

Republic of the Philippines
Supreme Court
Manila

THIRD DIVISION

PEOPLE OF THE PHILIPPINES,
Plaintiff-Appellee,

G.R. No. 232358

- versus -

Present:

LEONEN, J.,
Chairperson,
HERNANDO,
INTING,
DELOS SANTOS, and
LOPEZ, J. Y., *JJ.*

BELINA BAWALAN y MOLINA,
BBB and CCC,*
Accused-Appellants.

Promulgated:

May 12, 2021

MistDCBaH

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DECISION

HERNANDO, J.:

On appeal is the August 31, 2016 Decision¹ of the Court of Appeals (CA) in CA-G.R. CR HC No. 06865 affirming the March 4, 2014 Decision² of the Regional Trial Court (RTC), Branch 78 of Morong, Rizal in Criminal Case No. 09-8624-M which found accused-appellants Belina Bawalan y Molina (Bawalan), BBB, and CCC (collectively, accused-appellants) guilty beyond

* Initials were used to identify accused-appellants pursuant to Amended Administrative Circular 83-15 dated September 5, 2017 entitled Protocols and Procedures in the Promulgation, Publication, and Posting on the Websites of Decisions, Final Resolutions, and Final Orders Using Fictitious Names/Personal Circumstances.

¹ *Rollo*, pp. 2-27; penned by Associate Justice Maria Elisa Sempio Diy and concurred in by Associate Justices Ramon M. Bato, Jr. and Manuel M. Barrios.

² *CA rollo*, pp. 10-23; penned by Presiding Judge Gina Cenit-Escoto.

reasonable doubt of Qualified Trafficking in Persons as defined under Section 6(c) and (d), and penalized under Section 10, of Republic Act No. 9208 (RA 9208), otherwise known as the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2003.

The Factual Antecedents:

The Information³ filed against accused-appellants reads:

That on or about the 29th day of January 2009, in [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]⁴ Philippines and within the jurisdiction of this Honorable Court, the above-named accused, for the purpose of prostitution and other forms of sexual exploitations [sic] including acts of lasciviousness, where cu[s]tomers kissed complainant on her lips, embraced her and touched, mashed and hold her breasts and other private parts of her body, and in conspiracy with one another, and by means of fraud and deceit and taking advantage of the vulnerability of the complainant by reason of lack of job, did, then and there willfully, unlawfully, and knowingly promote, facilitate or induce child prostitution, by then and there procuring complainant, AAA,⁵ fourteen (14) years old, a minor, at the time of the commission of the offense, to work as a pick-up girl or prostitute of the accused, wherein she was made to indulge in lascivious conduct leading to sexual intercourse with a customer and thereafter, for and in exchange for money, which acts of promotion, facilitation and inducement into prostitution, constitute acts of human trafficking, engaging the said private complainant in prostitution and other sexual exploitation, prejudicial to the normal growth and development of 14-year old AAA.

CONTRARY TO LAW.⁶

Accused-appellants pleaded not guilty to the charge.⁷

Version of the Prosecution:

AAA testified⁸ that in January 2009, she was residing with her mother, BBB, and the latter's live-in partner, CCC. She also explained that she calls CCC as her "Papa CCC." She has five siblings – two sisters and three brothers. AAA identified BBB, CCC, accused Zuraida Samud (Samud), and Nanay Lita (later on identified as Bawalan)⁹ in open court.

³ Records, pp. 1-2.

⁴ Geographical location is blotted out pursuant to Supreme Court Amended Administrative Circular No. 83-2015. See note 1.

⁵ The identity of the victim or any information which could establish or compromise her identity, as well as those of her immediate family or household members, shall be withheld pursuant to Republic Act No. 7610, An Act Providing for Stronger Deterrence and Special Protection against Child Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination, Providing Penalties for its Violation, and for Other Purposes; Republic Act No. 9262, An Act Defining Violence Against Women and Their Children, Providing for Protective Measures for Victims, Prescribing Penalties Therefor, and for Other Purposes; and Section 40 of A.M. No. 04-10-11-SC, known as the Rule on Violence against Women and their Children, effective November 15, 2004. (*People v. Dumadag*, 667 Phil. 664, 669 (2011)).

