



Republic of the Philippines
Supreme Court
 Baguio

SECOND DIVISION

PEOPLE OF THE PHILIPPINES,
 Plaintiff-appellee,

G.R. No. 269401

Present:

-versus-

LEONEN, *SAJ*, Chairperson,
 LAZARO-JAVIER,
 LOPEZ, M.,
 LOPEZ, J., and
 KHO, JR., *JJ*.

MARY JOYCE ALMERO y
PASCUAL alias “Majoy”,
 Accused-appellant.

Promulgated:

APR 11 2024

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DECISION

LAZARO-JAVIER, J.:

The Case

This Appeal¹ assails the Decision² dated October 28, 2022 of the Court of Appeals in CA-G.R. CR-HC No. 14822 entitled *People of the Philippines v. Mary Joyce Almero y Pascual alias “Majoy”* affirming

¹ *Rollo*, pp. 3–4.

² *Id.* at 8–24. Penned by Associate Justice Maria Elisa Sempio Diy with the concurrence of Associate Justices Angelene Mary W. Quimpo-Sale and Rex Bernardo L. Pascual of the Special Seventeenth Division, Court of Appeals, Manila.

the conviction of accused-appellant Mary Joyce Almero y Pascual alias “Majoy” (Almero) for violation of Section 4(k)(2) in relation to Section 6(a) of Republic Act No. 9208 or the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2003, as amended by Republic Act No. 10364 or the Expanded Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2012.

Antecedents

The Charges

In Criminal Case No. 01-0029-2019, Almero was charged with violation of Section 4(k)(2) in relation to Section 6(a) of Republic Act No. 9208, as amended by Republic Act No. 10364, *viz.*:

Criminal Case No. 01-0029-2019

On September 30, 2018 at [REDACTED], Philippines and within the jurisdiction of this Honorable Court, the above-named accused, by taking advantage of the minor-complainant’s vulnerability, did then and there willfully, unlawfully and feloniously recruit, procure or offer for a fee AAA* (DOB: [REDACTED]), a [14-year-old] minor, to a certain “Carlo,” by any means for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

Contrary to law.³

On arraignment, Almero pleaded *not guilty* to the charge.⁴ The parties thereafter stipulated, among others, that: (a) AAA⁵ was a 14-year-old minor at the time of the incident;⁶ (b) BBB⁷ is the biological mother of AAA; (c) BBB was the first person to whom AAA narrated what Almero did to her; (d) BBB assisted AAA in filing the criminal case against Almero; and (e) BBB can identify AAA’s *Sinumpaang Salaysay*⁸ dated October 11, 2018 (*Sinumpaang Salaysay*), as well as AAA’s and her signature thereon.⁹

* In line with Amended Administrative Circular No. 83-2015, as mandated by Section 7 of Republic Act No. 9208 as amended by Republic Act No. 10364, the names of the private offended parties, along with all other personal circumstances that may tend to establish their identities, are made confidential to protect their privacy and dignity.

³ *Id.* at 9.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ Records, p. 14.

⁶ *Rollo*, p. 26.

⁷ Records, p. 16.

⁸ *Id.* at 6–8.

⁹ *Rollo*, pp. 9–11.

The parties also stipulated that Dr. Jazelle R. Quebrado (Dr. Quebrado): (a) did a medical examination of AAA at [REDACTED]; (b) prepared the Medico-Legal Certificate¹⁰ dated October 9, 2018; and (c) would affirm her findings that the hymen of AAA was no longer intact.¹¹

Prosecution's Version

Around 6:00 p.m. of September 30, 2018, AAA was at a computer shop in [REDACTED], Batangas.¹² While browsing Facebook, AAA received a message from Almero asking if she knew a girl willing to be paid for sex. AAA answered in the negative. Almero then asked if AAA could be that girl, to which AAA answered "*Baliw ka. Bakit ako?*"¹³ AAA then asked where Almero was and proposed that they meet since they have not seen each other in a while. AAA suggested meeting at a waiting shed nearby.¹⁴

AAA went to the waiting shed with her 5-year-old brother where Almero asked her again if she was willing to have sex with a man in exchange for money. Eventually, AAA decided to bring her brother home.¹⁵

AAA then went out to buy *isaw*. Almero saw her and accompanied her. While together, Almero once more asked AAA to agree to have sex with a man for money. AAA declined again, saying that her mother might get angry. AAA then told Almero that she was tired and wanted to go home. Almero disregarded AAA's desire to leave, suggested alibis to tell her mother,¹⁶ and instead brought her to a 7-Eleven convenience store.¹⁷

While they were talking, a black pickup truck driven by a certain Carlo stopped by 7-Eleven. AAA and Almero rode the vehicle. Inside, Carlo and Almero talked.¹⁸ Carlo drove the pickup truck to [REDACTED], Batangas.¹⁹ After parking in the drive-in garage, Carlo led AAA to the adjacent room. Almero waited outside.²⁰

¹⁰ Records, p. 10.

