

PEOPLE OF THE PHILIPPINES, PLAINTIFF-APPELLEE, VS. YOLANDA G. BAYLON AND RAFAEL D. ESTEBAN, ACCUSED-APPELLANTS.

G.R. No. 270579, January 22, 2026

Ponente: SINGH, J.

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SINGH, J.:

Before this Court is an appeal from the Court of Appeals' (CA) Decision,[1] dated March 17, 2023, in CA G.R. CR-HC No. 15143. The CA affirmed with modification the Decision,[2] dated January 9, 2020, in Criminal Case No. 152144, of the Regional Trial Court (RTC), Branch 163, Taguig City, which convicted Yolanda G. Baylon (Yolanda) and Rafael D. Esteban (Rafael) of Qualified Trafficking in Persons under Republic Act No. 9208, as amended by Republic Act No. 10364.

The Facts

Yolanda and Rafael were each indicted for violation of Section 4 (a), in relation to Sections 6 (a) and (c), of Republic Act No. 9208, as amended by Republic Act No. 10364 under the following Information:

That on September 3, 2013, in Taguig City, and within the jurisdiction of this Honorable Court, the above-named accused conspiring and confederating and mutually helping one another, did then and there, knowingly, willfully, unlawfully, feloniously, for the purpose of exploitation, such as prostitution, and other forms of sexual exploitation, recruit, hire[,] and pimp AAA270579,[*] [16] years old; BBB270579[*] [16] years old; CCC270579[*] [15] years old; and DDD270579[*] [15] years old, for the purpose of engaging in lascivious conduct and sexual intercourse with male foreign customers for a fee with the end in view of soliciting sex and promoting prostitution, to the damage and prejudice of said victims.

That the crime was attended by the [] aggravating circumstance of minority, complainants, being minors, to wit: AAA270579, [16] years old; BBB270579 [16] years old; CCC270579 [15] years old; and DDD270579 [15] years old[,] and that the crime was committed in large scale since there were more than three[] victims.

CONTRARY TO LAW.[3] (Emphasis in the original)

During arraignment, Yolanda and Rafael pleaded "Not Guilty" to the offense. After the Pre-Trial Conference was terminated, trial ensued.[4]

Version of the Prosecution

The prosecution presented AAA270579, BBB270579, CCC270579, DDD270579, Police Chief Inspector Shanne Lore Dettabali (PCInsp Dettabali), Senior Police Officer III Hetty Corpuz (SPO3 Corpuz), Remedios Eripol (Remedios), and Senior Police Officer I Marie Anne E. Dela Cruz (SPO1 Dela Cruz).[5]

On September 3, 2013, an entrapment operation plan was conducted within the Anti-Transnational Crime Laboratory Unit, with the assistance of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) to investigate a report from a confidential informant (CI) regarding a certain "Yol" and another person who were engaged in recruiting and offering young girls to men for sexual activities in exchange for money. After their

briefing, the entrapment team, with the CI, proceeded to the target area at the at along . Eventually, Yolanda and Rafael arrived that evening with some girls. Rafael and Yolanda met with the CI and the poseur-customer Police Officer III Rufino Lace (PO3 Lace) and spoke to them for some time. PO3 Lace then handed Yolanda the envelope of marked money. After the exchange, a van boarded with foreigners arrived and the said foreigners waved at the girls. Upon seeing the pre-arranged signal, the police officers rushed to the area and arrested Rafael and Yolanda.[6] The girls rescued from the scene were AAA270579, BBB270579, CCC270579, and DDD270579.

AAA270579 testified that she met Rafael sometime in 2011 at a Mercury Drug store in Taguig City. Rafael became familiar with her since she was a regular passenger on his tricycle. One day he offered AAA270579 money in exchange for sex. AAA270579 eventually agreed "because of the difficulties life has"[7] since both of AAA270579's parents were in jail. After she accepted his proposal, AAA270579 received a text from Rafael to go to Mercury Drug. When AAA270579 arrived there, she saw Rafael and a man on a motorcycle waiting for her. The man gave money to Rafael then promptly took AAA270579 to a hotel. At the hotel, AAA270579 and the man had sexual intercourse. Afterward, the man took AAA270579 to Rafael's house where Rafael then paid her PHP 500.00. AAA270579 asked Rafael why she only received PHP 500.00. Rafael replied they will split the money "50:50." [8]

