

**EDUARDO S. BARANDA AND ALFONSO HITALIA, PETITIONERS, VS.
HONORABLE JUDGE TITO GUSTILO, ACTING REGISTER OF DEEDS
AVITO SACLAUSO, HONORABLE COURT OF APPEALS, AND ATTY.
HECTOR P. T...***G.R. No. 81163. September 26, 1988*

Ponente: GUTIERREZ, JR., J.

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Eduardo S. Baranda and Alfonso Hitalia were the petitioners in G. R. No. 64432 and the private respondents in G. R. No. 62042. The subject matter of these two (2) cases and the instant case is the same – a parcel of land designated as Lot No. 4517 of the Cadastral Survey of Sta. Barbara, Iloilo covered by Original Certificate of Title No 6406.

The present petition arose from the same facts and events which triggered the filing of the earlier petitions. These facts and events are cited in our resolution dated December 29, 1983 in G. R. No. 64432, as follows:

"x x x This case has its origins in a petition for reconstitution of title filed with the Court of First Instance of Iloilo involving a parcel of land known as Lot No. 4517 of the Sta. Barbara Cadastre covered by Original Certificate of Title No. 6406 in the name of Romana Hitalia. Eventually, Original Certificate of Title No. 6406 was cancelled and Transfer Certificate of Title No. 106098 was issued in the names of Alfonso Hitalia and Eduardo S. Baranda. The Court issued a writ of possession which Gregorio Perez, Maria P. Gotera and Susana Silao refused to honor on the ground that they also have TCT No. 25772 over the same Lot No. 4517. The Court, after considering the private respondents' opposition and finding TCT No. 25772 fraudulently acquired, ordered that the writ of possession be carried out. A motion for reconsideration having been denied, a writ of demolition was issued on March 29, 1982. Perez and Gotera filed a petition for certiorari and prohibition with the Court of Appeals. On August 6, 1982, the Court of Appeals denied the petition. Perez and Gotera filed the petition for review on certiorari denominated as G. R. No. 62042 before the Supreme Court. As earlier stated the petition was denied in a resolution dated January 7, 1983. The motion for reconsideration was denied in another resolution dated March 25, 1983, which also stated that the denial is final. This decision in G. R. No. 62042, in accordance with the entry of judgment, became final on March 25, 1983. The petitioners in the instant case - G. R. No. 64432 - contend that the writs of possession and demolition issued in the respondent court should now be implemented; that Civil Case No. 00827 before the Intermediate Appellate Court was filed only to delay the implementation of the writ; that counsel for the respondent should be held in contempt of court for engaging in a concerted but futile effort to delay the execution of the writs of possession and demolition and that petitioners are entitled to damages because of prejudice caused by the filing of this petition before the Intermediate Appellate Court. On September 26, 1983, this Court issued a Temporary Restraining Order to maintain the status quo, both in the Intermediate Appellate Court and in the Regional Trial Court of Iloilo. Considering that - (1) there is merit in the instant petition for indeed the issues discussed in G.R. No. 64432 as raised in Civil Case No 00827 before the respondent court have already been passed upon in G.R. No. 62042; and (2) the Temporary Restraining Order issued by the Intermediate Appellate Court was only intended not to render the petition moot and academic pending the Court's consideration of the issues, the

Court RESOLVED to DIRECT the respondent Intermediate Appellate Court not to take cognizance of issues already resolved by this Court and accordingly DISMISS the petition in Civil Case No. 00827. Immediate implementation of the writs of possession and demolition is likewise ordered." (pp. 107-108, Rollo - G.R. No. 64432)

On May 9, 1984, the Court issued a resolution denying with finality a motion for reconsideration of the December 29, 1983 resolution in G. R. No. 64432. On this same date, another resolution was issued, this time in G. R. No. 62042, referring to the Regional Trial Court of Iloilo the ex-parte motion of the private respondents (Baranda and Hitalia) for execution of the judgment in the resolutions dated January 7, 1983 and March 9, 1983. In the meantime, the then Intermediate Appellate Court issued a resolution dated February 10, 1984, dismissing Civil Case No. 00827 which covered the same subject matter as the Resolutions above cited pursuant to our Resolution dated December 29, 1983. The resolution dated December 29, 1983 in G. R. No. 64432 became final on May 20, 1984.