⁶ Records, p. 1.

⁷ Id. at 17.

⁸ TSN, February 19, 2010, pp. 1-27.

⁹ Nanay Lita introduced herself as Belina Bawalan in open court.

The victim narrated that BBB and CCC would pimp her every time their family had nothing to eat. On the night of the said incident on January 29, 2009 at about 11:00 p.m., she was at the park in front of the store of Bawalan when a man suddenly arrived and approached the latter. AAA saw the man handing money to Bawalan. Upon receipt of the money, Bawalan instructed AAA to go with the client.¹⁰ Meanwhile, BBB, CCC and Samud were also in the area, about six meters away from AAA and Bawalan.¹¹

When AAA and the man were about to board a tricycle, the police officers arrived and arrested Bawalan, BBB, CCC and Samud. Thereafter, AAA and all the accused were taken to the police station, where AAA executed her Sworn Statement.¹²

The victim further testified¹³ that prior to the subject incident, there had been more than five instances in the past when she was pimped by accused-appellants. In some of those instances, she was taken to a motel to engage in sexual intercourse with customers. Although she could no longer recall their names, she stated that they were young, about 17 to 19 years old. Whenever Bawalan would get paid ₱200.00 by the customers, AAA would receive ₱100.00. However, during the subject incident, AAA did not receive any amount since the police officers confiscated the money.

On another occasion, Bawalan instructed AAA to go with a customer. They boarded a tricycle and proceeded to the cemetery. Upon arrival thereat, the said customer sent a text to police authorities. AAA narrated that she removed her clothes while the customer took a video of her naked. When the police authorities arrived, they also took a video of her. Thereafter, the customer, whom AAA later learned to be a police asset, gave her clothes to put back on. However, she decided not to file a case against the said police asset.¹⁴

On the other hand, police officer Eleanor B. Pabion (Officer Pabion) testified¹⁵ that on the evening of January 29, 2009, she and other police officers were instructed by the Chief of Police to conduct an operation against prostitution in [REDACTED]. The operation was conducted in response to rampant reports about prostitution in the said area. Police Officer 1 (PO1) Orlando F. Intoy (PO1 Intoy) was designated as poseur customer, carrying the marked money in the amount of ₱300.00. While AAA's name and her alias "[REDACTED]" were disclosed, no one from the police force personally knew AAA at that time.

¹⁰ TSN, February 19, 2010, p. 9.

¹¹ *Rollo*, p. 5.

¹² Records, pp. 7-10. See Sworn Statement of AAA.

¹³ TSN, February 19, 2010, pp. 1-27.

¹⁴ *Rollo*, pp. 5-6.

¹⁵ See TSN, March 16, 2011, pp. 1-19.

After about 11:00 p.m., Officer Pabion, PO1 Intoy, PO1 Ryan Jay F. Gaon (PO1 Gaon), PO1 Zarah C. Patapat (PO1 Patapat), PO2 Baby Imelda T. Alcantara (PO2 Alcantara), PO2 Jovylee D. Subong (PO2 Subong), and other police officers proceeded to the target area. Upon arrival thereat, the police officers strategically positioned themselves. Meanwhile, PO1 Intoy started acting as a poseur customer in front of the store of Bawalan where girls were picked up.¹⁶

Officer Pabion narrated that she saw PO1 Intoy handing the ₱300.00 marked money to Bawalan. When she and the rest of the police officers saw PO1 Intoy and AAA board the tricycle, which was their pre-arranged signal, they approached and apprehended BBB, CCC, Bawalan, and Samud. They were all brought to the police station, including AAA.¹⁷

During Officer Pabion's testimony in open court, she identified BBB, Bawalan, and Samud as the female persons that AAA pointed at, when the latter was asked as to who received the money. Although she admitted that she did not notice CCC in the area, she saw him in the company of officers Gaon, Subong, and Intoy at the police station.¹⁸

During cross-examination, Officer Pabion also admitted that she could no longer remember if there were markings on the three ₱100.00 bills, or if she saw them during the briefing with the Chief of Police. In fact, she saw the bills only after the arrest of the accused.¹⁹

Version of the Defense:

For her part, BBB testified²⁰ that she and CCC are live-in partners, while Bawalan frequented their house prior to the incident. On the other hand, she only came to know of Samud after meeting her in front of Bawalan's store.

