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FIRST DIVISION

[A.M. No. P-01-1522. November 29, 2001]
(Formerly OCA I.P.I. No. 98-415-P)

JUDGE ANTONIO J. FINEZA, Presiding Judge, Regional Trial Court of Caloocan City, Branch 131, *complainant, vs.* **ROMEO P. ARUELO, Clerk III, RTC, Branch 122, Caloocan City,** *respondent.*

SYNOPSIS

On February 13, 1998, Judge Fineza, herein complainant, charged respondent with gross misconduct and obstruction of justice for allegedly taking money from Juanito Faustino, the accused charged in two criminal cases pending before his sala. Respondent denied the charge but admitted having extended help to an acquaintance who was not a party in the said cases. The case was referred to the Office of the Court Administrator (OCA) which referred the case to the investigating judge. On the scheduled hearings of the case in October 2000, complainant's sole witness, Faustino, did not appear having changed his residence. Irritated by the slow pace of the proceedings, complainant withdrew his complaint, stating on record his demoralization and loss of faith in the system as the Supreme Court and the OCA did not take prompt action thereon.

It was held that judges should avoid making derogatory statements which placed not only the Court but also the entire Judiciary in a bad light and should protect the image and integrity of the judiciary; that the Supreme Court can not be divested of its supervisory power to discipline errant members; and that an employee of the judiciary should avoid any impropriety or appearance thereof in the performance of his duties refraining from any involvement in a pending case which may constitute undue interference.

SYLLABUS

1. **JUDICIAL ETHICS; JUDGES, SHOULD SO BEHAVE AT ALL TIMES AS TO PROMOTE PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN THE INTEGRITY AND IMPARTIALITY OF THE JUDICIARY.—** Rule 2.01, Canon 2 of the Code of Judicial Conduct mandates that "A judge should so behave at all times as to promote public

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confidence in the integrity and impartiality of the judiciary." Moreover, a judicial office circumscribes the personal conduct of a judge and imposes a number of restrictions thereon which he has to pay for accepting and occupying an exalted position in the administration of justice. The irresponsible or improper conduct of a judge erodes public confidence in the judiciary. It is thus the duty of the members of the bench to avoid any impression of impropriety to protect the image and integrity of the judiciary.

2. **ID.; ID.; CHARGED WITH EXERCISING PROPER CARE AND RESTRAINT IN HIS SPEECH.**— Toward this end, a judge is charged with exercising proper care and restraint in his speech. His language, both written and spoken, must be guarded and measured lest the best of intentions be misconstrued. In the case at bar, the unflattering remarks uttered by complainant Judge against this Court tainted the image of the Judiciary, of which he himself is a member. In fact, to blatantly declare in open court his demoralization and loss of faith in the very system to which he owes fealty is judicial apostasy, bordering on legal hereticism towards an institution of which his sworn obligation is to keep at all times unsullied and worthy of the people's trust.

3. **ID.; ID.; SHOULD AVOID MAKING DEROGATORY STATEMENTS WHICH PLACED NOT ONLY THE COURT BUT THE ENTIRE JUDICIARY IN A BAD LIGHT.**— At the risk of sounding trite, a judge should conduct himself at all times in a manner which would reasonably merit the respect and confidence of the people for he is the visible representation of the law. From the standpoint of the conduct and demeanor expected of a judge, complainant should have avoided making derogatory statements which placed not only the Court but the entire Judiciary in a bad light much more so considering that, as clearly borne out by the records, the Court, in fact, acted with dispatch on the incidents of the case submitted to it for resolution. In short, the Court could hardly be faulted with judicial indolence, given the prevailing facts of this case. Suffice it to state in this regard that the complaining judge's choice of words, aside from being baseless, only underscores a deplorable deficiency of judicial decorum on his part which requires that a magistrate of the law must at all times be temperate in his language.

