

Republic of the Philippines
Supreme Court
Manila

BY: xcg
TIME: 9:26

EN BANC

DR. VIRGILIO RODIL,
Complainant,

A.C. No. 10461

Present:

- versus -

BERSAMIN, C.J.,
CARPIO,
PERALTA,
PERLAS-BERNABE,
LEONEN,
JARDELEZA,
CAGUIOA,
REYES, A. JR.,*
GESMUNDO,
REYES, J. JR.,
HERNANDO,
CARANDANG,
LAZARO-JAVIER, and
INTING, JJ.

ATTY. ANDREW C. CORRO,
SAMUEL ANCHETA, JR. and
IMELDA POSADAS,
Respondents.

Promulgated:

July 30, 2019

X-----X

DECISION

PER CURIAM:

This administrative case arose from a letter-complaint¹ dated June 2, 2014, filed by complainant Dr. Virgilio Rodil (Dr. Rodil) against respondent Atty. Andrew C. Corro (Atty. Corro) before the Office of the Bar Confidant (OBC) of the Supreme Court. In a nutshell, Dr. Rodil alleged that Atty. Corro received PhP 10 Million for drafting a decision intended for the acquittal of a litigant whose case was pending before the Supreme Court.

* On official leave.

¹ *Rollo*, Vol. I, pp. 1-3.

The Antecedents:

The alleged incident occurred when Atty. Corro was formerly detailed as a Court Attorney at the Office of then Supreme Court Associate Justice Martin S. Villarama, Jr. In his letter-complaint, Dr. Rodil averred that his friend, Atty. Ramel Aguinaldo (Atty. Aguinaldo), asked him if he had any connection with the Supreme Court who could help his client who had a pending criminal case docketed as G.R. No. 205227, entitled *People of the Philippines v. Marco Alejandro*. In the said case, the trial court convicted accused-appellant Marco Alejandro (Alejandro) for illegal sale of dangerous drugs under Section 5, Article II of Republic Act No. 9165 and sentenced him to serve life imprisonment. Since the Court of Appeals affirmed the decision of the trial court, the case was elevated to the Supreme Court by ordinary appeal.²

In view of this, Dr. Rodil contracted the assistance of respondents Imelda Posadas (Posadas), Records Officer II of the Reporters Division in the Court of Appeals, and Samuel Ancheta, Jr. (Ancheta), Records Officer III, Third Division of the Supreme Court, who purportedly both facilitated the alleged transactions with Atty. Corro. Relevantly, Ancheta gave Dr. Rodil information about Atty. Corro after finding out that the case was raffled to then Associate Justice Villarama. Eventually, in exchange for a favorable decision acquitting Alejandro, Atty. Corro allegedly asked for a total of Ten Million Pesos (PhP 10,000,000.00). Atty. Corro supposedly received the said amount at Max's Restaurant along Maria Orosa Street, Manila in four payments or installments: 1) PhP 800,000.00 on April 22, 2013 given by Dr. Rodil to Posadas who turned over the cash to Ancheta for delivery to Atty. Corro; 2) PhP 700,000.00 on August 12, 2013, again given by Dr. Rodil through Posadas who passed it on to Ancheta for delivery to Atty. Corro; 3) PhP 5 Million on December 13, 2013, when Dr. Rodil personally met Atty. Corro and his friend Rico Alberto; and 4) PhP 3.5 Million on February 21, 2014, which Dr. Rodil also gave to Atty. Corro with Rico Alberto as witness.³

Afterwards, Atty. Corro supposedly gave Ancheta the advanced copy of the decision in G.R. No. 205227 and instructed them to open the envelope outside Max's Restaurant, since other court employees might be around the establishment. Dr. Rodil later on discovered that the advanced copy was actually a fake after he requested an official copy of the decision in the Reporters Office of the Supreme Court. Dismayed, Dr. Rodil tried to contact Atty. Corro but he completely ignored the former. Because of this, Dr. Rodil sent his representative to the Office of then Associate Justice Villarama to find Atty. Corro. He subsequently learned that Atty. Corro had already resigned from the Supreme Court. This prompted Dr. Rodil to file a

² *Rollo*, Vol. II, p. 439.

