



REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES
Sandiganbayan
QUEZON CITY

SEVENTH DIVISION

MINUTES of the proceedings held on February 17, 2021.

Present:

Justice MA. THERESA DOLORES C. GOMEZ-ESTOESTA ---- Chairperson
Justice ZALDY V. TRESPESES ----- Member
Justice GEORGINA D. HIDALGO ----- Member

The following resolution was adopted:

SB-12-CRM-0164 to 0167– People v. Jesus A. Versoza, et al.

This resolves the following:

Accused Jefferson P. Soriano’s “**MOTION FOR RECONSIDERATION**” dated February 16, 2021.

During the videoconference hearing last February 15, 2021, accused Jefferson P. Soriano [“Mayor Soriano”] was summarily declared in Contempt of Court and imposed the penalty of Fine of One Thousand Pesos (P1,000.00).

In his *Motion for Reconsideration*, Mayor Soriano seeks to have the Order of Contempt set aside, harping that he attended the videoconference hearing from the Covid-19 center office which had the strongest wifi signal but where he could not haplessly control the people who came in with urgent concerns demanding his urgent attention. He alleges that he lost his focus in the remote hearing and attended to such concerns, not knowing the rules and protocols he needed to observe for a videoconference hearing. He invokes that he absolutely meant no disrespect to the Court and was only caught up by unexpected circumstances. He thus asks for clemency, understanding, and forgiveness, entreating that the perceived contemptuous act was not intended, designed or committed on purpose. Although the penalty may not be stiff, he would rather not have the stigma of being branded as disrespectful to the Court, as he believed he was not, which could be a scourge he will have to carry for the rest of his life.

While the effects of the Order of Contempt are not as consequential and far-reaching as Mayor Soriano puts it, at least the impact of the same is not lost on him. All the other participants are dead set in keeping pace with the

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proceedings; hence, the deflection of one from the protocol is certainly disruptive of the proceedings for which reason the power of contempt is cited to correct it.

For the Court to bend over backwards, as Mayor Soriano would have it, will certainly require extreme caution on its part.

It is an oft-repeated rule that the power to punish for contempt is inherent in all courts so as to preserve order in judicial proceedings and to uphold the due administration of justice. Judges, however, should exercise their contempt powers judiciously and sparingly, with utmost restraint, and with the end in view of utilizing their contempt powers for correction and preservation, not for retaliation or vindication.¹


At this instance, it is noted that while Mayor Soriano joined the videoconference hearing at the earliest opportunity, he was quick to lose his attention over the proceedings brought about, as he has alluded, to his duties as City Mayor of Tuguegarao City. The Court would rather not speculate on the verity of such statements but would simply expand its understanding on the role he had to fulfill as City Mayor. Having nonetheless admitted that the shortcoming on his part was only because of "*honest lapses or oversight, not at all accompanied by any thought of dishonesty, rudeness, insolence or incivility,*" and thus asks for "*mercy and compassion,*" the Court can give heed, **but only this once.**

WHEREFORE, the *Motion for Reconsideration* filed by Mayor Jefferson P. Soriano is **GRANTED**. The Order dated February 15, 2021 insofar as it declared Mayor Soriano in Direct Contempt of Court is recalled and set aside.

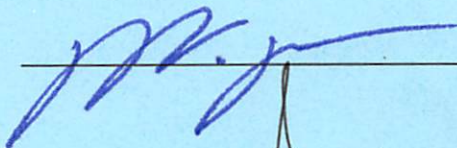
Mayor Soriano is, however, warned that a similar incident in the future will be dealt with more seriously.

SO ORDERED.

GOMEZ-ESTOESTA, J.



TRESPESES, J.



HIDALGO, J.



¹ *Castañeros v. Judge Escaño, Jr.*, A.M. No. RTJ-93-955, 12 December 1995.

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