-2015, entitled: Protocols and Procedures in the Promulgation, Publication and Posting on the Websites of Decisions, Final Resolutions, and Final Orders Using Fictitious Names/Personal Circumstances dated September 5, 2017.

[--] On leave.

[1] CA rollo, pp. 152-154.

[2] Id. at 113-131. The March 7, 2023 Decision was penned by Associate Justice Fernanda Lampas Peralta, with the concurrence of Associate Justices Rafael Antonio M. Santos and Lorenza R. Bordios of the Second Division, Court of Appeals, Manila.

[3] New Anti-Carnapping Act of 2016.

[4] RTC records, p. 1.

[5] Id. at 51, Certificate of Arraignment.

[6] Id. at 26-28, Certificates of Live Birth.

[7] Id. at 52-54, Certificates of Arraignment.

[8] Id. at 59, Pre-Trial Order.

[9] Id. at 58.

[10] Id. at 19, Certification.

[11] Spelled as Zoraida in other portions of the records.

[12] See TSN, Jennifer Villacorta, June 8, 2020, pp. 8-10.

[13] RTC records, p. 20, Police Blotter Report.

[14] See TSN, Jennifer Villacorta, June 8, 2020, pp. 10-11; TSN, PSSg Scepter Aguinaldo, August 19, 2020, pp. 3-4.

[15] RTC records, p. 19.

[16] Id. at 22.

[17] See TSN, Jennifer Villacorta, June 8, 2020, pp. 11-16; TSN, PSSg Scepter Aguinaldo, August 19, 2020, pp. 4-6, 9-11, 24-26.

[18] See TSN, Kristian Singh, November 24, 2020, p. 4.

[19] Erroneously spelled as Buwaya in other portions of the records.

[20] See TSN, Kristian Singh, November 24, 2020, pp. 5-7.

[21] Id. at 7-8, 11, 14, 18.

[22] Id. at 8-13.

[23] Id. at 14-16, 19.

[24] Id. at 20-21.

[25] See TSN, CICL1, March 29, 2021, pp. 4-5, 10-12.

[26] RTC records, pp. 302-315. The June 23, 2021 Decision was penned by Presiding Judge Maria Laarni R. Parayno of Branch , Regional Trial Court, , Pangasinan.

[27] Id. at 315.

[28] Id. at 311-315.

[29] Id. at 321, Notice of Appeal.

[30] CA rollo, pp. 43-47, Brief for the Accused-Appellant.

[31] Id. at 47-48.

[32] Id. at 48.

[33] Id. at 48-49.

[34] Id. at 130-131.

[35] Id. at 121-122.

[36] Id. at 128.

[37] Id. at 128-129.

[38] Id. at 152-153, Notice of Appeal with Compliance.

[39] Rollo, pp. 48-50, Manifestation [In Lieu of Supplemental Brief] filed by the Office of the Solicitor General; temporary rollo, pp. 1-2, Manifestation (In Lieu of Supplemental Brief) filed by Singh. See also CA rollo, pp. 86-108, Brief for the Plaintiff-Appellee; 38-51, Brief for the Accused-Appellant.

[40] See XXX v. People, G.R. No. 240385, October 8, 2025 [Per J. Hernando, First Division] at 9. This pinpoint citation refers to the copy of the Decision uploaded to the Supreme Court website. (Citations omitted)

[41] RULES OF COURT, Rule 133, sec. 2, as amended by A.M. No. 19-08-15-SC, October 8, 2019.

[42] People v. Akil, G.R. No. 265570, April 7, 2025 [Per J. Gaerlan, Third Division] at 6. This pinpoint citation refers to the copy of the Decision uploaded to the Supreme Court website.

[43] TSN, Jennifer Villacorta, June 8, 2020, pp. 15-16.

[44] Id. at 24-26.

[45] TSN, PSSg Scepter Aguinaldo, August 19, 2020, pp. 14-15.

[46] Id. at 4-5.

[47] CA rollo, pp. 128-129.

[48] See Tumog v. People of the Philippines, 948 Phil. 442, 450 (2023) [Per J. Dimaampao, Third Division]. (Citation omitted)

[49] See People v. Donio, 806 Phil. 578, 592 (2017) [Per J. Peralta, Second Division]. (Citation omitted)

[50] See Panaligan v. Phyvita Enterprises Corporation, 811 Phil. 465, 482 (2017) [Per J. Leonardo-De Castro, First Division]. (Citation omitted)

[51] TSN, Kristian Singh, November 24, 2020, pp. 7-8.

[52] TSN, CICAL1, March 29, 2021, pp. 4-6.

[53] Id. at 11-12.

[54] Id. at 14.

[55] *People v. Urzais*, 784 Phil. 561, 575 (2016) [Per J. Perez, Third Division].

[56] CA rollo, pp. 129-130.

[57] See TSN, CICL1, March 29, 2021, p. 15.

[58] *People v. Urzais*, 784 Phil. 561, 578 (2016) [Per J. Perez, Third Division].

[59] 938 Phil. 32 (2023) [Per J. Zalameda, En Banc].

[60] Id. at 59-60.

[61] RTC records, pp. 23-25, Certifications.

[62] A.M. No. 02-1-18-SC, January 22, 2019.

[63] TSN, CICL1, March 29, 2021, p. 10.

[64] Id. at 17.

[65] Id. at 19-20.

[66] Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act of 2006.

[67] An Act Strengthening the Juvenile Justice System in the Philippines, Amending for the Purpose Republic Act No. 9344, otherwise known as the "Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act of 2006" and Appropriating Funds Therefor (2013).

[68] Act No. 4103 (1933).

[69] See CICL XXX v. *People*, 938 Phil. 32, 58 (2023) [Per J. Zalameda, En Banc]. (Citation omitted)

[70] G.R. No. 265302, April 2, 2025 [Per J. M. Lopez, En Banc].

[71] See id. at 22. This pinpoint citation refers to the copy of the Decision uploaded to the Supreme Court website. (Citation omitted)

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.