BBB denied the charge filed against them. She claimed that on the evening of January 29, 2009, she and CCC went to the park. They ate some *lugaw* and headed to the church near Bawalan's store to rest. At that time, Samud was manning Bawalan's store and selling *balut*. After a while, BBB saw a man buying *balut*, whom she recognized as a police asset after hearing him say "*naririto na ang mga bugaw*" to someone he was talking to on the cellphone.²¹

¹⁶ Id.

¹⁷ Id.

¹⁸ *Rollo*, p. 7.

¹⁹ Id.

²⁰ TSN, March 7, 2012, pp. 2-25.

²¹ *Rollo*, p. 8.

BBB admitted to seeing her daughter AAA in the area with some female individuals while the former was resting with CCC beside the church. When she asked AAA what she was doing, she replied that she was just roaming around the area. As stated by BBB, she failed to see what AAA was actually doing since there was a *tolda* between them which blocked her view.²²

When police officers arrived at the scene, they arrested BBB and the rest of the accused. Thereafter, they were brought to the police station without knowing why they were arrested. At the police station, photos and videos of all the accused were taken.²³

BBB also testified that she saw AAA being taken by several persons and made to board a tricycle. She assumed that the persons were from the media after seeing Pinky Webb among them. Moreover, she noticed that one of the vehicles in the police station had "ABS-CBN" painted on it. Upon seeing her daughter being taken away, she wanted to chase the tricycle. However, she did not do so out of fear. She also shouted for help but no one came to her aid.²⁴

On the other hand, CCC confirmed BBB's statement that there is no truth to the charge against them. According to CCC, he only came to know of AAA when he and the other accused were already in jail since AAA lives with her biological father.²⁵

CCC recounted that at about 11:00 p.m. of January 29, 2009, he and BBB were at a store eating *lugaw*, near the church in [REDACTED]. Before heading home, they decided to buy *balut* from Bawalan's store. After eating two pieces of *balut*, they stayed in the area for a while. Suddenly, a white car stopped in front of them and four persons alighted from the vehicle. One of the four persons (who later on introduced themselves as police officers), told all the accused not to run. When they asked BBB and CCC if they had seen ₱300.00 and a woman selling *balut* in a cart, BBB and CCC replied in the negative.²⁶

Thereafter, a commotion ensued and one of the police officers pulled out a gun. At this point, Bawalan and Samud were arrested. Two police officers, later on identified by CCC as PO1 Gaon and PO1 Patapat, searched the cart and found ₱300.00 under the mantle covering the table thereon. According to CCC, he did not know who owned the money nor did he see the police officers place the money under the mantle of the table.²⁷

²² Id. at 8-9.

²³ Id. at 9.

²⁴ Id.

²⁵ Id. at 10.

²⁶ Id. at 10-11.

²⁷ Id. at 11.

CCC further testified that a police officer took a video recording of the vehicle with “ABS-CBN” painted on it, as well as all the accused. The police officers also told them not to run and escape. Afterwards, they were taken to the municipal hall.²⁸

Upon arrival at the municipal hall, the three female accused were subjected to investigation, Bawalan being the first one to be interrogated. However, CCC believed that the investigators were not police officers but personnel from “ABS-CBN” after noticing that there was a person holding a big spotlight lamp and another holding a video camera while his co-accused were being investigated. After a while, CCC was investigated. After investigation, all the accused were unable to go home.²⁹

As for Bawalan’s part, she testified³⁰ that she did not know AAA, BBB, and CCC prior to the incident. She only met co-accused BBB and CCC in jail, while she met AAA when the latter visited her mother once before the hearing in this case started. She also claimed that there is no truth to the offense charged against her. She recalls that from 8:00 p.m. until 11:00 p.m. of January 29, 2009, she was selling *balut*, Milo, and coffee beside the Goldilocks shop in [REDACTED]. At that time, she already earned ₱350.00 from her sales.