¹¹ *Rollo*, pp. 9–11.

¹² *Id.* at 11, 27.

¹³ *Id.* at 11.

¹⁴ *Id.* at 11–12.

¹⁵ *Id.* at 12.

¹⁶ *Id.* at 12, 27.

¹⁷ *Id.* at 12.

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ *Id.* at 12, 27.

²⁰ *Id.*

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Carlo asked AAA if Almero forced her to go with him. AAA answered in the affirmative. Thereafter, Carlo instructed her to take a shower. Next, AAA lay on the bed and covered her naked body with a blanket. AAA then asked Carlo what they were going to do, and Carlo responded that it was up to her.²¹ So AAA put Carlo's penis in her mouth and performed fellatio.²² Carlo then touched AAA's breasts and vagina.²³ Afterwards, they dressed up and went out of the room. Almero was still waiting outside.²⁴

The three rode the pickup truck again. There, Carlo gave Almero PHP 1,000.00. Carlo brought AAA and Almero to the computer shop. Almero then accompanied AAA home.²⁵

On October 4, 2018, Almero sent another message to AAA asking if she would like to have sex with Carlo for money.²⁶ AAA declined.

After 17 days,²⁷ AAA reported the incident to her mother, BBB. AAA also revealed Facebook screenshots to BBB showing that Almero encouraged her to go out with Carlo, viz.:

[Almero]: [Asan] ka[?]

[AAA]: Bahay[.]

[Almero]: Pwede ka ga ngayon sabi ni Carlo. Makatakas ka ga?

[AAA]: Bat ako tol?

[Almero]: Hahaha [ikaw] ang gusto e[.]

[AAA]: Ulol,hahahaha nainlove na yata yun saken eh[.]

[Almero]: Hahaha [baka] pwede den besh hahaha ano pwede ka[?]

[AAA]: What time ga?

[Almero]: Ano game ka ga[?]

[AAA]: [Ayaw ko] nab aka kung [anong] oras tayo makauwi hahaha[.]

[Almero]: Tanga[.] Hindi na tayo hahapunin[.]

[AAA]: Hahaha ikaw nalang kase

²¹ *Id.* at 28.

²² *Id.* at 12–13, 28.

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ *Id.* at 13.

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ *Id.* at 28.

²⁷ *Id.* at 16.

[Almero]: Anlahoy[.] Hahaha[.] [Ikaw] lang ang inaatay namin[.]
[AAA]: Bat ga ako?

[AAA]: Ikaw na hahaha total sayo lng din [naman] napupunta ang pera
Hahahahaha[.]

[Almero]: Ikaw ang gusto e[.] Anong [magagawa] ko[.] Hahaha.
[AAA]: Hahahahaha nako po [naman.]²⁸

Ultimately, AAA was brought to [REDACTED] where she was medically examined. Dr. Quebrado then issued Medico-Legal Certificate No. 10-18-509 dated October 9, 2018.²⁹

Defense's Version

On September 30, 2018, around 6:00 p.m., Almero was washing dishes at the gym she was managing. She received a Facebook message from AAA asking if she could meet with her at a nearby waiting shed.³⁰ Almero went to the waiting shed and found AAA waiting with her brother.

AAA sought assistance because she was supposedly pregnant.³¹ Almero inquired if AAA was certain and if she took a pregnancy test.³² AAA said that she was unsure, but her period got delayed. AAA then asked Almero if she knew how to get rid of the baby to which she replied, "I don't know."³³

Next, AAA requested that they have a drinking session with somebody. Almero then told AAA that she would be meeting with a certain Carlo for a drinking session. AAA then asked if she could go along with them. Before going, AAA brought her brother home while Almero stayed at the waiting shed. Upon AAA's return, the latter forced Almero to contact Carlo and requested that they go to Metro Event Zone (MEZ).³⁴ According to Almero, Carlo "intimated his hesitancy to go to MEZ" in [REDACTED], Batangas.³⁵

²⁸ *Id.* at 14; TSN, BBB, June 3, 2020, p. 7; Records, pp. 68–69.