³ *Id.*

complaint against Atty. Corro. Hearings were then conducted in order to clarify what had transpired.⁴

During the initial hearing of the case on November 7, 2017, Dr. Rodil, represented by his counsel, Atty. Ric Juan, Jr., appeared. Both Ancheta and Posadas were present as well. However, although represented by his counsel, Atty. Jovian Jubert Dumlao (Atty. Dumlao), Atty. Corro failed to appear despite notice. Dr. Rodil testified that Atty. Aguinaldo, counsel of Alejandro in G.R. No. 205227, appropriated for himself the 11,294-square meter property titled to Dr. Rodil's daughter. Dr. Rodil explained that he was compelled to surrender the title to Atty. Aguinaldo because the latter's group harassed and threatened him since the family of Alejandro were awaiting the return of the Php10 Million bribe. Hence, Dr. Rodil stated that he initiated the complaint against Atty. Corro in order to retrieve the title of the lot which he was forced to surrender to Atty. Aguinaldo for supposed safekeeping. In addition, Dr. Rodil asserted that he exchanged several text messages with Atty. Corro.⁵

Meanwhile, through a Comment,⁶ Atty. Aguinaldo averred that his group paid PhP 10 Million to Dr. Rodil who solely transacted with Atty. Corro, Ancheta and Posadas. Atty. Aguinaldo alleged that Dr. Rodil deceived them when he assured them that an acquittal will be granted to Alejandro.⁷

During the March 6, 2018 hearing,⁸ Posadas testified that Dr. Rodil asked her if she knew anyone who could help his lawyer-friend, Atty. Aguinaldo, who was handling a criminal case pending before the Supreme Court. Posadas then contacted Ancheta to ask about the status of the case and later found out who the *ponente* was. Ancheta then transacted with Atty. Corro who supposedly asked for an initial billing of PhP 800,000.00 to review the case. Posadas informed Dr. Rodil of the said condition. Thus, on April 22, 2013, Dr. Rodil met Posadas outside the gate of the Court of Appeals to deliver the PhP 800,000.00. Posadas then turned the money over to Ancheta, who in turn gave it to Atty. Corro at Max's Restaurant. The same arrangement was followed on August 12, 2013, which involved the amount of PhP 700,000.00. Thereafter, on December 13, 2013, after Dr. Rodil gave Posadas a bag containing the amount of PhP 5 Million, she handed it over to Ancheta to give to Atty. Corro. Since Posadas wanted to see Atty. Corro in person, she followed Ancheta to Max's Restaurant. She subsequently saw Ancheta turn over the money to Atty. Corro from a distance of approximately 10 meters. Posadas left the restaurant and waited at the gate of the Court of Appeals. Afterwards, Ancheta gave to Posadas an envelope containing the draft decision, which she turned over to Dr. Rodil. However, Dr. Rodil demanded that the draft be made in proper form since the

⁴ *Id.* at 439-440.

⁵ *Id.* at 440.

⁶ *Id.* at 170-175.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ Also reflected in Posadas's Affidavit; *Id.* at 7-9.

document was unsigned and did not have the Supreme Court letterhead. Afterwards, on February 21, 2014, Posadas met Dr. Rodil outside the gate of the Court of Appeals so that he could hand over to her the amount of PhP 3.5 Million. Thereafter, Posadas again gave the money to Ancheta to be given to Atty. Corro. The said payment was intended for the draft decision to be printed with the Supreme Court letterhead, for it to be signed by then Associate Justice Villarama, and for it to be stamped with “original signed” by the other Supreme Court Associate Justices.⁹

After several months, Dr. Rodil called Posadas to tell her that Atty. Aguinaldo got furious since the draft decision that they “bought” from Atty. Corro was exposed to be a fake decision. Posadas then contacted Ancheta who assured her that Atty. Corro will handle the situation. Since then, Atty. Corro could no longer be contacted or located.¹⁰