At about 11:00 p.m. of the said day, there were many unfamiliar people eating around the area where her store was. She only knew Samud, who bought two pieces of *balut* from her. When Samud was about to head home, all the accused were suddenly arrested by police officers. To her knowledge, she was being charged with something related to money but denied having anything to do with it. Furthermore, she stated that she failed to recover her earnings for that night and even her basket of *balut* got lost.³¹

Ruling of the Regional Trial Court:

In its March 4, 2014 Decision,³² the RTC found accused-appellants guilty beyond reasonable doubt of the crime of Qualified Trafficking in Persons.³³ It held that the prosecution was able to establish all the elements of the crime charged. It gave credence to AAA’s testimony that Bawalan instructed her to go with the poseur customer from whom Bawalan earlier received a sum of money.

²⁸ Id.

²⁹ Id.

³⁰ TSN, November 14, 2013, pp. 1-10.

³¹ *Rollo*, p. 12.

³² CA *rollo*, pp. 10-23.

³³ Id. at 20.

This was corroborated by Officer Pabion's testimony regarding their operation against prostitution, when she witnessed Officer Intoy acting as a poseur customer.³⁴ Hence, it strengthened the allegation of AAA's sexual exploitation. The trial court also noted AAA's vulnerability, as shown by the fact that she only reached first grade, and would be offered by the accused-appellants to male persons in exchange for money every time their family had no food to eat.³⁵

The trial court also gave more weight to AAA's assertion that BBB and CCC knew everything about the incident rather than the latter's claim of innocence and allegation that they just happened to be at the scene of the crime. It held that BBB and CCC are expected to take care of the welfare of AAA, a minor. Considering that it was already 11:00 p.m. when the incident happened, the RTC concluded that they were cohorts of Bawalan in exploiting AAA.³⁶

The dispositive portion of the RTC's Decision insofar as accused-appellants are concerned, reads:

WHEREFORE, this Court finds accused BELINA BAWALAN Y MOLINA, BBB AND CCC guilty beyond reasonable doubt of the crime of qualified trafficking of person defined under Section 6 (c) and (d) penalized under Section 10 of Republic Act No. 9208 committed against complainant AAA, and sentences each accused to suffer the penalty of LIFE IMPRISONMENT.

The said three accused are further ordered to individually pay a fine of Two Million Pesos (P2,000,000.00). They are likewise liable and directed to pay, jointly and severally, herein complainant AAA, moral and exemplary damages in the amount of P500,000.00 and P100,000.00, respectively, and to pay the costs.

x x x x

SO ORDERED.³⁷

Aggrieved, accused-appellants appealed³⁸ the judgment of conviction before the CA on the ground that the prosecution failed to prove their guilt beyond reasonable doubt. They argued that AAA gave inconsistent, contradictory, and irreconcilable statements as to 1) what transpired after she boarded the tricycle with the poseur-customer; and 2) the number of times she was pimped by accused-appellants.³⁹ Consequently, they contended that the possibility of AAA's story being concocted cannot be discounted.

³⁴ Id.

³⁵ Id. at 21.

³⁶ Id.

³⁷ Id. at 23.

³⁸ Records, p. 162.

³⁹ CA rollo, p. 46-51.