²⁹ *Rollo*, p. 13.

³⁰ *Id.* at 13, 28.

³¹ *Id.*

³² *Id.* at 13–14.

³³ TSN, Mary Joyce Almero, October 29, 2019, p. 7.

³⁴ *Id.* at 8.

³⁵ *Rollo*, pp. 14, 28.

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Eventually, AAA and Almero bought street food and proceeded to the latter's home. Then, they went to a 7-Eleven and waited for Carlo. When Carlo arrived, he agreed to go to MEZ. However, Carlo decided to back out and go home instead. Thus, they all went home.³⁶

Ruling of the Trial Court

By Decision³⁷ dated August 7, 2020, the trial court found Almero guilty of qualified trafficking in persons, viz.:

WHEREFORE, in view of all the foregoing, the Court hereby finds herein accused **Mary Joyce Almero y Pascual alias "Majoy" Guilty** beyond reasonable doubt for *Violation of Section 4 (k) (2) in relation to Section 6 (a) of Republic Act No. 9208 otherwise known as the "Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2003" as amended by Republic Act No. 10364 also known as the "Expanded Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2012"* and hereby sentences her to suffer the penalty of Life Imprisonment and to pay a fine of Two Million Pesos (Php 2,000,000.00).

Accused is likewise ordered to pay [AAA] the sum of Five Hundred Thousand Pesos (Php 500,000.00) as moral damages and One Hundred Thousand Pesos (Php 100,000.00) as exemplary damages.

SO ORDERED.³⁸ (Emphasis in the original)

The trial court held that the prosecution established all the elements of qualified trafficking in persons.³⁹ Almero talked with AAA, a minor, and convinced the latter to have sex with Carlo for money.⁴⁰ More, AAA performed oral sex on Carlo in exchange for PHP 1,000.00.⁴¹ Thus, it was unmistakable that Almero recruited and offered AAA for exploitation or prostitution by taking advantage of her minority and vulnerability.⁴²

As well, the trial court gave credence to the testimony of AAA, who "shed tears. . . while recalling her ordeal."⁴³ It also found that

³⁶ *Id.* at 14.

³⁷ *Id.* at 26–32. By Presiding Judge Noel M. Lindog of Branch 2, Regional Trial Court, ██████████, Batangas.

³⁸ *Id.* at 32.

³⁹ *Id.* at 31.

⁴⁰ *Id.*

⁴¹ *Id.*

⁴² *Id.*

⁴³ *Id.*

Almero admitted to setting up the meeting between AAA and Carlo,⁴⁴ and that said admission was confirmed by the screenshots of Facebook messages between AAA and herself.⁴⁵

Ruling of the Court of Appeals

The Court of Appeals affirmed under Decision⁴⁶ dated October 28, 2022. It, too, found that Almero peddled AAA's sexual services in exchange for money.⁴⁷ The claim that Almero prevailed over AAA was confirmed by the Facebook screenshots identified by BBB showing that Almero "forcefully demanded that [AAA] agree to. . . meet with Carlo."⁴⁸ Notably, Almero "did not object to the prosecution's offer and admissibility of said rebuttal evidence."⁴⁹ Such is tantamount to a waiver of any objection to the admissibility of said screenshots.⁵⁰ More, the Court of Appeals found AAA's testimony "straightforward, honest, and consistent on all material points."⁵¹ Lastly, the Court of Appeals imposed interest of 6% per annum on all monetary awards until full payment.⁵²

The Present Appeal

Almero pleads anew her purported innocence and prays that she be acquitted of the offense charged. Almero⁵³ and the Office of the Solicitor General (OSG)⁵⁴ both manifested that they are adopting their respective Briefs before the Court of Appeals, in lieu of supplemental briefs.

Almero maintains that the prosecution failed to demonstrate that she, upon meeting Carlo, actually offered AAA for sexual exploitation.⁵⁵ AAA's *Sinumpaang Salaysay* as well as her testimony only show that Almero "was just fooling around with Carlo" but never mentioned

⁴⁴ *Id.*

⁴⁵ *Id.* at 29.

⁴⁶ *Id.* at 8–24.

⁴⁷ *Id.* at 20.

⁴⁸ *Id.*

⁴⁹ *Id.* at 20–21.

