

FIRST DIVISION

[**A.M. NO. RTJ-04-1822, June 25, 2007**]

ATTY. REX G. RICO, COMPLAINANT, VS. JUDGE ANASTACIO C. RUFON (RTC, BACOLOD CITY, BRANCH 51), RESPONDENT.

DECISION

AZCUNA, J.:

This case involves a Complaint dated January 6, 2003, filed by Atty. Rex G. Rico charging respondent Judge Anastacio C. Rufon, Acting Presiding Judge, of the Regional Trial Court, Branch 51, Bacolod City with gross ignorance of the law, incompetence and violations of the Code of the Judicial Conduct, particularly Canon 1, Rules 1.01 and 1.02; Canon 2, Rule 2.01; and Canon 3, Rules 3.01 and 3.02.

The complainant alleged that:

1. He was the counsel for the plaintiffs in Civil Case No. 32482 entitled "Dos Amigos Branch IV, Teodoro Ko and Carmelina B. Suplido vs. Rachel J. Akol" pending before RTC, Branch 155, Pasig City. In the decision dated April 26, 1983, the Pasig court decided in favor of the plaintiffs. Defendant Rachel Akol appealed the case but the Court of Appeals affirmed the decision. Some of the properties in the name of Claudio Akol as spouse of Rachel Akol which were located in Bacolod City where thereafter levied in execution by the Bacolod City Sheriff who annotated a "Notice of Embargo" dated May 16, 1989 on the TCTs;
2. On June 7, 2000, as counsel for the plaintiffs, he filed a motion for the issuance of a writ of execution with RTC, Branch 155, Pasig City. The motion was granted and the Branch Sheriff of Bacolod City was directed to implement the writ of execution on the properties of defendant Akol in Bacolod City;
3. On September 7, 2000, Claudio G. Akol, Jr., filed a petition for Cancellation of Notice of Embargo (CAD Case No. 00-1204) at the RTC, Branch 51, Bacolod City, Negros Occidental presided over by Judge Anastacio C. Rufon in an acting capacity. In an Order dated October 27, 2000, Judge Rufon granted the petition and ordered the cancellation of the Notice of Embargo on the ground of prescription;
4. On the other hand, the RTC, Branch 155, Pasig City issued an Order dated November 29, 2000 holding in abeyance the enforcement of the writ of execution. It was only on January 2, 2001 that the said court directed the implementation of the writ;

5. Subsequently, Judge Rufon issued another Order dated March 21, 2001 directing the Register of Deeds of Bacolod City to comply with his October 27, 2000 Order by canceling the Notice of Embargo on the TCTs. On April 25, 2001, the Clerk of Court of RTC, Branch 51, Bacolod City issued a Certification that the court Order dated March 21, 2001 had become the final and executory.

Complainant claimed that Judge Rufon exhibited gross ignorance of the law and incompetence when he (1) violated the principle of judicial stability of taking cognizance of the Petition for Cancellation of Notice of Embargo on Transfer Certificate of Title (TCT) Nos. T-469321, Y-19969 and T-19968; (2) failed to notify plaintiffs Dos Amigos Branch IV, Teodoro Ko and Carmelina Suplido on the October 27, 2000 hearing on the petition for Cancellation of Notice of Embargo; and (3) issued an Order dated October 27, 2000 in the nature of a judgment without adequate legal and factual basis.

On the first issue of violation of the principle of judicial stability, the following positions were taken by the parties:

1. Complainant stated that the RTC, Branch 155, Pasig City issued the writ of execution pursuant to which the Bacolod City Sheriff annotated a Notice of Embargo on the titles of the conjugal properties of Claudio and Rachel Akol. Accordingly, any challenge on the effectivity, enforceability or legal effects of the writ of execution upon the rights and interests of the parties involved should be addressed exclusively to the court which issued it. The complainant cited *Pajarito v. Señeris, et al.* (87 SCRA 275, 283[1978]) which held that, "There is no question that the court which rendered the judgment has a general supervisory control over its process of execution, and this power carries with it the right to determine every question of fact and law which may be involved in the execution;"
2. Judge Rufon, however, claimed that his court has special and limited jurisdiction as a cadastral court to take cognizance of the petition pursuant to Section 112 of Act 496 (the Land Registration Act) now found in Sec. 108 of P.D. No. 1529 (the Property Registration Decree). He cited the last paragraph of Section 108 of P.D. No. 1529 which expressly provides that, "all petitions or motions filed under this Section as well as under any other provision of this Decree after original registration, shall be filed and entitled in the original case in which the decree or registration was entered." Moreover, Judge Rufon claimed that he relied in good faith on the verification and certification on non-forum shopping in taking cognizance of the case;
3. Complainant would refute Judge Rufon's reliance on Section 112 of Act 496 by explaining that the method for amendment or alteration outlined in this section is summary or administrative in nature. He claimed that the power of correction is subject to the limitation that there must be "unanimity among the parties" or there is no adverse interest otherwise the case becomes controversial and must be

threshed out in an ordinary case or in the case wherein the incident belongs (*Martinez vs. Evangelista*, G.R. No. L-26399, January 31, 1981). Complainant argued that the Petition for Cancellation of Notice of Embargo is not cadastral in nature but an action to quiet title and/or remove clouds under Articles 476, 478 and 481 of the new Civil Code. Hence, Section 112 of Act 496 is off-tangent and, moreover, it has been repealed by Section 108 of P.D. No. 1529. Judge Rufon's claim of good faith would therefore fall. Ignorance of the law excuses no one from compliance therewith.

On the second issue of failure to notify the plaintiffs in Civil Case No. 32482, the following contentions were put forward:

1. Complainant stated that the judgment creditors (plaintiffs Dos Amigos Branch IV, Teodoro Ko and Carmelina Suplido in Civil Case No. 32482) were not given actual notice of the 27 October 2000 hearing on the Petition of Cancellation despite the fact that they are parties in interest as clearly indicated in the Notice of Embargo. Thus they were deprived of their right to due process. He cited *Southwestern University v. Laurente* (26 SCRA 52, 55 [1968]) which held that, "The cancellation of the annotation of an encumbrance cannot be ordered without giving notice to the parties annotated in the certificate of title itself."
2. Respondent judge asserted that the Petition for Cancellation of Notice of Embargo is a proceeding *in rem*, hence it may be instituted and carried to judgment without need of personal service upon the claimants. He states that the Sheriff's Return dated September 18, 2000 showing that the Order dated September 13, 2000 setting the date, time and place of the hearing of the petition was duly posted in three (3) conspicuous public places for at least three(3) weeks before the scheduled October 27, 2000 hearing and that this is a constructive notice.
3. Complainant would refute this by stating that since the petition for the cancellation challenges the notice of embargo issued in Civil Case No. 32482, this would nullify the rights of the adverse party, namely Dos Amigos IV, Teodoro Ko and Carmelina Suplido. Clearly, the Petition for Cancellation of Notice of Embargo is an action *in personam*, not directed against the whole world, but only against the plaintiffs in Civil Case No. 32482, although it concerns the right to a tangible thing (*res*).

On the third issue of granting an order in the nature of a judgment without basis:

1. Complainant alleged that the records of the petition show that respondent judge did not require reception of evidence to prove that prescription had set in, which is a question of fact. Judge Rufon's Order dated October 27, 2000 granting the petition grounded on the alleged prescription does not state the facts and the law upon which it is based. A perusal of the Order shows that it is not interlocutory but one in the nature of a judgment hence it is required by the Constitution and the Rules of the Court to state the