They also claimed that the conflicting statements of the police officers also prove that there was no operation conducted to begin with. They pointed out the inconsistencies between the police officers' Sworn Affidavit⁴⁰ and Officer Pabion's testimony in open court regarding 1) the existence of the police blotter; and 2) whether the marked money was prepared during the pre-operation meeting.⁴¹ Lastly, they averred that PO1 Intoy should have been presented as a witness since he is the best person to testify regarding the operation.⁴²

On the other hand, the People, through the Office of the Solicitor General, maintained that the guilt of accused-appellants was proven beyond reasonable doubt.⁴³ The inconsistencies in the testimonies of the prosecution witnesses pertained only to trivial matters, which did not affect the determination of guilt of the accused-appellants in the crime charged.

The prosecution sufficiently proved that Bawalan, in conspiracy with BBB and CCC, caused the sexual exploitation of AAA in exchange for the sums of money received by Bawalan from the customers of AAA. Moreover, accused-appellants took advantage of the victim's vulnerability as she was often pimped by BBB and CCC when their family had nothing to eat. Besides, during the night of the incident, BBB and CCC were present when Bawalan received the money from the poseur customer.⁴⁴

Lastly, it was indubitably established during trial that BBB is the mother of AAA. On the other hand, CCC exercised some authority over AAA, as the latter considered him a fatherly figure and even calls him "Papa CCC."⁴⁵

Ruling of the Court of Appeals:

In its assailed August 31, 2016 Decision,⁴⁶ the CA affirmed the RTC's ruling. The dispositive portion thereof reads:

WHEREFORE, premises considered, the Appeal is **DENIED**. The Decision dated March 4, 2014 rendered by Branch 78, Regional Trial Court of HHH, Rizal in Criminal Case No. 09-8624-M is hereby **AFFIRMED**.

SO ORDERED.⁴⁷

Hence, the present appeal.⁴⁸

⁴⁰ Records, pp. 9-10.

⁴¹ CA *rollo*, pp. 52-53.

⁴² Id. at 53.

⁴³ Id. at 96.

⁴⁴ Id. at 96-114.

⁴⁵ Id. at 114-115.

⁴⁶ *Rollo*, pp. 2-27.

⁴⁷ Id. at 26.

⁴⁸ CA *rollo*, p. 180.

Our Ruling

The appeal is without merit.

Republic Act No. 9208⁴⁹ defines trafficking in persons as:

SECTION 3. *Definition of Terms.* — As used in this Act:

(a) *Trafficking in Persons* — refers to the recruitment, transportation, transfer or harboring, or receipt of persons with or without the victim's consent or knowledge, within or across national borders by means of threat or use of force, or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or of position, taking advantage of the vulnerability of the person or, the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person for the purpose of exploitation which includes at a minimum, the exploitation or the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery, servitude or the removal or sale of organs.

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall also be considered as "trafficking in persons" even if it does not involve any of the means set forth in the preceding paragraph.⁵⁰

In *People v. Casio*,⁵¹ this Court enumerated the elements of Trafficking in Persons:

- (1) The act of "recruitment, transportation, transfer or harbouring, or receipt of persons with or without the victim's consent or knowledge, within or across national borders."
- (2) The means used which include "threat or use of force, or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or of position, taking advantage of the vulnerability of the person, or, the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another; and
- (3) The purpose of trafficking is exploitation which includes "exploitation or the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery, servitude or the removal or sale of organs."⁵²

⁴⁹ An Act to Institute Policies to Eliminate Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, Establishing the Necessary Institutional Mechanisms for the Protection and Support of Trafficked Persons, Providing Penalties for its Violations, and for Other Purposes, otherwise known as Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2003. Approved: May 26, 2003.

⁵⁰ Republic Act No. 9208 (2003), Sec. 3(a). The original provisions of RA 9208 are used in the resolution of this case, prior to its amendment by Rep. Act No. 10364 in 2012.

⁵¹ 749 Phil. 458 (2014).

⁵² Id. at 472-473.

