

THIRTEENTH DIVISION

[CA-G.R. CR.-H.C. No. 04876, October 15, 2014]

PEOPLE OF THE PHILIPPINES, PLAINTIFF-APPELLEE, VS. JOSE FRANCISCO Y PANAG, ACCUSED-APPELLANT.

DECISION

SADANG, J.:

Accused-appellant Jose Francisco Y Panag (hereafter, accused) appeals from the Decision,^[1] dated January 6, 2011, of the Regional Trial Court (RTC) of Dagupan City, Branch 42 in Criminal Case Nos. 2007-0175-D and 2007-0176-D.

Records show that accused was indicted for violation of Section 5, Art. II of R.A. No. 9165, otherwise known as the "Comprehensive Drugs Act of 2002, in two (2) Informations, both dated March 12, 2007, that read thus:

Crim. Case No. 07-0175-D

That on or about the 10th day of March 2007, at 1:00 o'clock in the p.m., in the City of Dagupan, Philippines, and within the jurisdiction of this Honorable Court, the above-named accused, JOSE FRANCISCO Y PANAG, did then and there, willfully, unlawfully and criminally, sell and deliver to PO1 Romulo Lavarias, a member of the PNP, Dagupan City Police Station who acted as poseur buyer, dried marijuana fruiting tops contained in two hundred ten (210) heat-sealed plastic sachets, weighing more or less 75.8 grams, without authority to do so.

Contrary to Article II, Section 5, RA 9165.^[2]

Crim. Case No. 07-0176-D

That on or about the 10th day of March 2007, at 10:00 o'clock in the a.m., in the City of Dagupan, Philippines, and within the jurisdiction of this Honorable Court, the above-named accused, JOSE FRANCISCO Y PANAG, did then and there, willfully, unlawfully and criminally, sell and deliver to a customer dried marijuana leaves contained in ten (10) heat-sealed plastic sachet (sic), weighing more or less 3 grams, without authority to do so.

Contrary to Article II, Section 5, RA 9165.^[3]

At the arraignment on May 2, 2007, accused, assisted by counsel de officio Atty. Glenn Lumanlan, entered not guilty pleas to both charges; hence, pre-trial and trial

ensued.

The prosecution's case, per the testimonies of PO1 Romulo Lavariaz, Jr. and P/Inspector Myrna C. Malojo, is as follows: At around 10 AM of March 10, 2007, during a test-buy operation, a police asset was able to purchase from accused marijuana leaves weighing 8.6 grams using a P100.00 bill marked "LSL."^[4] This prompted the police to form a buy-bust team composed of P/Insp. Amado Cariño, PO1 Romulo B. Lavariaz, Jr. and P/Insp. Leo Llamas to operate against accused. Lavariaz was designated as the poseur-buyer. At around 1 PM, after a pre-operation conference, the team proceeded to the target area at PNR site, Dagupan City. Upon seeing accused in front of his house Lavariaz approached and asked if he could give him marijuana. He handed to the accused a P100 bill marked with the initials "LSL."^[5] Accused accepted the money and told Lavariaz to wait as he went inside his house. On his return, accused gave Lavariaz 10 heat-sealed plastic sachets containing dried marijuana leaves weighing 10.^[6] grams. Lavariaz then made a missed-call to the team members who closed in on accused. Lavariaz introduced himself as a police officer, arrested and frisked accused and recovered from him the test-buy and buy-bust P100.00 bills as well as 200 plastic sachets of suspected marijuana leaves.⁶ Lavariaz informed accused of his constitutional rights and wrote a confiscation receipt^[7] at the place of arrest.^[8] Lavariaz then put the markings "RBL-1" to "RBL-10" on the 10 plastic sachets containing the marijuana that he bought from accused.^[9] The team members proceeded to the Dagupan Police Station bringing with them the accused and the seized items. The desk officer recorded the arrest in the police blotter and the duty investigator prepared the PDEA information of Arrest^[10] and the Letter Request^[11] for forensic examination. Thereafter, the specimens were delivered by Lavariaz to P/Insp./Forensic Chemist Malojo at 8 AM on March 12, 2007.^[12] On the same day, P/Insp. Malojo, examined the specimens and issued her Chemistry Report No. D-40-071^[13] with the finding that the subject specimens were positive for marijuana. According to Malojo, the specimens were subjected to qualitative examination composed of the physical examination, chemical examination and a confirmatory test.

