



Republic of the Philippines
Supreme Court
 Manila

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 TEO V. LANTAN
 Clerk of Court
 Third Division
 DEC 13 2017

THIRD DIVISION

VIVENNE K. TAN,
 Petitioner,

G.R. Nos. 193993

Present:

-versus-

VELASCO, JR., J.,
Chairperson,
 BERSAMIN,
 LEONEN,
 MARTIRES, and
 GISMUNDO, JJ.

VINCENT "BINGBONG" CRISOLOGO,
 Respondent.

Promulgated:

November 8, 2017

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DECISION

MARTIRES, J.:

We resolve the petition for review on certiorari¹ filed by petitioner Vivienne K. Tan (*Tan*) assailing the 20 April 2010 Decision² and the 1 October 2010 Resolution³ of the Court of Appeals (CA) in CA-G.R. SP No. 112815. The CA found that the Regional Trial Court, Branch 95, Quezon City (*RTC*), exercised grave abuse of discretion when it reversed the decision of the Metropolitan Trial Court, Branch 37, Quezon City (*MeTC*), to exclude Tan from the voter's list of Precinct 0853-A of Barangay Sto. Domingo, Quezon City.

[Signature]

¹ *Rollo*, pp. 10-101.

² Id. at 105-124. Penned by Associate Justice Normandie B. Pizarro and concurred in by Associate Justice Amelita G. Tolentino, Associate Justice Ramon M. Bato, Jr., and Associate Justice Mario V. Lopez. Associate Justice Ruben C. Ayson wrote his dissenting opinion at 125-152.

³ Id. at 154-160. Associate Justice Ruben C. Ayson's dissenting opinion at 161-164.

THE FACTS

On 19 January 1993, Tan, born to Filipino parents, became a naturalized citizen of the United States of America (*U.S.A.*).⁴

On 26 October 2009, Tan applied to be registered as a voter in Quezon City.⁵ She indicated that she was a Filipino Citizen by birth. Her application was approved by the Election Registration Board (*ERB*) on 16 November 2009 making her a registered voter of Precinct 0853-A, Sto. Domingo, Quezon City.⁶

On 30 November 2009, Tan took an Oath of Allegiance to the Republic of the Philippines before a notary public in Makati City.⁷

The following day, or on 1 December 2009, she filed a petition before the Bureau of Immigration (*BI*) for the reacquisition of her Philippine citizenship.⁸ She stated in her petition that she lost her Philippine citizenship when she became a naturalized American citizen. However, Tan executed a sworn declaration renouncing her allegiance to the *U.S.A.*⁹ Thereafter, the *BI* confirmed her reacquisition of Philippine citizenship.¹⁰

On the same day, Tan filed her Certificate of Candidacy (*CoC*) for the 2010 National Elections to run as congresswoman for the First District of Quezon City.¹¹

On 28 December 2009, respondent Vincent “Bingbong” Crisologo (*Crisologo*) filed a petition before the MeTC, docketed as Civil Case No. 37-09-1292, seeking the exclusion of Tan from the voter’s list because (1) she was not a Filipino citizen when she registered as a voter; and (2) she failed to meet the residency requirement of the law.¹²

In her answer, Tan countered that she is a natural-born citizen having been born to Filipino parents on 1 April 1968. Although she became a naturalized American citizen on 19 January 1993, Tan claimed that since 1996 she had effectively renounced her American citizenship as she had been continuously residing in the Philippines. She had also found

⁴ Id. at 634.

⁵ Id. at 638.

⁶ Id.

⁷ Id. at 216.

⁸ Id. at 180-181.

⁹ Id. at 218.

¹⁰ Id. at 217.

¹¹ Id. at 215.

¹² Id. at 219-224.

employment within the country and even set up a school somewhere in Greenhills.¹³

The Ruling of the MeTC

On 14 January 2010, the MeTC rendered a decision excluding Tan from the voter's list.¹⁴ It held that she was not a Filipino citizen at the time that she registered as a voter, viz:

Through her acts and deeds, [Tan] clearly manifested and unequivocally admitted that she was not a Filipino citizen at the time of her application as a registered voter. If indeed she was a Filipino citizen as she claimed and represented, she would not have gone to the extent of re-affirming her Filipino citizenship, by her act of applying for the same. If indeed she was a Filipino citizen on October 26, 2009, the day she registered as a voter, she would not have been allowed to apply for Filipino citizenship as she was already a Filipino citizen. There is the act of [Tan] which would clearly manifest her lack of Philippine citizenship upon her registration. Said act is her taking an Oath of Allegiance on December 1, 2009. A Filipino citizen would not be required to perform an Oath of Allegiance to affirm his or her Filipino citizenship, because affirmation is no longer necessary because the citizenship has always been in her possession.