For his part, Ancheta¹¹ testified on July 31, 2018 that since Posadas is his friend, he helped her in the case of Alejandro. He approached his friend, Atty. Corro, to review the case and gave the documents to him. Days later, Atty. Corro called Ancheta over the phone and set a meeting with him at Max’s Restaurant with a certain Rico Alberto. Atty. Corro informed Ancheta that after reading the records, Alejandro could secure a favorable decision but at a huge price, specifically PhP 10 Million.¹² Ancheta informed Posadas of the terms, who in turn informed Dr. Rodil. The next day, Posadas told Ancheta that the family of Alejandro is amenable to the demands of Atty. Corro. Notably, Ancheta admitted that he handed over the cash to Atty. Corro and that he introduced Dr. Rodil to Atty. Corro in the latter part of the transactions. Ancheta confirmed that Atty. Corro even gave Dr. Rodil his calling card. Thus, after full payment of PhP 10 Million was made, Atty. Corro handed over to Ancheta the sealed envelope purportedly containing an advanced copy of the decision for Alejandro’s acquittal. Though, when Dr. Rodil inquired about the official release of the said decision, Atty. Corro assured him that the decision will soon be promulgated. Thereafter, Dr. Rodil discovered that the draft decision given to him was fake.¹³

After the complaint was filed against Atty. Corro, he was given several opportunities¹⁴ to present his side but he failed to personally appear. Instead, his counsel, Atty. Dumlao, stated that they will submit a memorandum within 20 days from May 7, 2019. All the same, since the OBC believed that Atty. Corro did not have any intention to personally

⁹ *Id.* at 440-441.

¹⁰ *Id.* at 441.

¹¹ Also reflected in Ancheta’s Affidavit; *Id.* at 10-12.

¹² The amounts were: PhP 800,000.00 for the initial reading of the case; PhP 700,000.00 for the review of the case; PhP 5 Million for the supposed advanced draft decision; and PhP 3.5 Million for the advanced copy of the decision of acquittal signed by *ponente* and sealed, bearing the Supreme Court logo.

¹³ *Id.* at 441.

¹⁴ The hearing dates set were: October 17, 2018, January 9, 2019, March 12, 2019, and May 7, 2019. This is apart from the issuances sent by the Court for Atty. Corro to secure a copy of the letter-complaint and other relevant documents related to his case.

appear in any of the proceedings, it deemed it best to submit a report on Atty. Corro's case.

The Report and Recommendation of the Office of the Bar Confidant (OBC)

The OBC, in its Report and Recommendation¹⁵ dated June 27, 2019, found that Atty. Corro, Ancheta and Posadas, as court employees, committed grave misconduct as they were parties to a corrupt practice in the government in order to secure a favorable ruling. However, the OBC limited itself to Atty. Corro's case since the cases of the other two court personnel, Ancheta and Posadas, should be referred to the Office of Administrative Services of the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeals, respectively.

Significantly, the OBC found that Atty. Corro vehemently disrespected the lawful orders of the Court by ignoring its series of resolutions. Instead of filing a comment on Dr. Rodil's complaint and complying with the show cause order, Atty. Corro found time in filing manifestations and ways to question the Court's processes. He even employed delaying tactics and treated the process server of the Court with disrespect. Hence, the OBC stated that Atty. Corro's acts constitute as willful disobedience tantamount to gross misconduct and insubordination to the lawful orders of the Court which rendered him morally unfit to continue to become a member of the Bar.

The OBC noted an occasion in which Atty. Corro filed a manifestation praying that an administrative investigation be conducted on his case when he found out that the Court issued an unsigned resolution dated October 18, 2016 which, among others, submitted his case for resolution. The Court referred the case to the OBC for investigation yet Atty. Corro repeatedly and consistently refused to cooperate by not appearing at the scheduled hearings despite notice. The OBC similarly noted that Atty. Corro neglected his duty to uphold the dignity and authority of the Court and utilized delaying tactics to prolong the resolution of the case. He even informed the OBC that he will not appear in the hearings and will instead be represented by his counsel as he is allegedly always out of town working as a consultant in a mining company at a different province.