Upon motions of the petitioners, the Regional Trial Court of Iloilo, Branch 23 presided by Judge Tito G. Gustilo issued the following order:

"Submitted are the following motions filed by movants Eduardo S. Baranda and Alfonso Hitalia through counsel dated August 28, 1984:

"(a)

Reiterating Motion for Execution of Judgment of Resolutions dated January 7, 1983 and March 9, 1983 Promulgated by Honorable Supreme Court (First Division) in G.R. No. 62042;

"(b)

Motion for Execution of Judgment of Resolution dated December 29, 1983 Promulgated by Honorable Supreme Court (First Division) in G. R. No. 64432;

"(c)

The Duties of the Register of Deeds are purely ministerial under Act 496, therefore she must register all orders, judgment, resolutions of this Court and that of Honorable Supreme Court.

"Finding the said motions meritorious and there being no opposition thereto, the same is hereby GRANTED.

"WHEREFORE, Transfer Certificate of Title No. T-25772 is hereby declared null and void and Transfer Certificate of Title No. T-106098 is hereby declared valid and subsisting title concerning the ownership of Eduardo S. Baranda and Alfonso Hitalia, all of Sta. Barbara Cadastre.

"The Acting Register of Deeds of Iloilo is further ordered to register the Subdivision Agreement of Eduardo S. Baranda and Alfonso Hitalia as prayed for." (p. 466, Rollo - G.R. No. 64432)

The above order was set aside on October 8, 1984 upon a motion for reconsideration and manifestation filed by the Acting Registrar of Deeds of Iloilo, Atty. Helen P. Sornito on the ground that there was a pending case before this Court, an Action for Mandamus, Prohibition, Injunction under G. R. No. 67661 filed by Atty. Eduardo Baranda, against the former which remained unresolved.

In view of this development, the petitioners filed in G. R. No. 62042 and G. R. No. 64432 ex-parte motions for issuance of an order directing the Regional Trial Court and Acting Register of Deeds to execute and implement

the judgments of this Court. They prayed that an order be issued:

"1.

Ordering both the Regional Trial Court of Iloilo Branch XXIII, under Hon. Judge Tito G. Gustilo and the acting Register of Deeds Helen P. Sornito to register the Order dated September 5, 1984 of the lower court;

"2.

To cancel No. T-25772. Likewise to cancel no. T-106098 and once cancelled to issue new certificates of title to each of Eduardo S. Baranda and Alfonso Hitalia;

Plus other relief and remedies equitable under the premises." (p. 473, 64432 Rollo)

Acting on these motions, we issued on September 17, 1986 a Resolution in G. R. No. 62042 and G. R. No. 64432 granting the motions as prayed for. Acting on another motion of the same nature filed by the petitioners, we issued another Resolution dated October 8, 1986 referring the same to the Court Administrator for implementation by the judge below.

In compliance with our resolutions, the Regional Trial Court of Iloilo, Branch 23 presided by Judge Tito G. Gustilo issued two (2) orders dated November 6, 1986 and January 6, 1987 respectively, to wit:

"O R D E R

"This is an Ex-parte Motion and Manifestation submitted by the movants through counsel on October 20, 1986; the Manifestation of Atty. Helen Sornito, Register of Deeds of the City of Iloilo, and formerly acting register of deeds for the Province of Iloilo dated October 23, 1986 and the Manifestation of Atty. Avito S. Saclausio, Acting Register of Deeds, Province of Iloilo dated November 5, 1986.

"Considering that the motion of movants Atty. Eduardo S. Baranda and Alfonso Hitalia dated August 12, 1986 seeking the full implementation of the writ of possession was granted by the Honorable Supreme Court, Second Division per its Resolution dated September 17, 1986, the present motion is hereby GRANTED.

"WHEREFORE, the Acting Register of Deeds, Province of Iloilo, is hereby ordered to register the Order of this Court dated September 5, 1984 as prayed for.