Accused Jose Francisco and his nephew, Jerry Servillon, testified in his defense, thus: Between 12 noon to 1 PM, accused was in front of his house at Mayombo watching a game of pool being played by Jerry, Pupung Diaz and Jay Servillon when ten men in civilian clothes arrived. They introduced themselves as policemen and arrested accused without presenting a warrant of arrest and thereupon searched the house of accused without a search warrant. At the police station, he learned that the men who arrested him were police officers Lavariaz, Molina, Mendiones and Antipolo. Accused denied that he sold the ten (10) heat-sealed plastic sachets containing marijuana to the police. He also denied that the 210 plastic sachets containing dried marijuana fruiting tops were found in his possession.

On January 6, 2011, the trial court rendered its Decision^[14] the *fallo* of which reads:

WHEREFORE, judgment is hereby rendered finding the accused JOSE FRANCISCO Y Panag GUILTY beyond reasonable doubt of the crime of selling marijuana dried leaves and sentencing him to suffer the penalty of

life imprisonment and a fine of P500,000.00 which is imposed for violation of Sec. 5, Art. II of R.A. 9165. The prohibited marijuana dried leaves shall be disposed of in accordance with law.

SO ORDERED.

Accused filed a Notice of Appeal^[15] which was given due course in the Order^[16] dated February 3, 2011.

Accused raises this assignment of error:

THE TRIAL COURT GRAVELY ERRED IN FINDING THAT THE GUILT OF THE ACCUSED-APPELLANT FOR THE CRIME CHARGED HAS BEEN PROVEN BEYOND REASONABLE DOUBT.

Ruling

It must be noted that although the accused was charged in two (2) separate informations, the trial court did not render separate judgments thereon but simply found accused guilty beyond reasonable doubt of violation of Section 5, Art II of R.A. 9165. The trial court did not consider in its decision the 200 heat-sealed plastic sachets containing marijuana dried leaves because these were found in the possession of the accused after the buy-bust operation and the informations do not charge illegal possession of dangerous drugs. Also, the trial court did not rule on the alleged sale of marijuana contained in 10 sachets as alleged in Crim. Case No. 07-0176-D. This is to be expected because the prosecution did not present the police asset who had allegedly bought the marijuana from the accused during a test-buy. Nonetheless, the trial court found that the prosecution was able to establish the sale between the poseur-buyer and the accused of marijuana leaves weighing 10.6 grams which were contained in 10 heat-sealed plastic sachets. It appears that the marijuana contained in the 10 plastic sachets were added to the 200 found in the possession of the accused, thus, the total sachets alleged in the Information in Crim. Case No. 07-0175-D is 210.

In cases involving sale of dangerous drugs, the prosecution must prove: 1) the identities of the buyer and seller, the object, and the consideration; and 2) the delivery of the thing sold and the payment therefor.^[17] What is material to the prosecution for illegal sale of dangerous drugs is the proof that the transaction or sale had actually taken place, coupled with the presentation in court of evidence of the *corpus delicti*.^[18] The commission of illegal sale merely requires the consummation of the selling transaction which happens the moment the buyer receives the drug from the seller. As long as the police officer went through the operation as a buyer, whose offer was accepted by appellant, followed by the delivery of the dangerous drugs to the former, the crime is already consummated.^[19]

In this appeal, accused contends that the apprehending officers did not comply with Section 21 of RA No. 9165. He points out that the photographs testified to by Lavariáz merely depicted the barangay kagawad, the accused and the marked