In light of these, the OBC ruled that Atty. Corro violated the Lawyer's Oath as well as Canon 1, Rule 1.01 of the Code of Professional Responsibility (CPR) when he repeatedly ignored court directives despite notice. More importantly, it held that Atty. Corro violated the law against bribery, graft and corruption for demanding and accepting the amount of Php10 Million. He used his position as a court attorney and an officer of the court, and betrayed the confidentiality of the assigned cases in the office of an Associate Justice. Apart from this, he committed gross dishonesty, deceit and willful breach of ethical commitment as well as gross misconduct,

¹⁵ *Id.* at 438-445; penned by Assistant Bar Confidant Amor P. Entila and noted by Atty. Ma. Cristina B. Layusa, Deputy Clerk of Court and Bar Confidant.

which render him unfit to continue to enjoy being a member of the legal profession. Likewise, the OBC declared that Atty. Corro's acts, in refusing to comply with the Court's resolutions and in consistently being absent in the hearings, amount to gross misconduct and willful disobedience which are valid grounds for suspension or disbarment. Hence, the OBC recommended that Atty. Corro be disbarred from the practice of law.

The Court's Ruling:

As recommended by the OBC, the Court imposes the absolute penalty of disbarment upon Atty. Corro.

At the outset, it should be emphasized that “[d]isbarment proceedings are *sui generis*, they belong to a class of their own, and are distinct from that of civil or criminal actions. To be sure, a finding of liability in a civil case or a conviction in a criminal case is not necessary for finding a member of the bar guilty in an administrative proceeding.”¹⁶ Undeniably, this case is unique because it involves a lawyer who previously worked in the halls of the Supreme Court, and disrespected the institution by placing it in a bad light. Thus, the Court may consider the totality of circumstances and evidence presented in order to determine Atty. Corro's liability and appropriate penalty.

Section 27, Rule 138 of the Rules of Court provides that disbarment or suspension may be imposed upon a lawyer based on certain grounds, as follows:

Sec. 27. Disbarment or suspension of attorneys by Supreme Court; grounds therefor. – A member of the bar may be disbarred or suspended from his office as attorney by the Supreme Court for any deceit, malpractice, or other gross misconduct in such office, grossly immoral conduct, or by reason of his conviction of a crime involving moral turpitude, or for any violation of the oath which he is required to take before admission to practice, or for a wilful disobedience of any lawful order of a superior court, or for corruptly or willfully appearing as an attorney for a party to a case without authority so to do. x x x.

Taking these grounds into account and juxtaposing it with the established factual circumstances of the case, there is no doubt that by demanding and accepting the bribe in the amount of PhP 10 Million, Atty. Corro, as found by the OBC, committed gross misconduct and grossly immoral conduct, and violated the laws against bribery, graft and corruption in the government service.

¹⁶ *Tan v. IBP Commission on Bar Discipline*, 532 Phil. 605, 612 (2006), citing *Roldan v. Panganiban*, 487 Phil. 475, 489 (2004).

Based on the records, the hearings¹⁷ conducted by the OBC strengthened the allegation that Atty. Corro provided the terms of payment and profited from the illegal transactions. Moreover, the purported text messages¹⁸ between Dr. Rodil and Atty. Corro showed that the latter supposedly still attempted to fix the problem, that is, until he suddenly did not respond to the former anymore, which further displayed Atty. Corro's participation in the despicable transactions. Copies of the text messages¹⁹ appended to the records showed Dr. Rodil's conversation with Atty. Aguinaldo regarding the return of the PhP 10 Million bribe to Alejandro's family, Dr. Rodil's conversation with the individual named Rico Alberto,²⁰ and Dr. Rodil's conversation with Posadas,²¹ all of which pertain to the illegal transactions and the ensuing demands for the return of the money.

To reiterate, Atty. Corro received the full amount of Ten Million Pesos (PhP 10,000,00.00) from Dr. Rodil (which was supposedly funded by the family of Alejandro) in exchange for a favorable decision of acquittal for Alejandro in G.R. No. 205227. This undeniable fact warrants Atty. Corro's disbarment since he is guilty of gross misconduct as well as grossly immoral conduct for committing such reprehensible acts. His additional infractions in ignoring and disrespecting lawful issuances or orders from the Court only added to the long list of reasons why he should no longer be given the privilege to practice law or to be a member of the Bar. Indeed, in order to maintain membership in the law profession, "[a] lawyer at no time must be wanting in probity and moral fiber which not only are conditions precedent to his entrance to, but are likewise essential demands for his continued membership in, a great and noble profession."²² Unfortunately, Atty. Corro displayed characteristics and committed contemptible acts contrary to what is expected of a lawyer.