4. **ID.; ID.; DISPLAY OF PETULANCE AND IMPATIENCE IN THE CONDUCT OF A TRIAL, INCOMPATIBLE WITH THE NEEDFUL ATTITUDE AND SOBRIETY OF A GOOD JUDGE.**— Even if complainant were of the opinion that time was

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of the essence in the pursuit of the administrative case, he nonetheless should have the patience and circumspection to give the Court enough leeway to attend to his cause, considering that its time and resources are not merely limited to addressing adjudicative functions but other administrative and fiscal concerns as well. A display of petulance and impatience in the conduct of a trial is a norm of behavior incompatible with the needful attitude and sobriety of a good judge.

5. **ID.; ID.; ABSOLUTE LACK OF APPRECIATION AND DISRESPECT FOR THE EFFORT AND MEASURES UNDERTAKEN BY THE COURT, TOO DESERVING OF REBUKE.**— Indeed, the brazenness of complainant's remonstrations and his insolence in even going on record that the Court has been sleeping on its job in acting upon his case not only underscores his callous disregard of the myriad administrative and judicial travails the Court has to contend with as the Tribunal of Last Resort, among them, the chronic problem of an overflowing docket of which his case is but one additional aggravation. It also betrays his absolute lack of appreciation and disrespect for the efforts and measures undertaken by the Court to cope with these concerns. Needless to state, such presumptuousness is only too deserving of rebuke.

6. **ID.; ID.; SHOULD AVOID ANY IMPRESSION OF IMPROPRIETY TO PROTECT THE IMAGE AND INTEGRITY OF THE JUDICIARY.**— In *Gozun v. Liangco,* the Court reiterated the dictum that "It is the duty of the members of the bench to avoid any impression of impropriety to protect the image and integrity of the judiciary. A judge who tarnishes the image of the judiciary or brings it to public contempt, dishonor or disrespect must be administratively dealt with and punished accordingly."

7. **ADMINISTRATIVE LAW; SUPREME COURT; CANNOT BE DIVESTED OF ITS SUPERVISORY POWER TO DISCIPLINE ERRANT MEMBERS.**— With regard to complainant's desire to withdraw the complaint – . . . It should be remembered that a complaint for misconduct, malfeasance or misfeasance against a public officer or employee cannot simply be withdrawn anytime; such withdrawal would not result in the automatic dismissal of the case. *The need to maintain the faith and confidence of the people in the government and its agencies and instrumentalities should not be made to depend on the whims*

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and caprices of the complainants who are, in a real sense, only witnesses therein. In short, this Court cannot be divested of its supervisory power to discipline errant members of the Judiciary as well as those employed therein through the mere expedience of a complainant's voluntary desistance in the pursuit of the administrative case.

8. ID.; COURT PERSONNEL; CLERK; UNDUE INTERFERENCE IN A PENDING CASE; CASE AT BAR.— The Court agrees with the OCA that respondent Romeo P. Aruelo should be sanctioned but finds the recommended penalty too light, given the prevailing facts of the case. Although the investigation failed to prove the claim that respondent received money in exchange for the dismissal of the subject criminal cases, he, nonetheless, made a clear admission of his active involvement in a pending case before the court. The so-called "help" he allegedly extended to an acquaintance who is not even a party to the criminal cases is, in fact, more of an undue interference, which is way beyond his duties as a court employee. Although there is nothing inherently wrong in extending such assistance, still respondent should have been more circumspect in doing so considering the fact that as an employee of the Judiciary, he should avoid any impropriety or appearance thereof in the performance of his functions.

9. JUDICIAL ETHICS; CODE OF JUDICIAL ETHICS; JUDGES; SHOULD REFRAIN FROM INFLUENCING IN ANY MANNER THE OUTCOME OF LITIGATION.— Only recently, no less than an Associate Justice of the Court of Appeals was meted the supreme penalty of dismissal for trying to intercede on behalf of a suspected drug queen. In that case, an indignant Court minced no words in saying that "The Code of Judicial Conduct mandates a judge to 'refrain from influencing in any manner the outcome of litigation or dispute pending before another court or administrative agency.' *The slightest form of interference cannot be countenanced.* Once a judge uses his influence to derail or interfere in the regular course of a legal or judicial proceeding for the benefit of one or any of the parties therein, public confidence in the judicial system is diminished, if not totally eroded."