Rafael and AAA270579 carried on this arrangement until 2013. AAA270579 narrated how Rafael introduced her to several men to have sexual intercourse with for money. After each time, Rafael would take a share of the money for himself and pay her PHP 500.00. It was only in 2013 when he started to pay her more money, around PHP 1,000.00 to 1,500.00 at a time. AAA270579 stated that she could no longer count how many times she had sexual intercourse with a man introduced to her by Rafael. During this time AAA270579 also met the co-accused Yolanda, who is Rafael's live-in partner.[9]

AAA270579 testified that on September 3, 2013, Rafael told her to meet him at because they will meet an American customer. When she arrived there, BBB270579, CCC270579 and DDD270579 were already with Rafael and Yolanda. They all proceeded to at the along where two men approached their group and talked to Yolanda and Rafael for some time. At one point in the evening, Yolanda went with the girls to the comfort room where she told them "Mga anak, nasa akin na ang pera, kayo na ang bahalang dumeskarte sa tip, limang daan sa inyo" AAA270579 also added, "basta kami na daw po ang bahala sa tip." [10]

For her testimony, BBB270579 stated that Rafael and Yolanda were her neighbors. In 2011, BBB270579 was twice almost raped by her stepfather. That year, she left school. In August of 2012, she moved to the house of Rafael and Yolanda. In the second week that month, Rafael began pimping BBB270579 to male customers to have sexual intercourse in exchange for money. BBB270579 narrated an incident when Rafael brought her to an apartment-hotel to meet a customer. Rafael took PHP 1,000.00 from the customer and gave PHP 500.00 to BBB270579. The customer took BBB270579 up to a room where they had sexual intercourse. When they finished, BBB270579 went down to where Rafael was waiting to bring her home.[11]

Similar to AAA270579, Rafael continued this pattern with BBB270579 until 2013. BBB270579 testified that Yolanda would likewise give her customers during this time. Yolanda would take BBB270579 to meet a customer at , she would receive money from the customer and split that money with BBB270579. BBB270579 stated that she also could not count how many times she had been pimped out to customers by Rafael and Yolanda. She stated that she would meet up to five customers in one day.[12]

BBB270579 corroborated AAA270579's testimony as to the events on September 3, 2013. She narrated that she, AAA270579, CCC270579 and DDD270579 were at a along with Rafael and Yolanda that day. Two men

approached them and spoke with Rafael and Yolanda. After this, the girls went to the comfort room, Yolanda followed them and informed them that she already had the money. When they returned from the comfort room the police officers arrived and arrested Yolanda and Rafael.[13]

CCC270579 testified that Yolanda began pimping her in August of 2013. She met Yolanda through another girl, a certain "Talia," who invited CCC270579 to also have sex with men for a fee. Talia introduced CCC270579 to Yolanda and gave Yolanda her number. CCC270579 narrated that in August of 2013, Yolanda texted CCC270579 "pwede ka ba?" CCC270579 replied "Opo, pwede po ako." Yolanda gave instructions to CCC270579 to meet at a boarding house where Yolanda, Rafael, and BBB270579 were waiting for her. The group then went to around 8:00 p.m. At , a car drove up and two men emerged. The men spoke with Yolanda for a bit then Yolanda informed CCC270579 and BBB270579 that she received the money already and she will give the girls PHP 500.00 each. CCC270579 and BBB270579 then entered the car and the two men took the girls to where they all had a drinking session followed by sex. After having sex with them, the men brought BBB270579 and CCC270579 back to the boarding house where Rafael and Yolanda were already sleeping. The girls woke Yolanda so they could collect their PHP 500.00.[14]

It was already the next day, September 3, 2013, when CCC270579 headed home. However, that same day, Yolanda told CCC270579 to come back since she had an American customer for her.[15] CCC270579 returned to the boarding house that day with her childhood friend, DDD270579. At around 7:00 p.m., Rafael and Yolanda left the boarding house with CCC270579, DDD270579, and BBB270579. On the way there, Rafael picked up AAA270579. They headed to a along , Taguig City. CCC270579 testified that while they were waiting at , two men approached their group and talked with Rafael and Yolanda. Soon after, four American men arrived in a van and waved at the girls. The girls then went to the comfort room where Yolanda informed them that she will give them PHP 500.00 each, but the tip would be up to them. However, when they returned from the comfort room the police officers were there to arrest Rafael and Yolanda.[16]