When she took her oath of allegiance on December 1, 2009, she renounced any and all allegiance to the Government of the United States of America. This act is again a clear showing that she was an American and not a Filipino citizen at the time she registered as a voter on October 26, 2009.

x x x x

The foregoing manifest that [Tan], through her subsequent acts and deeds, through the authoritative permission given to her by governmental agencies, and through her application for, and taking of an Oath of Allegiance for Filipino citizenship, could not be considered as a Filipino citizen at the time that she registered as a Philippine voter.

In view thereof, the petition for her to be excluded as a voter is **GRANTED**. [Tan] is hereby to be excluded from the voter's list of Precinct 0853-A of Barangay Sto. Domingo, Quezon City.¹⁵

The Ruling of the RTC

Aggrieved, Tan appealed the MeTC decision to the RTC, where it was reversed and Crisologo's petition was dismissed for lack of merit. The RTC's position was that Tan's questioned citizenship was cured, to wit:

¹³ Id. at 237-258.

¹⁴ Id. at 260-266. Penned by Judge Augustus C. Diaz.

¹⁵ Id. at 264-266.



In the case at bar, there is no doubt that [Tan] upon registration as voter in the First District of Quezon City was still a naturalized American Citizen. But her questioned citizenship was cured when [Tan] made the following acts:

- 1) She took an oath of allegiance to the Republic of the Philippines on November 30, 2009;
- 2) She filed a Petition for Reacquisition and/or Retention of Philippine Citizenship under Republic Act No. 9225 before the [BI];
- 3) On December 1, 2009, the [BI] has issued an Order granting the petition and ordering the issuance of a Certificate of Retention/Re-acquisition of Philippine Citizenship in favor of [Tan]; and
- 4) Lastly, [Tan] executed a Sworn Declaration that she make a formal renunciation of her United States nationality; that she absolutely and entirely renounce her United States nationality together with all rights and privileges and all duties and allegiance and fidelity there unto pertaining before a notary public on December 1, 2009.

With these acts of [Tan], she is deemed to have never lost her Filipino citizenship.

x x x x

Clearly, the court *a quo* erred in concluding that [Tan], through her subsequent acts and deeds, through the authoritative permission given to her by government agencies, and through her application for, and taking an Oath of Allegiance for Filipino citizenship, could not be considered as a Filipino citizen at the time she registered as a Philippine voter. [citation omitted]

[Tan] having re-acquired her Filipino citizenship under Republic Act No. 9225, she is deemed not to have lost her Filipino citizenship and is, therefore, a valid registered voter. In short, whatever defects [Tan] had in her nationality when she registered as a voter should now be deemed cured by her re-acquisition of her Filipino citizenship under R.A. No. 9225.

WHEREFORE, the Decision dated January 14, 2010 of the [MeTC] is REVERSED and SET ASIDE and a new one is rendered dismissing the Petition For Exclusion Of A Voter From The List for lack of merit.¹⁶

Since the RTC decision became final and executory pursuant to Republic Act (R.A.) No. 8189, otherwise known as the Voter's Registration Act of 1996,¹⁷ Crisologo filed a petition for certiorari before the CA.¹⁸ He argued that Tan should have been excluded from the list of registered voters for failure to meet the citizenship and residency requirement to be registered as a voter.



¹⁶ Id. at 271-274. Penned by Judge Henri Jean-Paul B. Inting.

¹⁷ Id. at 298

¹⁸ Id. at 275-296.

The Assailed CA Decision

After the parties submitted their respective memoranda, the CA came up with a decision finding that the RTC committed grave abuse of discretion amounting to lack or in excess of jurisdiction in reversing the decision of the MeTC. The dispositive portion reads:

WHEREFORE, the petition is **GRANTED**. The assailed disposition is **ANNULLED** and **SET ASIDE**. The MeTC decision dated January 14, 2010 excluding Vivienne K. Tan from the voter's list of Precinct 0853-A of Barangay Sto. Domingo, Quezon City, is **REINSTATED**. Costs against the Private Respondent.¹⁹

In coming up with its conclusion, the CA gave the following reasons:

