

SECOND DIVISION

[G.R. No. 236848, June 08, 2020]

**CANDELARIA DE MESA MANGULABNAN, PETITIONER, VS.
PEOPLE OF THE PHILIPPINES, RESPONDENT.**

DECISION

PERLAS-BERNABE, J.:

Assailed in this petition for review on *certiorari*^[1] are the Decision^[2] dated October 6, 2017 and the Resolution^[3] dated January 15, 2018 of the Sandiganbayan (SB) in Criminal Case No. SB-11-CRM-0228 which found petitioner Candelaria De Mesa Mangulabnan (Mangulabnan) guilty beyond reasonable doubt of Direct Bribery under Article 210 of the Revised Penal Code.^[4]

The Facts

The instant case stemmed from an Information^[5] charging Mangulabnan of Direct Bribery under Article 210 of the Revised Penal Code, the accusatory portion of which states:

That on or about March 1998 or for sometime subsequent thereto, in the City of San Fernando, Pampanga, Philippines, accused RODRIGO R. FLORES, Presiding Judge of the Municipal Trial Court in Cities (MTCC), Branch 2, City of San Fernando, Pampanga, with Salary Grade 27, thus, within the jurisdiction of this Honorable Court, together with CANDELARIA MANGULABNAN, Court Interpreter and specially assigned as Chairman of the Revision Committee of the same MTCC of San Fernando City, Pampanga, while in the performance of their official functions, committing the offense in relation to their office, taking advantage of their respective official positions, and with grave abuse of authority, confederating together and mutually helping one another, did then and there willfully, unlawfully and feloniously demanded and request the amount of P20,000.00 from Dario Manalastas, a party to an election protest case filed by Alberto Guinto against Dario Manalastas where accused Rodrigo R. Flores and Candelaria Mangulabnan have to intervene in their official capacities since such case is pending before the Court where accused Rodrigo R. Flores is the Presiding Judge and Candelaria Mangulabnan is the Court Interpreter and Chairman of the Revision Committee, which amount accused Candelaria Mangulabnan actually received for accused Rodrigo R. Flores in consideration of a decision in the case favorable to Dario Manalastas which is unjust, since the decision should be based on the merits of the case and not the monetary consideration, the damage and prejudice of Dario Manalastas and public service.

CONTRARY TO LAW.^[6]

The prosecution alleged that sometime in May 1997, private complainant Alberto Guinto (Guinto) filed an election protest against Dario Manalastas (Manalastas) before the Municipal Trial Court in Cities (MTCC) of the City of San Fernando, Pampanga, Branch 2, where Rodrigo R. Flores was Presiding Judge (Judge Flores) and Mangulabnan worked as a Court Interpreter. On several occasions, Judge Flores allegedly visited Guinto in the latter's workplace and asked for several monetary favors. Despite receiving these favors, Judge Flores decided the case in favor of Manalastas. Guinto then filed complaints before the Office of the Court Administrator (OCA), charging Judge Flores for his failure to decide the election protest within the required period, and against Mangulabnan for releasing an unauthorized copy of the decision. These administrative complaints were referred to Executive Judge Adelaida Ala-Medina (Judge Medina) for investigation, review, and recommendation. In her report, Judge Medina revealed that while the election protest case was pending before the MTCC, Judge Flores borrowed Twenty Thousand Pesos (P20,000.00) from Manalastas, which Mangulabnan received as middleman in favor of Judge Flores. Hence, Judge Medina recommended Mangulabnan's dismissal from service for her participation as conduit in the commission of the crime.^[7] In a Resolution^[8] dated August 10, 2006, the Court adopted Judge Medina's findings, suspended Mangulabnan for one (1) year,^[9] and ordered that the Court's Resolution be furnished to the Office of the Ombudsman (OMB) for investigation. Thereafter, the OMB found that the allegations make out a case for Direct Bribery; hence, the Information was filed.^[10]

Mangulabnan pleaded "not guilty" to the charge.^[11]

During the proceedings before the SB, the prosecution did not present any witnesses, and instead presented the documents culled from the administrative case, the due execution of which was stipulated on by the parties. After the prosecution rested its case, Mangulabnan filed a Motion for Leave to File Demurrer to Evidence, which the SB denied.^[12] Thereafter, Mangulabnan filed an Ex-Parte Manifestati on waiving her right to present evidence. The SB then ordered the parties to submit their respective Memoranda; following which, the case would be submitted for decision.^[13] In her Memorandum, Mangulabnan principally argued that the prosecution failed to prove her guilt beyond reasonable doubt considering its heavy reliance on the evidence adduced during the administrative proceedings, without presenting a single witness to identify the same or to be cross-examined.^[14] She argued that administrative accountability cannot amount to a finding of guilt in a criminal case.^[15] Thus, she prayed that the Information be dismissed.^[16]

The SB Ruling

In a Decision^[17] dated October 6, 2017, the SB found Mangulabnan guilty beyond reasonable doubt of Direct Bribery^[18] and accordingly, sentenced her to suffer the indeterminate penalty of imprisonment for a period of four (4) years, two (2) months, and one (1) day of *prision correccional* as minimum, to nine (9) years, four (4) months, and one (1) day of *prision mayor* as maximum, and to pay a fine in the amount of Sixty Thousand Pesos (P60,000.00), with special temporary

disqualification from holding public office.^[19]

The SB noted Mangulabnan's admission in open court in a separate civil case for injunction filed by Manalastas, which formed part of the administrative case's records, that she indeed received money from the latter and delivered it to Judge Flores, thus proving their conspiracy in committing the crime. Moreover, it found that the prosecution had established all the elements constituting Direct Bribery under Article 210 of the Revised Penal Code, considering that: (a) Judge Flores and Mangulabnan were both public officers, being the Presiding Judge and Court Interpreter, respectively, of the MTCC of the City of San Fernando, Pampanga, Branch 2 at the time of the commission of the offense; (b) Mangulabnan acted as a conduit of Judge Flores when she received Twenty Thousand Pesos (P20,000.00) from Manalastas, and delivered the same to Judge Flores; (c) the amount was in consideration of the rendition of judgment in the pending election protest in favor of Manalastas; and (d) that the rendition of judgment relates to the function of Flores as Presiding Judge. Considering the concurrence of all the elements, and that Mangulabnan was a co-conspirator of Judge Flores, the SB found the prosecution's evidence sufficient to prove her guilt beyond reasonable doubt.^[20]

Aggrieved, Mangulabnan filed a Motion for Reconsideration and/or To Reopen Case,^[21] but was denied in a Resolution^[22] dated January 15, 2018. It found no showing that the SB deprived Mangulabnan of her right to present evidence to justify the reopening of the case;^[23] hence, this petition.

The Issue Before the Court

The issue for the Court's resolution is whether or not the SB correctly convicted Mangulabnan of the crime of Direct Bribery under Article 210 of the Revised Penal Code.

The Court's Ruling

The petition is without merit.

Article 210 of the Revised Penal Code, as amended, states:

ARTICLE 210. *Direct Bribery.* - Any public officer who shall agree to perform an act constituting a crime, in connection with the performance of this official duties, in consideration of any offer, promise, gift or present received by such officer, personally or through the mediation of another, shall suffer the penalty of *prision mayor* in its medium and maximum periods and a fine not less than three times the value of the gift, in addition to the penalty corresponding to the crime agreed upon, if the same shall have been committed.

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In addition to the penalties provided in the preceding Paragraphs, the culprit shall suffer the penalty of special temporary disqualification.

As may be gleaned from above, the elements of the crime charged are as follows: (a) the offender is a public officer; (b) he accepts an offer or promise or receives a