DDD270579 corroborated CCC270579's testimony that on September 3, 2013, she received a text from CCC270579 informing her that they will meet with American customers. DDD270579 went with CCC270579 to meet Yolanda. Yolanda told her that they will have white American customers who will pay them PHP 2,000.00 each in exchange for sexual intercourse. That night, DDD270579 went with Yolanda and Rafael, as well as the other girls, to the at along .[17]

DDD270579 stated that while they were waiting at , two men approached their group and talked to them. Then a van with Americans drove up to their table and waved at the girls. Yolanda went with the girls to the comfort room and informed them that they will get PHP 500.00 each plus tip after they have sex with the Americans. DOD270579 was mad at first because this was lower than the PHP 2,000.00 she was originally promised, but she agreed because she needed the money. When they returned from the comfort room, however, the police officers had arrived to rescue the girls and Rafael and Yolanda were quickly arrested.[18]

Version of the Defense

Only Yolanda and Rafael testified.[19] Yolanda testified that Rafael is her live-in partner and that they allowed BBB270579 to live in their house with her infant child. On September 3, 2013, Yolanda claimed that BBB270579 invited her to eat at along with her friends. Together with Rafael, they left for and ran into BBB270579's other friend, AAA270579, on the way. Yolanda stated that that was the first time she met these friends of BBB270579.[20]

Yolanda narrated that after they arrived at , two men approached BBB270579 and then pointed to an American in a van in front of them. One man introduced himself as "Rufino Lace" and asked if they had eaten already. When

Yolanda said no, he gave her PHP 3,000.00 and told her to order food. Yolanda did so. As they ate, the two men continued to talk to BBB270579. After eating, the four young girls went to the comfort room and Yolanda followed. When Yolanda returned, Rufino Lace tried to give her another PHP 3,200.00, supposedly for the four children. At first, Yolanda tried to refuse, but she relented because Rufino Lace insisted. Rufino Lace told her to count the money, but as soon as she did more men arrived and handcuffed her and Rafael.[21]

Rafael corroborated Yolanda's testimony. He added that the two men asked them if they knew "Talia" and repeatedly asked for their names. He also stated that the two men spoke to both BBB270579 and Yolanda and it was the men who ordered food for them. After eating, the four girls and Yolanda went to the comfort room. When they returned a man gave money to Yolanda and asked her to count it. When Yolanda counted it, more men suddenly approached, took the four girls and arrested Rafael and his partner.[22]

The Ruling of the RTC

The RTC ruled that the prosecution satisfactorily established all the elements of Trafficking in Persons. The testimonies of AAA270579, BBB270579, CCC270579 and DDD270579 were credible, direct, categorical, and corroborative of each other on the material points. On the day of the entrapment operation, the four minor girls were lured by Rafael and Yolanda into agreeing to have sexual intercourse with American men in exchange for money.[23]

Moreover, AAA270579, BBB270579 and CCC270579 testified that even before the entrapment operation Yolanda and Rafael had already pimped them out to several customers. These testimonies show that Rafael and Yolanda had a common purpose to exploit these girls and use them for prostitution. In contrast, the defense did not present any evidence of ill will from the girls or the police officers. Their defense of denial therefore deserves scant consideration.[24] The RTC thus disposed:

WHEREFORE, premises considered, the Court finds accused Yolanda G. Baylon and Rafael D. Esteban GUILTY beyond reasonable doubt of Qualified Trafficking in Persons and hereby sentences them to suffer the penalty of Life Imprisonment and to each pay a fine of [PHP 3 million].

SO ORDERED.[25]

Rafael and Yolanda thus appealed to the CA.

The Ruling of the CA

The CA affirmed the findings of the RTC that the elements of Trafficking in Persons were successfully established. It is clear from the testimonies of the victims that they were recruited by Rafael and Yolanda for the purpose of prostitution in exchange for money. Also, Rafael and Yolanda clearly took advantage of the vulnerability of the victims since the girls were underprivileged and in dire need of money.[26]

Rafael and Yolanda questioned the prosecution's failure to present P03 Lace, the poseur-customer. On this point, the CA held that this omission is of no moment since the elements of Trafficking in Persons were nevertheless sufficiently established by the four private complainants. The testimonies likewise consistently narrated that Yolanda and Rafael brought them to with the purpose of offering the girls to American men for sexual intercourse in exchange for money. Hence, Rafael and Yolanda were caught in flagrante delicto when they committed the overt act of exploiting victims for prostitution.[27]