⁵⁰ *Id.* at 21.

⁵¹ *Id.*

⁵² *Id.* at 22–23.

⁵³ *Id.* at 43–44.

⁵⁴ *Id.* at 36–37.

⁵⁵ CA *rollo*, p. 36.

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any particular instance where Almero offered AAA's services to Carlo in exchange for money.⁵⁶ Further, AAA herself offered to perform sexual acts for Carlo⁵⁷ as evinced by her statement "*Ano kainin ko 'yan?*" the word "*yan*" referring to Carlo's penis. Thus, the intent to commit fellatio originated entirely from her mind.⁵⁸ Too, there was no proof that AAA received any part of the PHP 1,000.00 allegedly given by Carlo to Almero. Therefore, it cannot be presumed that the amount was received by Almero in consideration of AAA's sexual acts.⁵⁹

Because the prosecution allegedly failed to establish the elements of the offense charged, the courts below should not have disfavored Almero's denial and alibi. Although inherently weak, denial and alibi assume relevance when the evidence of the prosecution linking the Almero to the crime is inconclusive.⁶⁰

Meanwhile, the OSG counters in its Brief⁶¹ that the prosecution established all the elements of trafficking in persons.⁶² More, it was shown that the trafficked person, *i.e.*, AAA, was a child when the crime was committed, thus qualifying the offense.

Our Ruling

Trafficking in persons is a deplorable crime.⁶³ The gravamen of the offense is not so much the offer of a woman or a child; it is the act of recruiting or using, with or without consent, a fellow human being for sexual exploitation.⁶⁴ Though it may be committed against anyone, it is more frequently targeted at women and children—sectors of our society which are more susceptible to abuse.⁶⁵

Trafficking in persons is defined under Republic Act No. 9208, as amended, *viz.*:

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

⁵⁶ *Id.* at 36–39.

⁵⁷ *Id.* at 38.

⁵⁸ *Id.* at 38–39.

⁵⁹ *Id.* at 39.

⁶⁰ *Id.* at 42.

⁶¹ *Id.* at 60–75.

⁶² *Id.* at 66–74.

⁶³ See *People v. Casio*, 749 Phil. 458, 461 (2014) [Per J. Leonen, Second Division].

⁶⁴ *People v. Barrientos*, G.R. No. 255591, September 7, 2022 [Notice, First Division].

⁶⁵ See generally *Garcia v. Drilon*, 712 Phil. 44 (2013) [Per J. Perlas-Bernabe, *En Banc*]

(a) Trafficking in Persons — refers to the recruitment, obtaining, hiring, providing, offering, transportation, transfer, maintaining, harboring, or receipt of persons with or without the victim's consent or knowledge, within or across national borders by means of 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 person for the purpose of exploitation which includes at a minimum, the 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.

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, adoption or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation or when the adoption is induced by any form of consideration for exploitative purposes shall also be considered as "trafficking in persons" even if it does not involve any of the means set forth in the preceding paragraph.

Here, the charge falls under Section 4(k)(2) in relation to Section 6(a) of Republic Act No. 9208, as amended, *viz.*:

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

....

(k) To recruit, transport, harbor, obtain, transfer, maintain, hire, offer, provide, adopt or receive a child for purposes of exploitation or trading them, including but not limited to, the act of baring and/or selling a child for any consideration or for barter for purposes of exploitation. Trafficking for purposes of exploitation of children shall include:

....

(2) The use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography, or for pornographic performances;

....

SEC 6. *Qualified Trafficking in Persons.* – The following are considered as qualified trafficking:

(a) When the trafficked person is a **child**[.] (Emphasis supplied)

*People v. Casio*⁶⁶ laid down the elements of trafficking in persons under the expanded definition in Republic Act No. 10364, thus:

⁶⁶ 749 Phil. 458, 474 (2014) [Per J. Leonen, Second Division].