Section 6 of RA 9208, on the other hand, enumerates the instances when trafficking is considered qualified:

(a) When the trafficked person is a child;

x x x x

(c) When the crime is committed by a syndicate, or in large scale. Trafficking is deemed committed by a syndicate if carried out by a group of three (3) or more persons conspiring or confederating with one another. It is deemed committed in large scale if committed against three (3) or more persons, individually or as a group;

(d) When the offender is an ascendant, parent, sibling, guardian or a person who exercises authority over the trafficked person or when the offense is committed by a public officer or employee;

x x x x⁵³

As correctly ruled by the courts below, accused-appellants are guilty beyond reasonable doubt of Qualified Trafficking in Persons under RA 9208.

The elements of the offense of trafficking in persons were sufficiently established by the testimonies of the prosecution witnesses. First, AAA categorically stated that Bawalan instructed her to go with PO1 Intoy, who was then acting as a poseur-customer, after Bawalan received money from the latter.⁵⁴ This fact was corroborated by Officer Pabion, who saw PO1 Intoy hand the marked money to Bawalan.⁵⁵ AAA further stated it was not the first time she was sexually exploited by accused-appellants. According to her, it would happen often, whenever their family had nothing to eat:

Q: You also stated in your Sworn Statement that in the place you were residing, there is no food to eat, is that correct?

A: Yes, sir.

Q: What would your mother and your "*tatay-tatayan*" do when you have no food to eat?

A: *Binubugaw po nila ako.*

Q: What do you mean "*binubugaw*"?

A: *Binibigay po sa mga lalaki.*⁵⁶

x x x x

⁵³ Republic Act No. 9208 (2003), Sec. 6.

⁵⁴ TSN, February 19, 2010, p. 9.

⁵⁵ TSN, March 16, 2011, pp. 6-7.

⁵⁶ TSN, February 19, 2010, pp. 7-8.

Q: Were [sic] there any prior incident that you were being pimped by your mother, your *tatay-tatayan*[,] and Nanay Lita?

A: Yes, there was, sir.

Q: About how many times?

A: Five (5) times, sir.⁵⁷

AAA also stated that in the previous incidents, she would be taken to the cemetery and motel,⁵⁸ was videotaped naked,⁵⁹ and had sexual intercourse with her customers.⁶⁰ Evidently, accused-appellants took advantage of her vulnerability when she was made to engage in sexual activities with customers in exchange for money.

The fact that the poseur customer, PO1 Intoy, was not presented as a witness is of no moment. Contrary to accused-appellants' claim, the victim of the crime is in the best position to state that the accused had recruited and used her by giving her payment in exchange for her sexual exploitation.⁶¹

With respect to the circumstances which qualify the offense, we affirm the pronouncements of the courts below. It is undisputed that BBB is the mother of AAA,⁶² and CCC is her fatherly figure whom she calls "Papa CCC."⁶³ Taking into consideration the circumstances on how AAA was sexually exploited, all three accused-appellants conspired and acted together in perpetrating the crime.

While the prosecution failed to prove the victim's minority due to the absence of her birth certificate, it however established that the crime was committed by a group of three persons, and by an ascendant and a person exercising authority over the victim. Consequently, the crime still falls under Qualified Trafficking in Persons under Sections 6(c) and (d) of RA 9208.

The issue on whether the entrapment operation was recorded in the police blotter prior to the conduct of the actual operation, and whether the marked money was already prepared during the pre-operation meeting, are likewise immaterial in the prosecution of the crime charged. Thus, this Court deems it unnecessary to delve into this matter.

As to the inconsistencies in AAA's testimony, We find them unsubstantiated. AAA's allegedly conflicting answers as to what happened after she boarded the tricycle pertained to two different instances. Her first narration referred to a previous incident where she was taken to the cemetery

⁵⁷ Id. at 12. Note: AAA later on revealed in her testimony that there were more than five (5) instances.

⁵⁸ Id. at 18.

⁵⁹ Id. at 20.

⁶⁰ Id. at 22.

⁶¹ *People v. Rodriguez*, 818 Phil. 625, 638 (2017).

⁶² TSN, March 7, 2012, pp. 6-7.