In like manner, Atty. Corro definitely violated the Lawyer's Oath, as follows:

I, _____ do solemnly swear that I will maintain allegiance to the Republic of the Philippines; I will support its Constitution and obey the laws as well as the legal orders of the duly constituted authorities therein; I will do no falsehood, nor consent to the doing of any in court; I will not wittingly or willingly promote or sue any groundless, false, or unlawful suit, nor give aid nor consent to the same. I will delay no man for money or malice, and will conduct myself as a lawyer according to the best of my knowledge and discretion with all good fidelity as well to the courts as to my clients; and I impose upon myself this voluntary obligation without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion. So help me God.²³

¹⁷ *Rollo*, Vol. II, pp. 124-168; 262-296; 354-402.

¹⁸ *Id.* at 249.

¹⁹ *Id.* at 234-242.

²⁰ *Id.* at 251-255.

²¹ *Id.* at 257-258.

²² *Tucay v. Tucay*, 376 Phil. 336, 340 (1999).

²³ Form 28; attached to the Rules of Court.

As an officer of the court, Atty. Corro violated the lawyer's oath because he disobeyed the legal orders of the Court and did not conduct himself as a lawyer to the best of his knowledge and discretion given that he initiated and participated in illegal transactions which ran afoul to his duty to maintain good fidelity to the courts and even to litigants. By acting in conspiracy with Dr. Rodil, Ancheta, and Posadas to commit corrupt acts, Atty. Corro additionally broke the laws against bribery, graft and corruption.

Also, the Court found that Atty. Corro essentially violated the following provisions of the Code of Professional Responsibility (CPR), to wit:

CANON 1 - A LAWYER SHALL UPHOLD THE CONSTITUTION, OBEY THE LAWS OF THE LAND AND PROMOTE RESPECT FOR LAW AND LEGAL PROCESSES.

Rule 1.01 - A lawyer shall not engage in unlawful, dishonest, immoral or deceitful conduct.

Rule 1.02 - A lawyer shall not counsel or abet activities aimed at defiance of the law or at lessening confidence in the legal system.

Rule 1.03 - A lawyer shall not, for any corrupt motive or interest, encourage any suit or proceeding or delay any man's cause.

CANON 7 - A LAWYER SHALL AT ALL TIMES UPHOLD THE INTEGRITY AND DIGNITY OF THE LEGAL PROFESSION AND SUPPORT THE ACTIVITIES OF THE INTEGRATED BAR.

x x x x

Rule 7.03 - A lawyer shall not engage in conduct that adversely reflects on his fitness to practice law, nor shall he whether in public or private life, behave in a scandalous manner to the discredit of the legal profession.

CANON 10 - A LAWYER OWES CANDOR, FAIRNESS AND GOOD FAITH TO THE COURT.

Rule 10.01 - A lawyer shall not do any falsehood, nor consent to the doing of any in court; nor shall he mislead, or allow the Court to be misled by any artifice.

Atty. Corro tried to deflect the accusations by placing the blame on Dr. Rodil, Posadas, and Ancheta as the orchestrators of the corrupt transactions.²⁴ However, it should be emphasized that the subject of this disbarment case solely involves Atty. Corro as a member of the Bar, and not the other parties to the case since they would have to answer for their individual liabilities in different fora as applicable to their personal circumstances and violations.

²⁴ Temporary *rollo*, pp. 452-457.

Withal, We noted that Atty. Corro merely rebutted Ancheta's assertions with general statements such as: that Ancheta failed to prove with clear and preponderant evidence that Atty. Corro willfully resorted to falsehood and unlawful conduct; that Ancheta failed to present any independent evidence to establish fault upon Atty. Corro; and that there was a conspiracy between Dr. Rodil, Ancheta, and Posadas.²⁵ Atty. Corro could have easily refuted these assertions with particular instances or explanations, yet he chose not to submit any substantial document to explain his side or to at least attend the hearings. He did not even attempt to claim that he did not know who Dr. Rodil, Ancheta or Rico Alberto was, or to swear that he had never considered or entertained to commit any anomalous transactions with them. More importantly, he did not insist in the strongest terms that he did not engage in any corrupt acts or that he did not ever participate in the alleged transactions which transpired.