- (1) The taking of the Oath of Allegiance is a condition *sine qua non* for the reacquisition or retention of Philippine citizenship by a natural-born Filipino citizen who became a naturalized citizen of a foreign country;
- (2) Section 2 of R.A. No. 9225,²⁰ cannot be relied upon to declare that Tan never lost her Philippine citizenship or that her reacquisition of such cured the invalidity of her registration because the provision applies only to citizens of the Philippines at the time of the passage of R.A. No. 9225;
- (3) R.A. No. 9225 contains no provision stating that it may be applied retroactively as regards natural-born citizens who became naturalized citizens of a foreign country prior to the effectivity of the said law; and
- (4) Tan must have first taken her Oath of Allegiance before she can be validly registered as a voter because R.A. No. 9225 itself says that individuals with dual citizenships must comply with existing laws for them to enjoy full civil and political rights.

Arguing on pure questions of law, Tan filed the present petition before this Court.



¹⁹ Id. at 123.

²⁰ Otherwise known as the "Citizenship Retention and Re-acquisition Act of 2003."

OUR RULING

The pivotal question in this case is whether Tan can be considered a Philippine citizen at the time she registered as a voter.

A natural-born Filipino citizen who renounces his or her Philippine citizenship, effectively becomes a foreigner in the Philippines with no political right to participate in Philippine politics and governance.

The right to vote is reserved for Filipino citizens. The Constitution is clear on this matter:

Section 1. Suffrage may be exercised by all **citizens of the Philippines**, not otherwise disqualified by law who are at least eighteen years of age, and who shall have resided in the Philippines for at least one year and in the place wherein they propose to vote for at least six months immediately preceding the election. No literacy, property, or other substantive requirement shall be imposed on the exercise of suffrage.²¹ (emphasis ours)

This constitutional provision is reflected in R.A. No. 8189 this way: “[a]ll **citizens of the Philippines** not otherwise disqualified by law who are at least eighteen (18) years of age, and who shall have resided in the Philippines for at least one (1) year, and in the place wherein they propose to vote, for at least six (6) months immediately preceding the election, may register as a voter.”²² Although the Voter’s Registration Act of 1996 does not contain a similar provision like R.A. No. 9189²³ that disqualifies non-Filipino citizens from voting, it does, however, provide that the ERB shall deactivate the registration and remove the registration records of any person who has lost his or her Filipino citizenship.²⁴

Without any doubt, **only** Filipino citizens are qualified to vote and may be included in the permanent list of voters.²⁵ Thus, to be registered a voter in the Philippines, the registrant must be a citizen at the time he or she filed the application.



²¹ CONSTITUTION, Article V, Section 1.

²² R.A. No. 8189, Section 9.

²³ Otherwise known as the “Overseas Absentee Voting Act of 2003,” Section 5: *Disqualifications*. – The following **shall be disqualified from voting** under this Act: 1. Those who have lost their Filipino citizenship in accordance with Philippine laws; 2. Those who have expressly renounced their Philippine citizenship and who have pledged allegiance to another country; [x x x].

²⁴ R.A. No. 8189, Section 27(f).

²⁵ Id, Section 4. *Permanent List of Voters*. There shall be a permanent list of voters per precinct in each city or municipality consisting of all registered voters residing within the territorial jurisdiction of every precinct indicated by the precinct maps.

In the present case, it is undisputed that Tan filed her voter's registration application on 26 October 2009, and that she only took her Oath of Allegiance to the Republic of the Philippines on 30 November 2009, or more than a month after the ERB approved her application.

Tan argues that (1) her reacquisition of Philippine citizenship through R.A. No. 9225 has a retroactive effect, such that a natural-born Filipino citizen is deemed never to have lost his or her Filipino citizenship,²⁶ and that (2) the reacquisition cured any and all defects, assuming any are existing, attendant during her registration as a voter.²⁷

R.A. No. 9225 was enacted to allow natural-born Filipino citizens, who lost their Philippine citizenship through naturalization in a foreign country, to expeditiously reacquire Philippine citizenship.²⁸ Under the procedure currently in place under R.A. No. 9225, the reacquisition of Philippine citizenship requires only the taking of an oath of allegiance to the Republic of the Philippines.

Congress declared as a state policy that all Philippine citizens who become citizens of another country shall be deemed not to have lost their Philippine citizenship *under the conditions* laid out by the law.²⁹ The full implications of the effects of R.A. No. 9225 can be fully appreciated in Section 3, which reads:

SEC. 3. *Retention of Philippine Citizenship.* Any provision of law to the contrary notwithstanding, natural-born citizens of the Philippines who have lost their Philippine citizenship by reason of their naturalization as citizens of a foreign country are deemed hereby to have **reacquired** Philippine citizenship upon taking the following oath of allegiance to the Republic:

I _____, solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines, and obey the laws and legal orders promulgated by the duly constituted authorities of the Philippines; and I hereby declare that I recognize and accept the supreme authority of the Philippines and will maintain true faith and allegiance thereto; and that I imposed this obligation upon myself voluntarily without mental reservation or purpose of evasion.