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"O R D E R

"This is a Manifestation and Urgent Petition for the Surrender of Transfer Certificate of Title No. T-25772 submitted by the petitioners Atty. Eduardo S. Baranda and Alfonso Hitalia on December 2, 1986 in compliance with the order of this Court dated November 25, 1986, a Motion for Extension of Time to File Opposition filed by Maria Provide Gotera through counsel on December 4, 1986 which was granted by the Court pursuant to its Order dated December 15, 1986. Considering that no Opposition was filed within the thirty (30) days period granted by the Court finding the petition tenable, the same is hereby GRANTED.

"WHEREFORE, Maria Provide Gotera is hereby ordered to surrender Transfer Certificate of Title No. T-25772 to this Court within ten (10) days from the date of this order, after which period, Transfer Certificate of Title No. T-25772 is hereby declared annulled and the Register of Deeds of Iloilo is ordered to issue a new Certificate of Title in lieu thereof in the name of petitioners Atty. Eduardo S. Baranda and Alfonso Hitalia, which certificate shall contain a memorandum of the annulment of the outstanding duplicate." (pp. 286-287, Rollo- 64432)

On February 9, 1987, Atty. Hector Teodosio, the counsel of Gregorio Perez, private respondent in G. R. No. 64432 and petitioner in G. R. No. 62042, filed a motion for explanation in relation to the resolution dated September 17, 1986 and manifestation asking for clarification on the following points:

“a.

As to the prayer of Atty. Eduardo Baranda for the cancellation of TCT T-25772, should the same be referred to the Court of Appeals (as mentioned in the Resolution of November 27, 1985) or is it already deemed granted by implication (by virtue of the Resolution dated September 17, 1986)?

“b.

Does the Resolution dated September 17, 1986 include not only the implementation of the writ of possession but also the cancellation of TCT T-25772 and the subdivision of Lot 4517?" (p. 536, Rollo - 64432)

Acting on this motion and the other motions filed by the parties, we issued a resolution dated May 25, 1987 noting all these motions and stating therein:

xxx xxx xxx

"Since entry of judgment in G. R. No. 62042 was made on January 7, 1983 and in G. R. No. 64432 on May 30, 1984, and all that remains is the implementation of our resolutions, this COURT RESOLVED to refer the matters concerning the execution of the decisions to the Regional Trial Court of Iloilo City for appropriate action and to apply disciplinary sanctions upon whoever attempts to trifle with the implementation of the resolutions of this Court. No further motions in these cases will be entertained by this Court." (p. 615, Rollo - 64432)

In the meantime, in compliance with the Regional Trial Court's orders dated November 6, 1986 and January 6, 1987, Acting Register of Deeds Avito Saclauso annotated the order declaring Transfer Certificate of Title No. T-25772 as null and void, cancelled the same and issued new certificates of titles numbers T-111560, T-111561 and T-111562 in the name of petitioners Eduardo S. Baranda and Alfonso Hitalia in lieu of Transfer Certificate of Title No. T-106098.

However, a notice of lis pendens "on account of or by reason of a separate case (Civil Case No. 15871) still pending in the Court of Appeals" was carried out and annotated in the new certificates of titles issued to the petitioners. This was upheld by the trial court after setting aside its earlier order dated February 12, 1987 ordering the cancellation of lis pendens.

This prompted the petitioners to file another motion in G. R. No. 62042 and G. R. No. 64432 to order the trial court to reinstate its order dated February 12, 1987 directing the Acting Register of Deeds to cancel the notice of lis pendens in the new certificates of titles.

In a resolution dated August 17, 1987, we resolved to refer the said motion to the Regional Trial Court of Iloilo City, Branch 23 for appropriate action.

Since respondent Judge Tito Gustilo of the Regional Trial Court of Iloilo, Branch 23 denied the petitioners' motion to reinstate the February 12, 1987 order in another order dated September 17, 1987, the petitioners filed this petition for certiorari, prohibition and mandamus with preliminary injunction to compel the respondent judge to reinstate his order dated February 12, 1987 directing the Acting Register of Deeds to cancel the notice of lis pendens annotated in the new certificates of titles issued in the name of the petitioners.