On another note, Atty. Corro focused on the supposed issue that he was not charged with a specific offense and that he was denied due process.²⁶ He conveniently forgot that the Court gave him the clearance or permission to procure a copy of the letter-complaint of Dr. Rodil against him; that he was well-represented by counsel during the hearings; and that he received notices from the Court which he could have clarified or inquired further into if he only bothered to show up to the hearings or to at least make efforts to personally secure copies of the records. However, Atty. Corro conjured up numerous excuses so as not to set foot in the Supreme Court premises, and even enlisted the help of other individuals (whose reputations he also jeopardized by being associated with him) to acquire the documents he needed instead of doing it himself. If it was truly important for him to clear his name, then he should have pulled out all the stops to speedily dispose or dismiss the instant case against him on the merits. In fact, the Court is under the impression that Atty. Corro deliberately acted in such a way in order to show a semblance of lack of due process so that he could invoke it as a defense, when in actuality he was not denied such right. The Court will not be lured into such a deception and will not countenance such a reprehensible act by an officer of the court.

In any case, Atty. Corro should be reminded that as a member of the Bar, he is subject to full investigation by the Court. Moreover, if there are other wrongdoings which he will be found guilty of, these will definitely contribute to the ruling on his case whether the allegations were specific or not. Without a doubt, "[a]ny person may bring to this court's attention the misconduct of any lawyer, and action will usually be taken regardless of interest or lack of interest of the complainant, if the facts proven so warrant."²⁷

²⁵ *Id.* at 455.

²⁶ *Id.* at. 457-460.

²⁷ *Bolivar v. Simbol*, 123 Phil. 450, 454 (1966), citing *Katalbas v. Tupas*, 105 Phil. 1289 (1959).

Atty. Corro harped on the instance that he was supposedly not allowed to procure a copy of his alleged text messages with Dr. Rodil. Yet, Atty. Corro also stated that such text messages could have been tampered with due to the advances in technology.²⁸ Even so, Atty. Corro should remember that he was given the opportunity to apprise himself regarding the incidents of his case but he chose to disregard such chance. At this juncture, the Court would like to point out that Atty. Corro would still be found liable even without a copy of the said text messages. In other words, the existence of such “proof” is not indispensable to the case at bench.

Interestingly, Atty. Corro mentioned that he was present at the Supreme Court premises, specifically that he was in his work station, during the time of the alleged incidents. Thus, he posited that he could not have left his work station at those times since the said transactions were conducted during business hours. He argued that if he left, his pay slips should have reflected the corresponding deductions on his salary.²⁹ We find this defense ridiculous as it was not physically impossible for him to leave his work station during those times. The same goes for his excuse that since he filed a leave on December 13, 2013 which was certified by the Office of Administrative Services (OAS),³⁰ he could not have been at the area where the alleged transactions transpired.³¹ Unquestionably, there is still a possibility that he went to Max’s Restaurant to receive the money even if he was on leave at the time. Simply put, he has no solid alibi³² to negate his presence on the alleged dates of the illegal transactions.

As for Atty. Corro’s attempts to display his character by submitting his performance evaluation forms,³³ his application to become a judge,³⁴ or his clearance³⁵ from the Court after he resigned, We find that these are not conclusive to show that he is not guilty of the accusations against him. As a matter of fact, submitting such documents is a feeble yet unconvincing endeavor to sway the Court of his supposed “good character.” Yet, it is common sense to know that a person’s true character cannot be determined solely by such evaluations and documents. This is akin to the belief that one person may not look like a villain but can very well be one in secret or that a person may be a wolf in sheep’s clothing. Likewise, presenting a copy of his 2013 Statement of Assets, Liabilities and Net Worth (SALN),³⁶ even if it suggested that he has more than enough to sustain his daily sustenance and activities, does not necessarily mean that he is incapable of amassing wealth through illegal means.

²⁸ Temporary *rollo*, pp. 460-462.

²⁹ *Id.* at 463-464; Annexes 11-14, pp. 480-481.

³⁰ Annexes 15-16, pp. 482-483.

³¹ *Id.* at 464.

³² See *People v. Sayo*, G.R. No. 227704, April 10, 2019; *People v. Acabo*, G.R. No. 229823, February 27, 2019.

³³ Temporary *rollo*, p. 463; Annexes 1-10, pp. 470-479.