(1) The **act** of “recruitment, obtaining, hiring, providing, offering, transportation, transfer, maintaining, harboring, or receipt of persons with or without the victim's consent or knowledge, within or across national borders”;

(2) The **means** used include “by means of 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 person”; and

(3) The **purpose** of trafficking includes “the 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.” (Emphasis supplied)

On this score, both the trial court and the appellate court are one in finding that the elements of the offense, as well as the qualifying circumstance “that the trafficked person is a child,” are present here.⁶⁷

First. AAA positively identified Almero⁶⁸ as the person who induced her to offer sexual services to a third person, *i.e.*, Carlo. AAA testified in a candid and straightforward manner⁶⁹ that in the evening of September 30, 2018, Almero messaged her on Facebook asking if she knew any woman willing to perform sexual acts in exchange for money.⁷⁰ Though AAA rebuffed her at first, Almero repeated her inquiry when they met in person at the waiting shed.⁷¹ Relevantly, Almero also admitted that: (a) she had means to communicate with Carlo;⁷² (b) she and AAA were indeed fetched by Carlo;⁷³ and (c) they rode his pickup truck.⁷⁴

The screenshots identified by BBB—and to which Almero offered no objection⁷⁵—further confirm that Almero sought to *secure* the sexual services of AAA. Despite AAA’s refusals and deflections, Almero kept on prodding her and even told her that Carlo asked for AAA specifically.

⁶⁷ *Rollo*, pp. 18, 29.

⁶⁸ *Id.* at 20.

⁶⁹ *Id.* at 21.

⁷⁰ *Id.* at 20, 31.

⁷¹ *Id.* at 12.

⁷² TSN, Mary Joyce Almero, October 29, 2019, p. 23.

⁷³ *Id.* at 21–22.

⁷⁴ *Id.*

⁷⁵ *Rollo*, pp. 20–21.

As a defense, Almero points out that it was AAA who asked Carlo if she should put his penis into her mouth (*Ano kainin ko 'yan*), implying that the sexual encounter between AAA and Carlo was consensual and thus must absolve her of criminal liability.⁷⁶

We do not agree.

It is well-settled that trafficking in persons is committed even though the trafficked person knew about or consented to the act of trafficking.⁷⁷ To reiterate, the gravamen of the offense is the act of recruiting or using a fellow human being for sexual exploitation. The Court in *Casio* ordained that “[a] minor’s consent to [a] sexual transaction [is not a defense under Republic Act No. 9208 and is] irrelevant to the commission of the crime.”⁷⁸ Indeed, a minor’s consent is not given out of his or her own free will even without the use of coercive, abusive, or deceptive means.⁷⁹

Second. Almero took advantage of AAA’s vulnerability to ensure that she would meet up with Carlo. Almero asked AAA on at least three occasions if she was willing to perform sexual services for another person.⁸⁰ More, she convinced AAA to not go home to her mother and provided alibis that she could use in case AAA’s mother got upset.⁸¹

Finally. The purpose of Almero’s communication with both AAA and Carlo was the sexual exploitation of AAA. AAA testified that Almero asked her if she knew anyone who was willing to perform sexual services for money.⁸² When AAA could not provide any leads to persons willing to offer such services, Almero then directly asked her if she was willing to offer her sexual services to another.⁸³

Too, AAA testified that after she performed fellatio on Carlo, the latter handed PHP 1,000.00 to Almero.⁸⁴ That the money was given by Carlo to Almero immediately after AAA performed the sexual

⁷⁶ *Id.* at 38.

⁷⁷ *People v. Casio*, 749 Phil. 458, 461 (2014) [Per J. Leonen, Second Division]; *See also Ferrer v. People*, G.R. No. 223042, July 6, 2022 [Per J. Lazaro-Javier, Second Division].

⁷⁸ *People v. Casio*, 749 Phil. 458, 461 (2014) [Per J. Leonen, Second Division].

⁷⁹ *People v. Dela Cruz*, G.R. No. 238754, June 16, 2021 [Per J. Lopez, Third Division]; *See also People v. Ramirez*, 846 Phil. 314, 324 (2019) [Per J. Leonen, Third Division].

⁸⁰ *Rollo*, pp. 11–12.

⁸¹ *Id.* at 12, 27.

⁸² *Id.* at 11.

⁸³ *Id.* at 11–12.

⁸⁴ *Id.* at 13.

service⁸⁵ lends itself to no other interpretation than that payment was made for that purpose.

As for the qualifying circumstance, Republic Act No. 9208 defines the term “child” as “a person below eighteen (18) years of age or one who is over eighteen (18) but is unable to fully take care of or protect [themselves] from abuse, neglect, cruelty, exploitation, or discrimination because of a physical or mental disability or condition.”⁸⁶ AAA’s Certificate of Live Birth⁸⁷ shows that her date of birth is [REDACTED]. She was only 14 years of age at the time of the incident, hence a child.