Natural-born citizens of the Philippines who, *after* the effectivity of this Act, become citizens of a foreign country shall **retain** their Philippine citizenship upon taking the aforesaid oath. (emphasis ours)



²⁶ *Rollo*, p. 47.

²⁷ *Id.* at 87-88.

²⁸ *AASJS v. Datumanong*, 551 Phil. 110, 116-117 (2007). Excerpts of deliberations on R.A. No. 9225.

²⁹ R.A. No. 9225, Section 2.

Based on this provision alone, it would seem that the law makes a distinction between Filipino citizens who lost their Philippine citizenship prior to the effectivity of R.A. No. 9225 and *reacquired* their citizenship under the same law from those who lost their Philippine citizenship after R.A. No. 9225 was enacted and *retained* their citizenship.³⁰ On this point, Tan contends that this distinction does not substantially affect her citizenship status because reacquiring or retaining Filipino citizenship has the same effect.³¹ Moreover, she points out that the framers of the law did not distinguish the difference; hence, using the words “reacquire” and “retain” interchangeably.³²

In the light of factual circumstances of this case and considering the plain meaning of the words “reacquire” and “retain,” we find it fitting to address the seeming confusion brought about by Section 2 of R.A. No. 9225. In other words, by declaring “deemed to have not lost their Philippine citizenship,” does this mean that once Philippine citizenship is reacquired after taking the Oath of Allegiance required in R.A. No. 9225, the effect on the citizenship status retroacts to the period before taking said oath. We rule in the negative.

Borrowing the words of Chief Justice Maria Lourdes A. Serreno, “[t]he renunciation of foreign citizenship is not a hollow oath that can simply be professed at any time, only to be violated the next day. It requires an absolute and perpetual renunciation of the foreign citizenship and *a full divestment of all civil and political rights granted by the foreign country which granted the citizenship.*”³³ The tenor of these words in *Maquiling v. Comelec* paved the way for the Court to rule that Arnado, the mayoral candidate who garnered the most number of votes during the May 2010 Elections, was disqualified from running for any local elective position.³⁴ In that case, the Court found that Arnado effectively recanted his oath of renunciation because he used his U.S. passport after taking the oath.³⁵

While the facts and issue in the case at bar do not involve the same matters discussed in *Maquiling* and in *Arnado*, the Court’s position on renunciation and its effect lead us to conclude that once Philippine citizenship is renounced because of naturalization in a foreign country, we cannot consider one a Filipino citizen unless and until his or her allegiance to the Republic of the Philippines is reaffirmed. Simply stated, right after a Filipino renounces allegiance to our country, he or she is to be considered a foreigner.



³⁰ *Japzon v. Commission on Elections*, 596 Phil. 354, 367-368 (2009).

³¹ *Rollo*, pp. 59-72.

³² *Id.*

³³ *Maquiling v. Commission on Election*, 709 Phil. 408, 436 (2013).

³⁴ *Id.* at 438.

³⁵ *Id.* at 438-439. See also *Arnado v. Commission on Elections*, 767 Phil. 51, 85 (2015).

Note that Tan's act of acquiring U.S. citizenship had been a conscious and voluntary decision on her part. While studying and working in the U.S.A., Tan chose to undergo the U.S. naturalization process to acquire U.S. citizenship. This naturalization process required her to renounce her allegiance to the Philippine Republic and her Philippine citizenship. This is clear from the Oath of Allegiance she took to become a U.S. citizen, to wit:

I, hereby declare, on oath, that **I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty, of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen**; that I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign or domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I will bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by the law; that I will perform noncombatant service in the Armed Forces of the United States when required by the law; that I will perform work of national importance under civilian direction when required by the law; and that *I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion*; so help me God.³⁶ (emphasis and italics ours)

Renunciation or the relinquishment of one's citizenship requires a voluntary act for it to produce any legal effect. This willingness to disassociate from a political community is manifested by swearing to an oath. If we were to consider the words in the Oath of Allegiance as meaningless, the process laid out under the law to effect naturalization would be irrelevant and useless. Thus, to give effect to the legal implications of taking an Oath of Allegiance, we must honor the meaning of the words which the person declaring the oath has sworn to *freely, without mental reservation or purpose of evasion*.