³⁴ *Id.* at 464; Annexes 17-18, pp. 484-485.

³⁵ *Id.*; Annex 19, p. 486. The clearance supposedly cleared him of any administrative case after he resigned from the judiciary.

³⁶ *Id.* at 464-465; Annex 20, p. 487.

Considering these findings, Section 30, Rule 138 of the Rules of Court provides that:

Section 30. *Attorney to be heard before removal or suspension.* – No attorney shall be removed or suspended from the practice of his profession, until he has had full opportunity upon reasonable notice to answer the charges against him, to produce witnesses in his own behalf, and to be heard by himself or counsel. But if upon reasonable notice he fails to appear and answer the accusation, the court may proceed to determine the matter *ex parte*.

In connection with this, “[a] member of the Bar may be penalized, even disbarred or suspended from his office as an attorney, for violation of the lawyer’s oath and/or for breach of the ethics of the legal profession as embodied in the CPR. The practice of law is a profession, a form of public trust, the performance of which is entrusted to those who are qualified and who possess good moral character. The appropriate penalty for an errant lawyer depends on the exercise of sound judicial discretion based on the surrounding facts.”³⁷

Essentially, Atty. Corro maintained his innocence from the deed. Yet, he consistently and continuously ignored and disrespected the Court when he failed to attend the hearings despite notice, which to Our mind, would have been the best avenue to clear his name if he is truly blameless. Notwithstanding his choice not to attend the said hearings or to file the appropriate pleadings or responses to the accusations against him, he had the gall to accuse the Court of not affording him due process, even when every opportunity was already provided to him. To this, the Court deems it fit to mention its pronouncements in a previous administrative case involving another lawyer but with a similar question: “[R]espondent knew that the disbarment proceedings were pending. His right to practice his profession was at stake. He could ill-afford to just stand by and wait. It was his duty to inquire as to his fate. He was hidebound by his obligation to inform this Court of his whereabouts, to the end that notices could reach him. In all these, he failed. On the face of the environmental facts, respondent gave this Court ample reason to believe that he purposely stayed away.”³⁸

Atty. Corro, surely, had connections who could inform him of the status of his administrative case. In fact, he had his own counsel who represented him in the proceedings. Thus, the Court finds that he has had the full opportunity to defend himself, and that because of his own negligence or calculated maneuvers, he has waived his right to be heard. If Atty. Corro truly valued his standing in the legal profession, he would have exerted every effort to keep his name untarnished and not disregarded the Court’s issuances. Instead, Atty. Corro, when he agreed to “review” Alejandro’s case and promised an acquittal for a consideration while he was still an employee

³⁷ *Sison, Jr. v. Camacho*, 777 Phil. 1, 14 (2016), citing *Foster v. Agtang*, 749 Phil. 576, 595 (2014).

³⁸ *Bolivar v. Simbol*, supra note 27 at 453.

of the Supreme Court, then and there, already ruined his own reputation. Hence, he has nobody to blame but himself.

Categorically, the Court rules that the acts of Atty. Corro are “so reprehensible, and his violations of the CPR are so flagrant, exhibiting his moral unfitness and inability to discharge his duties as a member of the Bar. His actions erode rather than enhance the public perception of the legal profession.”³⁹ He is not worthy of bearing the honor of being called an officer of the court or a member of the Bar. Therefore, considering the totality of his violations as well as the damage and prejudice that he has brought upon the good name and reputation of the Supreme Court and the judiciary as an institution, it is but right to impose upon Atty. Corro the ultimate penalty of disbarment. This is without prejudice to the filing of the appropriate criminal charges against Atty. Corro by those concerned and if they so deem it fit.⁴⁰

This case has gone on long enough. It is time for Atty. Corro to face the consequences of his utterly shameful and filthy actions. Participating, or even suggesting to participate in a corrupt act is and will never be tolerated by the Court. Ergo, the full force of the Court’s authority to discipline members of the Bar should be imposed upon Atty. Corro. It is clear that he should be disbarred for all the violations he committed and for the shame he brought upon the legal profession as well as the judiciary. Let this be an example to those lawyers or employees of the judiciary to think twice, nay thrice, about even considering to conspire and defraud not just the Court but the litigants and the people in general.