In all, it is indisputable that Almero offered AAA, a child, to Carlo for sexual exploitation.

Penalties

Considering that AAA was 14 years old at the time of the incident, the courts *a quo*⁸⁸ correctly sentenced Almero to life imprisonment and ordered her to pay a fine of PHP 2,000,000.00. The awards of PHP 500,000.00 as moral damages and PHP 100,000.00 as exemplary damages are likewise in order.⁸⁹ Further, we sustain the award of 6% legal interest per annum on all monetary awards from finality of this Decision until full payment pursuant to *Nacar v. Gallery Frames*.⁹⁰

ACCORDINGLY, the Appeal is **DISMISSED**. The Decision dated October 28, 2022 of the Court of Appeals in CA-G.R. CR-HC No. 14822 is **AFFIRMED**. In Criminal Case No. 01-0029-2019, **MARY JOYCE ALMERO y PASCUAL** alias “Majoy” is found **GUILTY** of **QUALIFIED TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS** under Section 4(k)(2) in relation to Section (6)(a) of Republic Act No. 9208 as amended by Republic Act No. 10364, sentenced to life imprisonment, and ordered to **PAY** a fine of PHP 2,000,000.00. She is also ordered to **PAY** AAA PHP 500,000.00 as moral damages and PHP 100,000.00 as exemplary damages.

All monetary awards are subject to 6% interest per annum from finality of this Decision until full payment.

⁸⁵ *Id.*

⁸⁶ Republic Act No. 9208, Section 3(b).

⁸⁷ Records, p. 9.


⁸⁸ *Rollo*, pp. 22, 32.

⁸⁹ *People v. XXX*, G.R. No. 248815, March 23, 2022 [Per J. Hernando, Second Division].

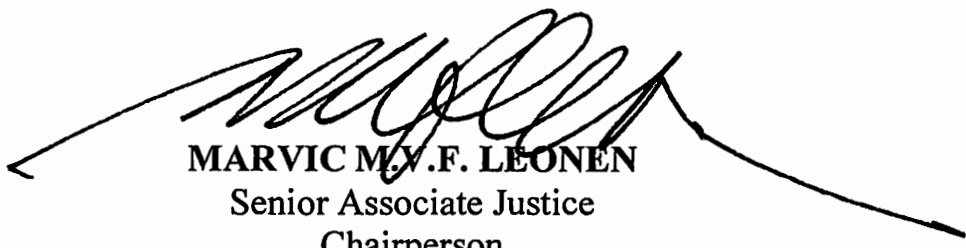
⁹⁰ 716 Phil. 267 (2013) [Per J. Peralta, *En Banc*].

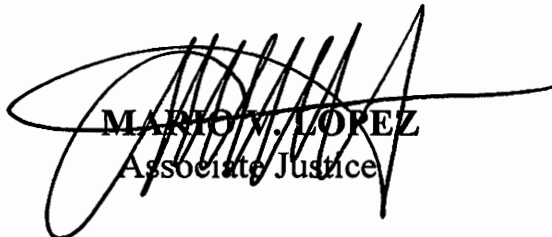
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SO ORDERED.

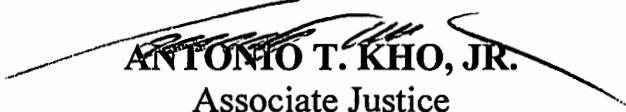

AMY C. LAZARO-JAVIER
Associate Justice

WE CONCUR:


MARVIC M.V.F. LEONEN
Senior Associate Justice
Chairperson



MARIO V. LOPEZ
Associate Justice


JHOSEP Y. LOPEZ
Associate Justice


ANTONIO T. KHO, JR.
Associate Justice

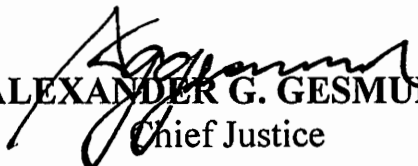
ATTESTATION

I attest that the conclusions in the above Decision had been reached in consultation before the case was assigned to the writer of the opinion of the Court's Division.


MARVIC M.V.F. LEONEN
Senior Associate Justice
Chairperson

CERTIFICATION

Pursuant to Article VIII, Section 13 of the Constitution and the Division Chairperson's Attestation, I certify that the conclusions in the above Decision had been reached in consultation before the case was assigned to the writer of the opinion of the Court's Division.


ALEXANDER G. GESMUNDO
Chief Justice

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