The CA affirmed the conviction of Rafael and Yolanda, but modified the monetary damages in order to conform with recent jurisprudence:[28]

WHEREFORE, the appeal is DENIED. The Decision[,] dated January 9, 2020[,] of the Regional Trial Court, National Capital Judicial Region, Branch , Taguig City is AFFIRMED with MODIFICATION in that

appellants are hereby ordered to pay[] each of the victims the amount of [PHP] 500,000.00 as moral damages [] and [PHP] 100,000.00 as exemplary damages. These amounts will also earn 6% per [annum] for the finality of the decision until their full payment.

SO ORDERED.[29] (Emphasis in the original)

Hence, the present appeal.

In their Appellant's Brief before the CA, the defense argued that the RTC erred in giving weight to the improbable testimonies of the prosecution witnesses. The defense highlighted certain inconsistent details such as: (1) SPO3 Corpuz claimed that PO3 Lace and the CI arrived at ahead of Rafael and Yolanda's group, yet the individual victims testified that they arrived first and the two men approached after; (2) the four girls have differing stories as to whether or not BBB270579 accompanied them to the comfort room or not; (3) none of them saw Yolanda take the money from PO3 Lace, yet SPO3 Corpuz stated that the four girls were present when PO3 Lace handed the money to Yolanda; and (4) the four girls could not agree as to how many Americans were in the van that approached them. Given the above discrepancies, the defense concludes that the girls were lying.[30]

Further, the defense assailed that no actual entrapment operation occurred. The prosecution failed to present the pre-operation clearance form and the poseur-customer, PO3 Lace. SPO3 Corpuz was only the arresting officer, but she did not hear the conversation between PO3 Lace and Yolanda. Hence, there is no proof of the alleged trafficking transaction with Yolanda.[31]

Moreover, the defense asserted that the prosecution failed to prove all the elements of Trafficking in Persons since none of the private complainants heard the transaction between PO3 Lace and Yolanda. Neither did they see her take the money from PO3 Lace. While the RTC ruled that the testimonies of the minor victims effectively established Rafael and Yolanda's specific intent and illicit business, the defense contended that these testimonies are not credible because of "their tendency to fabricate lies." [32]

In its Appellee's Brief[33] before the CA, the Office of the Solicitor General (OSG) countered that the alleged inconsistencies in the testimonies of the prosecution witnesses do not pertain to the elements of the crime. Rather, the four girls consistently narrated that they were rescued on September 3, 2013, by police officers and social workers. As to the prosecution's failure to present PO3 Lace, the OSG contended that the testimonies of AAA270579, BBB270579, and CCC270579 prove that Rafael and Yolanda repeatedly recruited and pimped minors for sexual exploitation which is the gravamen of the crime charged.[34]

The Issue

Did the CA err in confirming the convictions of Rafael and Yolanda for Qualified Trafficking in Persons?

The Ruling of the Court

Qualified Trafficking in Persons

The crime of Qualified Trafficking in Persons is defined under Sections 3, 4, and 6 of Republic Act No. 9208, as amended by Republic Act No. 10364:

SECTION 3. Definition of Terms. — As used in this Act: . . .

(b) Child — refers to a person below [18] years of age or one who is over [18] but is unable to fully take care of or protect himself/herself from abuse, neglect, cruelty, exploitation, or discrimination because of a physical or mental disability or condition.

. . . .

SECTION 4. Acts of Trafficking in Persons. — It shall be unlawful for any person, natural or juridical, to commit any of the following acts:

- (a) To recruit, obtain, hire, provide, offer, transport, transfer, maintain, harbor, or receive a person by any means, including those done under the pretext of domestic or overseas employment or training or apprenticeship, for the purpose of prostitution, pornography, or sexual exploitation;

....

SECTION 6. Qualified Trafficking in Persons. — The following are considered as qualified trafficking:

- (a) When the trafficked person is a child;

....

- (c) When the crime is committed by a syndicate, or in large scale. Trafficking is deemed committed by a syndicate if carried out by a group of [three] or more persons conspiring or confederating with one another. It is deemed committed in large scale if committed against [three] or more persons, individually or as a group;

The elements of Trafficking in Persons per Section 1 of Republic Act No. 9208, as amended by Republic Act No. 10364:

The act of "recruitment, transportation, transfer or harbouring, or receipt of persons with or without the victim's consent or knowledge, within or across national borders[;]

The means used which include "threat or use of force, or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or of position, taking advantage of the vulnerability of the person, or, the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another; [sic] and

The purpose of trafficking is exploitation which includes "exploitation or the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery, servitude or the removal or sale of organs.