WHEREFORE, Atty. Andrew C. Corro is hereby **DISBARRED** for gross misconduct, grossly immoral conduct, violations of the Lawyer’s Oath, violations of the Code of Professional Responsibility, and willful disobedience of the lawful orders of the Court. His name is **ORDERED STRICKEN OFF** from the Roll of Attorneys.

The individual cases of Samuel Ancheta, Jr. and Imelda Posadas are hereby referred to the Office of Administrative Services of the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeals, respectively, for the corresponding investigation and report within sixty (60) days from notice of the charges.

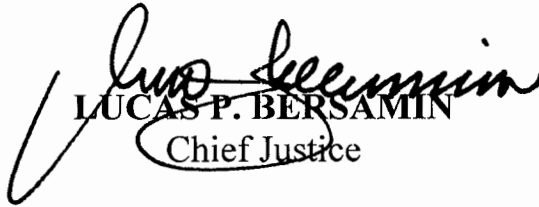
Let copies of this Decision be furnished to the Office of the Bar Confidant, Supreme Court of the Philippines, to be appended to the personal record of Andrew C. Corro as an attorney; to the Integrated Bar of the Philippines; and to the Office of the Court Administrator, for dissemination to all courts throughout the country for their guidance and information.

This Decision shall be **IMMEDIATELY EXECUTORY**.

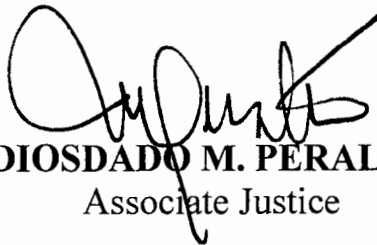
³⁹ *Sison, Jr. v. Camacho*, *supra* note 37.


⁴⁰ *Punla v. Maravilla-Ona*, A.C. No. 11149, August 15, 2017.


SO ORDERED.



LUCAS P. BERSAMIN
 Chief Justice

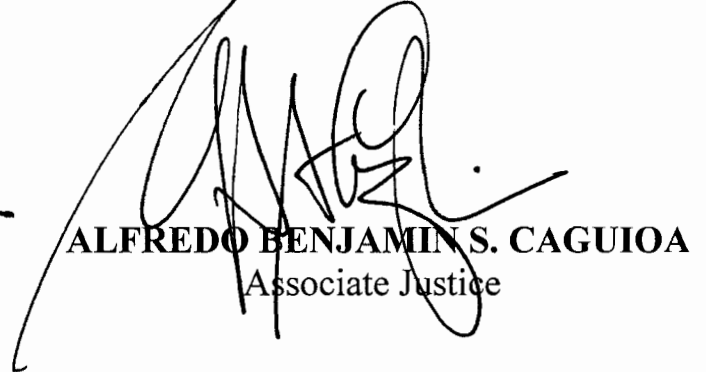

ANTONIO T. CARPIO
 Associate Justice



DIOSDADO M. PERALTA
 Associate Justice



ESTELA M. PERLAS BERNABE
 Associate Justice

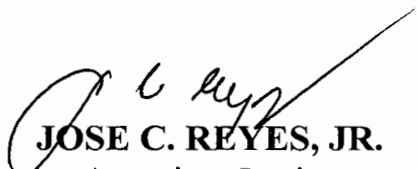

MARVIC M.V.F. LEONEN
 Associate Justice



FRANCIS H. JARDELEZA
 Associate Justice


ALFREDO BENJAMIN S. CAGUIOA
 Associate Justice

On official leave

ANDRES B. REYES, JR.
 Associate Justice


ALEXANDER G. GASMUNDO
 Associate Justice


JOSE C. REYES, JR.
 Associate Justice

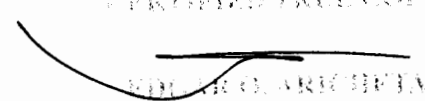

RAMON PAUL L. HERNANDO
 Associate Justice


ROSMARI D. CARANDANG
Associate Justice


AMY C. LAZARO-JAVIER
Associate Justice


HENRI JEAN PAUL B. INTING
Associate Justice

CERTIFIED TRUE COPY


RENE M. O. ARICILLA
Clerk of Court de Jure
Supreme Court