

THIRD DIVISION

[A.M. No. RTJ-00-1523, August 15, 2000]

NORMA ESGUERRA, COMPLAINANT, VS. JUDGE GUILLERMO L. LOJA, RESPONDENT.

D E C I S I O N

PURISIMA, J.:

This is an administrative case for gross inefficiency, grave abuse of discretion, incompetence and falsification of certificate of service instituted by Norma Esguerra against Judge Guillermo Loja^[1] for not deciding a case within the reglementary period.

The antecedent facts that matter are as follows:

Complainant brought a criminal complaint for falsification of public documents, entitled *People of the Philippines versus Georly Quilala, Sr. and Leonila Quilala*. Docketed as Criminal Case No. 94-139629, the case was assigned to the sala of respondent judge. It was submitted for decision on March 5, 1997, after the prosecution and the defense had rested.

Complainant charged that respondent judge failed to decide the said case within ninety (90) days after it was ready for decision, pursuant to Section 15 (1), Article VIII, 1987 Constitution,^[2] despite the filing of a motion for rendition of judgment.^[3] Complainant theorized that "there is [a] possibility that respondent judge might have falsified" his certificate of service sent to this Court, to make it appear that he had no case then pending decision, so as to enable him to receive his salary.

On June 18, 1998, the Court Administrator required the respondent judge to comment within ten (10) days from notice.

On July 9, 1998, respondent judge filed his Comment vehemently denying the allegations of the complaint, branding the same as nothing but pure and simple harassment.^[4] The aforementioned criminal case was decided in favor of the complainant on March 2, 1998^[5] but instead of appreciating the efforts of the respondent judge in deciding her case, she lodged the complaint against him.^[6]

The pivotal issue for determination here is whether or not the act of respondent judge in disposing a case would exculpate him from the charge of gross inefficiency, incompetence and falsification of certificate of service.

The Court Administrator noticed that the aforesaid Decision was without any date, so much so that he assumed that the date of promulgation was also the date of the decision. Consequently, he recommended in his report to the Court that the respondent judge be held guilty as charged and fined in the amount of P5,000.00 with a stern warning that a commission of a similar act in the future will be dealt