Tan took an Oath of Allegiance to the U.S.A. on 19 January 1993, prior to the enactment of R.A. No. 9225 on 29 August 2003. If we were to effect as retroactive Tan's Philippine citizenship to the date she lost her Philippine citizenship, then the different use of the words "reacquire" and "retain" in R.A. No. 9225 would effectively be futile.

An interpretation giving R.A. No. 9225 a retroactive effect to those who have lost their Philippine citizenship through naturalization by a foreign country prior to R.A. No. 9225 would cause confusion to what is stated in Section 3: "natural-born citizens by reason of their naturalization as citizens of a foreign country **are hereby deemed to have reacquired Philippine citizenship upon taking the following oath of allegiance to the Republic.**" To go beyond what the law says and interpret it in its ordinary and plain meaning would be tantamount to judicial legislation.



³⁶ Naturalization Oath of Allegiance to the United States of America, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, available from <<http://www.uscis.gov/citizenship/naturalization-test/naturalization-oath-allegiance-united-states-america>>

The plain meaning rule or *verba legis* is the most basic of all statutory construction principles. When the words or language of a statute is clear, there may be no need to interpret it in a manner different from what the word plainly implies.³⁷ This rule is premised on the presumption that the legislature know the meaning of the words, to have used words advisedly, and to have expressed its intent by use of such words as are found in the statute.³⁸

Corollary to this rule is the holistic approach. There is no conflict between the plain meaning rule and this approach as the latter does not espouse going outside the parameters of the statute. It merely adopts a broader approach towards the body of the law. In *Mactan-Cebu International Airport Authority v. Urgello*,³⁹ we pronounced:

The law must not be read in truncated parts; its provisions must be read in relation to the whole law. It is a cardinal rule in statutory construction that a statute's clauses and phrases must not be taken as detached and isolated expressions, but the whole and every part thereof must be considered in fixing the meaning of any of its parts in order to produce a harmonious whole. Every part of the statute must be interpreted with reference to the context, *i.e.*, that every part of the statute must be considered together with other parts of the statute and kept subservient to the general intent of the whole enactment.⁴⁰

To harmonize, given the distinction between citizens who have “re-acquired” from those who “retained” Philippine citizenship,⁴¹ coupled with the legal effects of renunciation of citizenship, Section 2 of R.A. No. 9225 cannot be used as basis for giving a retroactive application of the law. R.A. No. 9225 contains no provision stating that it may be applied retroactively as regards natural-born citizens who became naturalized citizens of a foreign country prior to the effectivity of the said law. In fact, correlating Sections 2 and 3 of the law would readily reveal that only those falling under the second paragraph of R.A. No. 9225, *i.e.*, natural-born citizens who became naturalized citizens of a foreign country *after* the effectivity of the said law, shall be considered as not to have lost their Philippine citizenship.

Moreover, to consider that the reacquisition of Philippine citizenship retroacts to the date it was lost would result in an absurd scenario where a Filipino would still be considered a Philippine citizen when in fact he had already renounced his citizenship. We are not about to give a statute a

³⁷ *Victoria v. Commission on Elections*, 229 Phil. 263 (1994), *Osea v. Malaya*, 425 Phil. 920, 926 (2002). *Soriano v. Lista*, 447 Phil. 566, 570 (2003), *Abad v. Goldloop Properties, Inc.*, 549 Phil. 641, 654 (2007).

³⁸ *Republic v. Lacap*, 546 Phil 87, 100 (2007), citing *Commissioner of Internal Revenue v. Central Luzon Drug Corporation*, 496 Phil. 307, 332-334 (2005); *National Federation of Labor v. National Labor Relations Commission*, 383 Phil. 910, 918 (2000).

³⁹ 549 Phil. 302-325 (2007).

⁴⁰ *Id.* at 322.