The records show that after the Acting Register of Deeds annotated a notice of lis pendens on the new certificates of titles issued in the name of the petitioners, the petitioners filed in the reconstitution case an urgent ex-parte motion to immediately cancel notice of lis pendens annotated thereon.

In his order dated February 12, 1987, respondent Judge Gustilo granted the motion and directed the Acting Register of Deeds of Iloilo to cancel the lis pendens found on Transfer Certificate of Title Nos. T-106098; T-111560; T-111561 and T-111562.

Respondent Acting Register of Deeds Avito Saclauson filed a motion for reconsideration of the February 12, 1987 order stating therein:

"That the undersigned hereby asks for a reconsideration of the said order based on the second paragraph of Section 77 of P. D. 1529, to wit:

"At any time after final judgment in favor of the defendant or other disposition of the action such as to terminate finally all rights of the plaintiff in and to the land and/or buildings involved, in any case in which a memorandum or notice of Lis Pendens has been registered as provided in the preceding section, the notice of Lis Pendens shall be deemed cancelled upon the registration of a certificate of the clerk of court in which the action or proceeding was pending stating the manner of disposal thereof."

"That the lis pendens under Entry No. 427183 was annotated on T-106098, T-111560, T-111561 and T-111562 by virtue of a case docketed as Civil Case No. 15871, now pending with the Intermediate Court of Appeals, entitled, 'Calixta Provideo, Ricardo Provideo, Sr., Maxima Provideo and Perfecto Provideo, Plaintiffs, versus Eduardo Baranda and Alfonso Hitalia, Respondents.'

"That under the above-quoted provisions of P.D. 152, the cancellation of subject Notice of Lis Pendens can only be made or deemed cancelled upon the registration of the certificate of the Clerk of Court in which the action or proceeding was pending, stating the manner of disposal thereof.

"Considering that Civil Case No. 1587, upon which the Notice of Lis Pendens was based is still pending with the Intermediate Court of Appeals, only the Intermediate Court of Appeals and not this Honorable Court in a mere cadastral proceedings can order the cancellation of the Notice of Lis Pendens." (pp. 68-69, Rollo)

Adopting these arguments and on the ground that some if not all of the plaintiffs in Civil Case No. 15871 were not privies to the case affected by the Supreme Court resolutions, respondent Judge Tito Gustilo set aside his February 12, 1987 order and granted the Acting Register of Deeds' motion for reconsideration.

The issue hinges on whether or not the pendency of the appeal in Civil Case No. 15871 with the Court of Appeals prevents the court from cancelling the notice of lis pendens in the certificates of titles of the petitioners which were earlier declared valid and subsisting by this Court in G. R. No. 62042 and G. R. No. 64432. A corollary issue is on the nature of the duty of a Register of Deeds to annotate or annul a notice of lis pendens in a torrens certificate of title.

Civil Case No. 15871 was a complaint to seek recovery of Lot No. 4517 of Sta. Barbara Cadastre Iloilo, (the same subject matter of G. R. No. 62042 and G. R. No. 64432) from petitioners Baranda and Hitalia filed by Calixta Provideo, Ricardo Provideo, Maxima Provideo and Perfecta Provideo before the Regional Trial Court of Iloilo, Branch 23. At the instance of Atty. Hector P. Teodosio, the Providos' counsel, a notice of lis pendens was annotated on petitioners' Certificate of Title No. T-106098 covering Lot No. 4517, Sta. Barbara Cadastre.

Acting on a motion to dismiss filed by the petitioners, the court issued an order dated October 24, 1984 dismissing Civil Case No. 15871.

The order was then appealed to the Court of Appeals. This appeal is the reason why respondent Judge Gustilo

recalled the February 12, 1987 order directing the Acting Register of Deeds to cancel the notice of lis pendens annotated on the certificates of titles of the petitioners.

This petition is impressed with merit.