In this case, the Court finds that the testimonies of AAA270579, BBB270579, and CCC270579 clearly show that they were made to repeatedly engage in sexual intercourse with male customers provided to them by Rafael and Yolanda for money.

The Court rejects the defense's assertion that these testimonies are incredible due to their alleged inconsistencies. It should be noted that the victims in this case are all minors, whose testimonies are inherently deemed truthful and credible:

It is likewise settled that the testimonies of child victims are given full weight and credit, since youth and immaturity are generally badges of truth. When the offended parties are of tender age and immature, courts are inclined to give credit to their account of what transpired, considering not only their relative vulnerability but also the shame to which they would be exposed if the matter to which they testified is not true. Certainly, leeway should be given to witnesses who are minors, especially when they are relating past incidents of abuse. The revelation of innocent children whose chastity has been abused deserves full credit as they could only have been impelled to tell the truth, especially in the absence of proof of ill-motive.[35] (Emphasis supplied)

Moreover, the Court finds no reason to divert from the RTC and CA's findings on the credibility of the victims' testimonies. It is settled that when the credibility of a witness is called into question, the trial court's findings are given great weight and respect, more so when they are sustained by the CA. The trial court has the unique opportunity to discern and scrutinize the victims' sincerity and spontaneity through their demeanor and behavior during trial.[36] The defense has not presented any reason for this Court to disturb the uniform findings of the lower courts.

In any case, the Court emphasizes that the alleged inconsistencies do not pertain to the elements of the crime. The defense raised the following alleged inconsistencies: (1) whether PO3 Lace and the CI were at before the girls arrived; (2) whether BBB270579 went to the comfort room; (3) whether BBB270579 saw the exchange of money between PO3 Lace and Yolanda; and (4) how many Americans were in the van that evening. The Court has oft held that trivial matters which do not determine the crime committed, and inconsistencies which have nothing to do with the elements of the crime cannot be used as grounds for an acquittal.[37] Here, none of the alleged discrepancies pertain to the actual recruitment, hiring, or transportation of the victims for the purpose of sexual exploitation and prostitution for a fee.

Rather, the testimonies of the four girls unequivocally established that Rafael and Yolanda recruited each girl for a similar scheme and exploited their vulnerabilities, specifically, their need for money for their own personal survival. In the case of AAA270579, she testified that both of her parents were in jail at the time Rafael first approached her. Similarly, BBB270579 was seeking refuge from the attempted sexual abuse of her step-father while she herself had an infant to care for. CCC270579 and DDD270579 both stated that they agreed to engage in sex-for-a-fee since they needed money. Rafael and Yolanda clearly took advantage of vulnerable young girls.

The fact that Rafael and Yolanda contacted each victim and offered them the male customers for a fee indisputably amounts to recruitment and harboring for the purpose of prostitution and therefore qualifies as trafficking in persons. The evidence is clear, Rafael and Yolanda were running a child prostitution business. Even before the entrapment operation, Rafael and Yolanda committed Qualified Trafficking in Persons.

The entrapment operation was sufficiently proven

The Court further finds that the operation conducted by the police constitutes a valid entrapment operation. With respect to the non-presentation of PO3 Lace, the Court finds that this alone cannot defeat the prosecution's case. The testimony of SPO3 Corpuz, who was part of the entrapment operation team and who was at the scene, sufficiently established that Rafael and Yolanda were caught in flagrante delicto. Her testimony corroborates the victims' narration of the events proving that it was Rafael and Yolanda who recruited and transported the victims to for the purpose of prostitution.