⁴¹ *Supra* note 30.

meaning that would lead to absurdity as it is our duty to construe statutes in such a way to avoid such consequences. If the words of a statute are susceptible [to] more than one meaning, the absurdity of the result of one construction is a strong argument against its adoption and in favor of such sensible interpretation as would avoid such result.⁴²

Finally, it is a well-settled rule that statutes are to be construed as having only a prospective operation, unless the legislature intended to give them a retroactive effect.⁴³ We must bear in mind that a law is a rule established to guide our actions without no binding effect until it is enacted.⁴⁴ It has no application to past times but only to future time, and that is why it is said that the law looks to the future only and has no retroactive effect unless the legislator may have formally given that effect to some legal provisions.⁴⁵

During the time Tan lost her Philippine citizenship, R.A. No. 9225 was not yet enacted and the applicable law was still Commonwealth Act No. 63. Under this law, both the renunciation of Philippine citizenship and the acquisition of a new citizenship in a foreign country through naturalization are grounds to lose Philippine citizenship:

Section 1. *How citizenship may be lost.* – A Filipino citizen may lose his citizenship in any of the following ways and/or events:

- (1) By naturalization in a foreign country;
- (2) By express renunciation of citizenship;

x x x x

Since the foregoing law was still effective when Tan became an American citizen, the loss of her Philippine citizenship is but a necessary consequence. As the applicable law at that time, Tan was presumed to know the legal effects of her choice to become a naturalized U.S. citizen. The loss of Tan's Philippine citizenship is reinforced by the fact that she voluntarily renounced her Philippine citizenship as a requirement to acquire U.S. citizenship.

All said, absent any legal basis for the retroactive application of R.A. No. 9225, we agree with the CA that Tan was not a Filipino citizen at the time she registered as a voter and her inclusion to the permanent voter's list is highly irregular.



⁴² *Chartered Bank of India v. Imperial*, 48 Phil. 931, 948 (1921); *In re Allen*, 2 Phil. 630 (1903); *People v. Rivera*, 59 Phil. 236 (1933); *Bank of the Philippine Islands v. Herridge*, 47 Phil. 57 (1924).

⁴³ *Lepanto Consolidated Mining Co. v. WMC Resources Intl. Pty. Ltd.*, 537 Phil. 473, 485 (2006).

⁴⁴ *Balatbat v. Court of Appeals*, 282 Phil. 429, 436 (1992).

⁴⁵ *Id.*

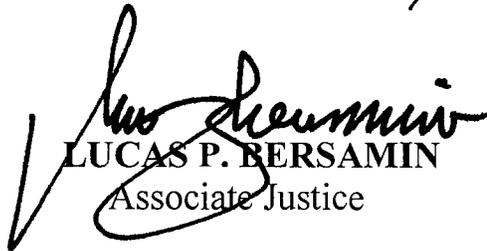
WHEREFORE, premises considered, the petition for review on certiorari is **DENIED** and the 20 April 2010 Decision and the 1 October 2010 Resolution of the Court of Appeals in CA-G.R. SP No. 112815 is **AFFIRMED in toto**.

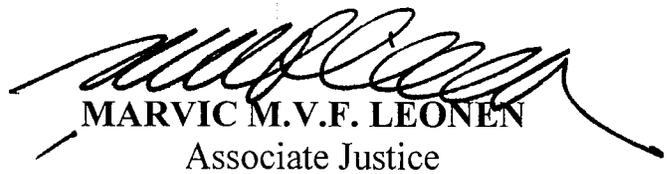
SO ORDERED.

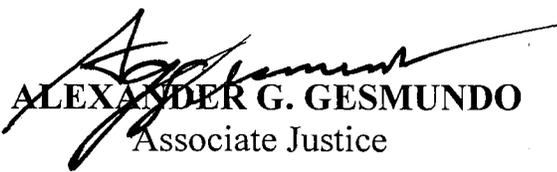

SAMUEL R. MARTIRES
Associate Justice

WE CONCUR:


PRESBITERO J. VELASCO, JR.
Associate Justice
Chairperson

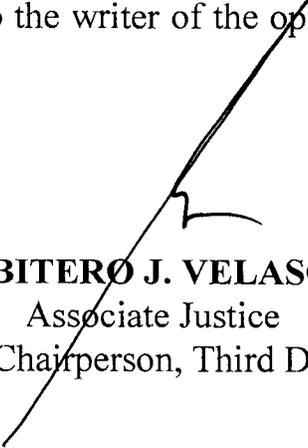

LUCAS P. BERSAMIN
Associate Justice


MARVIC M.V.F. LEONEN
Associate Justice


ALEXANDER G. GESMUNDO
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.

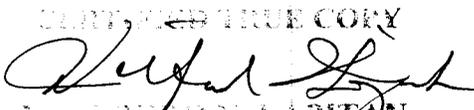

PRESBITERO J. VELASCO, JR.
Associate Justice
Chairperson, Third Division

CERTIFICATION

Pursuant to Section 13, Article VIII 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.



MARIA LOURDES P. A. SERENO
Chief Justice

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