Maria Provide Gotera was one of the petitioners in G. R. No. 62042. Although Calixta Provide, Ricardo Provide, Maxima Provide and Perfecta Provide, the plaintiffs in Civil Case No. 15871 were not impleaded as parties, it is very clear in the petition that Maria Provide was acting on behalf of the Providos who allegedly are her co-owners in Lot No. 4517, Sta. Barbara Cadastre as shown by Transfer Certificate of Title No. T-25772 issued in her name and the names of the plaintiffs in Civil Case No. 15871, among others. (Annex "E", G.R. No. 62042, p. 51, Rollo) In fact, one of the issues raised by petitioners Maria Provide Gotera and Gregoria Perez in G. R. No. 62042 was as follows:

xxx xxx xxx

"2.

Whether or not, in the same reconstitution proceedings, respondent Judge Midpantao L. Adil had the authority to declare as null and void the transfer certificate of title in the name of petitioner Maria Provide Gotera and her other co-owners." (p. 3, Rollo; Underlining supplied)

It thus appears that the plaintiffs in Civil Case No. 15871 were privies to G. R. No. 62042 contrary to the trial court's findings that they were not.

G. R. No. 62042 affirmed the order of the then Court of First Instance of Iloilo in the reconstitution proceedings declaring TCT No. 25772 in the name of the Providos over Lot No. 4517, Sta. Barbara Cadastre null and void for being fraudulently obtained and declaring TCT No. 106098 over the same parcel Lot No. 4517, Sta. Barbara Cadastre in the name of petitioners Eduardo Baranda and Alfonso Hitalia valid and subsisting.

The decision in G. R. No. 62042 became final and executory on March 25, 1983 long before Civil Case No. 15871 was filed.

Under these circumstances, it is crystal clear that the Providos, private respondents herein, in filing Civil Case No. 15871 were trying to delay the full implementation of the final decisions in G. R. No. 62042 as well as G. R. No. 64432 wherein this Court ordered immediate implementation of the writs of possession and demolition in the reconstitution proceedings involving Lot No. 4517, Sta. Barbara Cadastre.

The purpose of a notice of lis pendens is defined in the following manner:

"Lis pendens has been conceived to protect the real rights of the party causing the registration thereof. With the lis pendens duly recorded, he could rest secure that he would not lose the property or any part of it. For, notice of lis pendens serves as a warning to a prospective purchaser or incumbrancer that the particular property is in litigation; and that he should keep his hands off the same, unless of course he intends to gamble on the results of the litigation. (Section 24, Rule 14, Rules of Court; *Jamora v. Duran*, et al., 69 Phil. 3, 11; *I Martin*, Rules of Court, p. 415, footnote 3, citing cases.)" (*Nataño v. Esteban*, 18 SCRA 481, 485-485)

The private respondents are not entitled to this protection. The facts obtaining in this case necessitate the application of the rule enunciated in the cases of *Victoriano v. Rovira* (55 Phil. 1000), *Municipal Council of Paranaque v. Court of First Instance of Rizal* (70 Phil. 363) and *Sarmiento v. Ortiz* (10 SCRA 158), to the effect that:

"We have once held that while ordinarily a notice of pendency which has been filed in a proper case, cannot be cancelled while the action is pending and undetermined, the proper court has the discretionary power to cancel

it under peculiar circumstances, as for instance, where the evidence so far presented by the plaintiff does not bear out the main allegations of his complaint, and where the continuances of the trial, for which the plaintiff is responsible, are unnecessarily delaying the determination of the case to the prejudice of the defendant. (Victoriano v. Rovira, supra; The Municipal Council of Paranaque v. Court of First Instance of Rizal, supra)"

The facts of this case in relation to the earlier cases brought all the way to the Supreme Court illustrate how the private respondents tried to block but unsuccessfully the already final decisions in G. R. No. 62042 and G. R. No. 64432.

Parenthetically, respondent judge Tito Gustilo abused his discretion in sustaining the respondent Acting Register of Deeds' stand that the notice of lis pendens in the certificates of titles of the petitioners over Lot No. 4571, Barbara Cadastre cannot be cancelled on the ground of pendency of Civil Case No. 15871 with the Court of Appeals. In upholding the position of the Acting Register of Deeds based on Section 77 of Presidential Decree No. 1529, he conveniently forgot the first paragraph thereof which provides:

"Cancellation of lis pendens. - Before final judgment, a notice of lis pendens may be cancelled upon Order of the Court after proper showing that the notice is for the purpose of molesting the adverse party, or that it is not necessary to protect the rights of the party who caused it to be registered. It may also be cancelled by the Register of Deeds upon verified petition of the party who caused the registration thereof."