This Court ruled in *People v. Villaria*[38] that the testimony of the officer who conducted the entrapment operation is accorded full faith and credence absent any clear and convincing evidence that the police officers did not properly perform their duties or that they were prompted by ill motive. The Court reiterated that the corroborating testimonies of the arresting officer and the minor victim may sustain a conviction under the law.[39] In fact, it is sufficient that the testimonies prove that the accused lured, enticed, engaged, or transported the victims for the purpose of exploitation. That is, such testimony may be shown even by the trafficked persons' testimony alone.[40]

From the testimonies of the minor victims, Rafael and Yolanda had been recruiting and influencing minors to engage in prostitution for months, if not years, prior to the entrapment operation. Evidently, the crime had already been consummated long before the arrest on September 3, 2013. The testimonies of the prosecution witnesses also support the fact that the police coordinated an entrapment operation on September 3, 2013. SPO3 Corpuz narrated that she personally witnessed Yolanda take the marked money from the poseur-customer. Similarly, each of the minor victims testified that Yolanda informed them in the comfort room that she received the money and that the girls would be paid PHP 500.00 in exchange for having sexual intercourse with customers. Hence, the police team caught the accused in their regular course of business.

Penalty and Damages

Section 10 (e) of Republic Act No. 9208, as amended by Republic Act No. 10364, provides that "any person found guilty of qualified trafficking under Section 6 shall suffer the penalty of life imprisonment and a fine of not less than PHP 2 million but not more than PHP 5 million." Prevailing jurisprudence also dictates that each victim be awarded PHP 500,000.00 as moral damages and PHP 100,000.00 as exemplary damages:

As regards the award of damages, the Court, in *People v. Lalli*, held that the awards of moral and exemplary damages were warranted in cases of trafficking in persons as the offense is analogous to the crimes of seduction, abduction, rape, or other lascivious acts, "which cause the victim physical and mental suffering, besmirched reputation, moral shock, and social humiliation." In *Lalli*, the Court awarded moral damages of [PHP] 500,000.00 and exemplary damages of [PHP] 100,000.00 to each of the victims. Likewise, the imposition of [6%] interest [per annum] on the award from the finality of judgment until full payment is proper in line with the Court's ruling in *Nacar v. Gallery Frames*.^[41] (Citations omitted)

The Court also affirms the imposition of legal interest at 6% per annum on all monetary awards due to the victims from finality of judgment until full payment.

Additionally, the four victims and their families are entitled to avail themselves of the appropriate services for their healing, recovery and reintegration, as prescribed under Republic Act No. 11862 or the Expanded Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2022:

SEC. 24. Other Services for Trafficked Persons. —

(d) Healing, Recovery, and Reintegration Program for Trafficked Persons (RRPTP) — The DSWD and the LGUs shall develop and implement a healing, recovery, and reintegration program for trafficked persons which shall include a comprehensive package of services for the individual victim-survivor of trafficking in persons, the victim's immediate family, and the community at large including mental health services such as psychological assessment, counseling and therapy, rehabilitation, upgrade of temporary shelters, assistance in accessing judicial services, livelihood training and opportunities, psychoeducation services, educational scholarships, or skills enhancement training services, and economic reintegration services.

The LGUs shall be responsible for the proper implementation of the recovery and reintegration program for trafficked persons: Provided, That the DSWD shall monitor and evaluate the implementation of the program and conduct an audit of Local Social Welfare and Development Offices.

The Court, thus, directs the DSWD and the local government units where the four victims are currently residing to admit them into the Healing, Recovery, and Reintegration Program for Trafficked Persons, and to provide the appropriate services for their recovery.

As a final note, the Court reiterates that Trafficking in Persons is an abhorrent crime. It strips people of their dignity and humanity and most often targets those suffering from poverty and desperation. Specifically, women and children continue to be the most victimized targets of trafficking operations, their youth and tenderness are sold in the sex trade as mere commodities.^[42]

The law was crafted precisely to advance the State's policy of affording the utmost protection to its children from all forms of abuse and to sanction these abhorrent crimes. This is in line with the State's duty under *parens patriae* to protect the youth from such atrocities.^[43] In the same vein, the courts carry the solemn duty to ensure that the perpetrators of human trafficking suffer the consequences under the full extent of the law.

ACCORDINGLY, the Appeal is DISMISSED. The Decision, dated March 17, 2023, of the Court of Appeals in CA-G.R. CR-HC No. 15143 is AFFIRMED. The Court finds accused-appellants Yolanda G. Baylon and Rafael

D. Esteban GUILTY beyond reasonable doubt of Qualified Trafficking in Persons in violation of Section 4(a), in relation to Section 6(a) and (c), of Republic Act No. 9208, as amended by Republic Act No. 10364. Accused-appellants Yolanda G. Baylon and Rafael D. Esteban are each SENTENCED to suffer the penalty of life imprisonment and to PAY the fine of PHP 3,000,000.00. They are further jointly ORDERED to PAY each child victim, AAA270579, BBB270579, CCC270579, and DDD270579, PHP 500,000.00 as moral damages, and PHP 100,000.00 as exemplary damages. These amounts will earn 6% per annum from the date of finality of this Decision until their full payment.