⁶³ TSN, February 19, 2010, p. 3.

by a male customer while the second narration pertained to the entrapment operation.

The supposed discrepancy in her testimony as to the number of times that she was pimped by accused-appellants is just as irrelevant in the prosecution of this case. The appellate court's disquisition on the matter is apt:

x x x This Court can only surmise that ██████ experiences regarding prostitution must be dreadful and traumatic. As such, We cannot expect ██████ to take note and make an accurate account, of each instance of pimping. For all We know, ██████ must have gone through a lot in trying to bury such painful memories, only to be excavated once again during trial in the instant case. Accordingly, We agree with plaintiff-appellee that ██████ has been consistent in her testimony and if any such inconsistency exists, such merely pertains to minor or trivial matters which are inconsequential in determining the guilt or innocence of the accused-appellants in the crime charged against them.⁶⁴

In view of the foregoing, this Court finds no reason to deviate from the factual findings of the trial court, as affirmed by the CA, absent any indication that the lower courts overlooked, misunderstood, or misapplied the surrounding facts and circumstances of the case.⁶⁵ As the trial court was in the best position to assess and determine the credibility of the witnesses, having had the opportunity to observe the witnesses' demeanor on the witness stand,⁶⁶ its findings must be respected.

Finally, the courts below correctly imposed on each of the accused-appellants the penalty of life imprisonment and a fine of ₱2,000,000.00, solidary liability for moral damages in the amount of ₱500,000.00, and exemplary damages in the amount of ₱100,000.00. Legal interest of six percent (6%) per *annum* from finality of judgment until full payment on all monetary awards given to the victim is further in order.

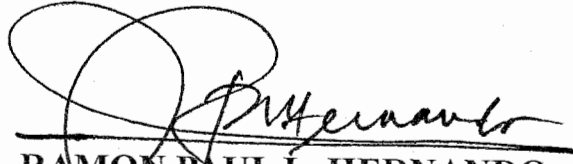
WHEREFORE, the appeal is hereby **DISMISSED**. The assailed August 31, 2016 Decision of the Court of Appeals in CA-G.R. CR HC No. 06865 which affirmed the March 4, 2014 Decision of the Regional Trial Court, Branch 78 of Morong, Rizal in Criminal Case No. 09-2624-M which found accused-appellants Belina Bawalan y Molina, BBB, and CCC guilty beyond reasonable doubt of Qualified Trafficking in Persons under Section 10 of Republic Act No. 9208 and sentenced them to suffer the penalty of life imprisonment, to individually pay a fine of ₱2,000,000.00, as well as solidary liability for moral damages in the amount of ₱500,000.00, and exemplary damages in the amount of ₱100,000.00, is **AFFIRMED** with **MODIFICATION** in that all monetary awards shall bear legal interest at the rate of six percent (6%) per *annum* from date of finality of this judgment until full payment.

⁶⁴ *Rollo*, p. 23.


⁶⁵ *People v. Basao*, 697 Phil. 193, 209 (2012).

⁶⁶ *People v. Burce*, 730 Phil. 576, 586 (2014).


SO ORDERED.


RAMON PAUL L. HERNANDO
Associate Justice

WE CONCUR:


MARVIC M. V. F. LEONEN
Associate Justice
Chairperson



HENRI JEAN PAUL B. INTING
Associate Justice


EDGARDO L. DELOS SANTOS
Associate Justice


JHOSEP Y. LOPEZ
Associate Justice

ATTESTATION

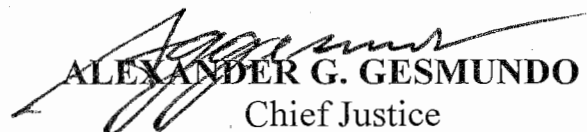
I attest that the conclusions in the above Decision had been reached in consultation before the case was assigned to the writer of the opinion of the Court's Division.



MARVIC M. V. F. LEONEN
Associate Justice
Chairperson

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.



ALEXANDER G. GESMUNDO
Chief Justice