This Court cannot understand how respondent Judge Gustilo could have been misled by the respondent Acting Register of Deeds on this matter when in fact he was the same Judge who issued the order dismissing Civil Case No. 15871 prompting the private respondents to appeal said order dated October 10, 1984 to the Court of Appeals. The records of the main case are still with the court below but based on the order, it can be safely assumed that the various pleadings filed by the parties subsequent to the motion to dismiss filed by the petitioners (the defendants therein) touched on the issue of the validity of TCT No. 25772 in the name of the Providos over Lot Number 4571, Sta. Barbara Cadastre in the light of the final decisions in G. R. No. 62042 and G. R. No. 64432.

The next question to be determined is on the nature of the duty of the Register of Deeds to annotate and/or cancel the notice of lis pendens in a torrens certificate of title.

Section 10, Presidential Decree No. 1529 states that "It shall be the duty of the Register of Deeds to immediately register an instrument presented for registration dealing with real or personal property which complies with all the requisites for registration. x x x. If the instrument is not registrable, he shall forthwith deny registration thereof and inform the presentor of such denial in writing, stating the ground or reasons therefore, and advising him of his right to appeal by consulta in accordance with Section 117 of this Decree."

Section 117 provides that "When the Register of Deeds is in doubt with regard to the proper step to be taken or memoranda to be made in pursuance of any deed, mortgage or other instrument presented to him for registration or where any party in interest does not agree with the action taken by the Register of deeds with reference to any such instrument, the question shall be submitted to the Commission of Land Registration by the Register of Deeds, or by the party in interest thru the Register of Deeds. x x x."

The elementary rule in statutory construction is that when the words and phrases of the statute are clear and unequivocal, their meaning must be determined from the language employed and the statute must be taken to mean exactly what it says. (Aparri v. Court of Appeals, 127 SCRA 231; Insular Bank of Asia and America Employees' Union [IBAAEU) v. Inciong, 132 SCRA 663) The statute concerning the function of the Register of Deeds to register instruments in a torrens certificate of title is clear and leaves no room for construction. According to Webster's Third International Dictionary of the English Language - the word shall means "ought to, must, x x x obligation - used to express a command or exhortation, used in laws, regulations or directives to

express what is mandatory." Hence, the function of a Register of Deeds with reference to the registration of deeds encumbrances, instruments and the like is ministerial in nature. The respondent Acting Register of Deeds did not have any legal standing to file a motion for reconsideration of the respondent Judge's Order directing him to cancel the notice of lis pendens annotated in the certificates of titles of the petitioners over the subject parcel of land. In case of doubt as to the proper step to be taken in pursuance of any deed x x x or other instrument presented to him, he should have asked the opinion of the Commissioner of Land Registration now, the Administrator of the National Land Title and Deeds Registration Administration in accordance with Section 117 of Presidential Decree No. 1529.

In the ultimate analysis, however, the responsibility for the delays in the full implementation of this Court's already final resolutions in G. R. No. 62042 and G. R. No. 64432 which includes the cancellation of the notice of lis pendens annotated in the certificates of titles of the petitioners over Lot No. 4517 of the Sta. Barbara Cadastre falls on the respondent Judge. He should never have allowed himself to become part of dilatory tactics, giving as excuse the wrong impression that Civil Case No. 15871 filed by the private respondents involves another set of parties claiming Lot No. 4517 under their, own Torrens Certificate of Title.

WHEREFORE, the instant petition is GRANTED. The February 12, 1987 order of the Regional Trial Court of Iloilo, Branch 23 is REINSTATED. All subsequent orders issued by the trial court which annulled the February 12, 1987 order are SET ASIDE. Costs against the private respondents.

SO ORDERED.

Fernan, C.J., (Chairman), Feliciano, Bidin, and Cortes, JJ., concur.

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