The Department of Social Welfare and Development and the local government units where the victims currently reside are DIRECTED to admit the victims and their immediate families to the appropriate Healing, Recovery, and Reintegration Program for Trafficked Persons, in line with Republic Act No. 11862 or the Expanded Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2022.

SO ORDERED.

Caguioa (Chairperson), Inting, Gaerlan, and Dimaampao, JJ., concur.

[*] Pursuant to Amended Administrative Circular No. 83-2015 dated September 5, 2017, titled "Protocols and Procedures in the Promulgation, Publication and Posting on the Websites of Decisions, Final Resolutions, and Final Orders Using Fictitious Names/Personal Circumstances," which requires the preparation of a first copy of Decisions/Resolutions/Orders where the real or genuine name/s or identities and personal circumstances of the victim/s are used.

[1] Rollo, pp. 8-27. Penned by Associate Justice Roberto P. Quiroz and concurred in by Associate Justices Mariflor P. Punzalan Castillo and Germano Francisco D. Legaspi, Third Division, Court of Appeals, Manila.

[2] Id. at 30-42. Penned by Judge Leili Cruz Suarez.

[*] The real name of the victims, their personal circumstances, and other information which tend to establish or compromise their identities, as well as those of their immediate family or household members, shall not be disclosed to protect their privacy, and fictitious initials shall, instead, be used, in accordance with *People v. Cabalquinto* [533 Phil. 703 (2006)] and Amended Administrative Circular No. 83-2015 dated September 5, 2017 (Protocols and Procedures in the Promulgation, Publication, and Posting on the Websites of Decisions, Final Resolutions, and Final Orders Using Fictitious Names).

[3] RTC records, p. 1.

[4] Rollo, p. 31.

[5] Id.

[6] Id. at 10-11.

[7] TSN, January 28, 2014, p. 12.

[8] Id. at 15.

[9] Id. at 12-17.

[10] Id. at 21-23.

[11] TSN, April 1, 2014, pp. 13-20.

[12] Id. at 12-26.

[13] Id. at 29-32.

[14] TSN, November 12, 2014, pp. 10-19.

[15] Id. at 19-21.

[16] TSN, April 27, 2015, pp. 6-16.

[17] TSN, June 29, 2015, pp. 9-15.

[18] TSN, June 29, 2015, pp. 15-19.

[19] Rollo, p. 31.

[20] TSN, May 31, 2018, pp. 8-10.

[21] Id. at 12-18.

[22] TSN, November 15, 2018, pp. 8-12.

[23] Rollo, pp. 35-40.

[24] Id. at 40-42.

[25] Id. at 42.

[26] Id. at 15-20.

[27] Id. at 21-25.

[28] Id. at 27.

[29] Id.

[30] CA rollo, pp. 29-35.

[31] Id. at 35-36.

[32] Id. at 37-39.

[33] Id. at 67-80.

[34] Id. at 72-77.

[35] *People v. Echanes*, G.R. No. 272974, January 20, 2025 [Per J. Lazaro-Javier, Second Division]. This pinpoint citation refers to the copy of the Decision uploaded to the Supreme Court website.

[36] *People v. XXX234512*, G.R. No. 234512, March 5, 2025 [Per J. J. Lopez, Second Division]. This pinpoint citation refers to the copy of the Decision uploaded to the Supreme Court website.

[37] *People v. XXX*, 919 Phil. 326, 348 (2022) [Per J. Hernando, Second Division].

[38] 949 Phil. 770 (2023) [Per J. Leonen, Second Division].

[39] Id. at 779.

[40] *Santiago v. People*, 855 Phil. 536, 550 (2019) [Per J. Leonen, Third Division].

[41] *Brozoto v. People*, 901 Phil. 265, 282 (2021) [Per J. Lopez, Third Division].

[42] See *People v. Almero*, 953 Phil. 93, 101 (2024) [Per J. Lazaro-Javier, Second Division].

[43] *Brozoto v. People*, 901 Phil. 265, 283 (2021) [Per J. Lopez, Third Division].

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