10. CONSTITUTIONAL LAW; JUDICIARY; ANY ACT WHICH FALLS SHORT OF THE EXACTING STANDARDS FOR PUBLIC OFFICE SHALL NOT BE COUNTENANCED.— All too often, this Court has declared that any act which falls short of the exacting standards for public office, especially on the part of

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those expected to preserve the image of the judiciary, shall not be countenanced. To reiterate, public office is a public trust. Public officers must at all times be accountable to the people, serve them with utmost degree of responsibility, integrity, loyalty and efficiency. Needless to state, respondent in his ill-advised alacrity to please a party-litigant out of a misplaced sense of trying to be of service, ran afoul of such standards.

APPEARANCES OF COUNSEL

D E C I S I O N

YNARES-SANTIAGO, *J.*:

In a Letter-Complaint dated February 13, 1998,[1] Judge Antonio J. Fineza, Presiding Judge of Branch 131 of the Regional Trial Court of Caloocan City, charged respondent Romeo P. Aruelo, Clerk III, Branch 122 of the same court with Gross Misconduct and Obstruction of Justice relative to Criminal Cases Nos. C-52541 and C-52542 pending before his sala.

It appears that on October 21, 1997, Juanito Faustino, the accused in the above-mentioned criminal cases, failed to appear at his arraignment, for which reason Judge Fineza issued a warrant for his arrest. Subsequently, Faustino filed a "Voluntary Surrender with Urgent Motion for Reconsideration" wherein he declared that respondent Romeo P. Aruelo and one Bayani Viola advised him not to attend the hearing scheduled on October 21, 1997 since the case against him had already been dismissed. In exchange for this, Aruelo and Viola took money from him in the amount of ₱30,000.00.

Owing to the seriousness of the charge against respondent, complainant Judge issued an Order dated January 28, 1998[2] requiring respondent to explain why he should not be charged criminally and administratively for estafa and/or obstruction of justice.

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[1] *Rollo*, pp. 1-2.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

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By way of compliance,[3] respondent submitted an Affidavit[4] denying the charges hurled against him by Juanito Faustino and attached thereto the *Sinumpaang Salaysay* of Bayani Viola[5] to support his allegations.

Respondent alleged that he did not meet Juanito Faustino prior to the scheduled arraignment of the latter on October 21, 1997. Neither did he receive a single centavo from him for the purported purpose of having said cases dismissed. Respondent claimed that the first time he met accused Juanito Faustino was when the latter and Bayani Viola, who is an old acquaintance, came to him asking for assistance in the preparation of a motion to lift or set aside the warrant of arrest issued against said accused.

Respondent was told that the warrant of arrest was issued after the accused failed to attend the arraignment on October 21, 1997 due to the latter's alleged sickness at the time. They left with him the Medical Certificate of Faustino. When respondent consulted a lawyer, the latter told him that the Medical Certificate of Juanito Faustino appeared to be spurious. The lawyer further advised him to tell Faustino to get another Medical Certificate that was genuine and authentic. So when he met Juanito Faustino and Bayani Viola again, he told them about his friend's advice and they promised to secure another Medical Certificate. They never did and that was the last time he saw Juanito Faustino.

On April 29, 1998, respondent filed a verified answer[6] with the Office of the Court Administrator (OCA) reiterating his averments in the Affidavit he submitted in compliance with complainant Judge's order of January 28, 1998.

Acting on a recommendation of the OCA dated April 14, 2000,[7] the Court thereafter issued a Resolution dated June 28, 2000

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[3] *Id.*, p. 7.

[4] *Id.*, pp. 8-9.

[5] *Id.*, p. 10.

[6] *Id.*, pp. 12-13.

[7] *Id.*, pp. 15-16.

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initially referring the case to Executive Judge Bayani Rivera for investigation.[8] However, in a letter[9] submitted to the OCA dated August 9, 2000, Judge Rivera requested that he be replaced with another investigator on the ground that herein complainant has filed administrative complaints against him which are pending with the Court of Appeals.

Thus, in a Resolution dated August 30, 2000,[10] the Court referred the case to Vice Executive Judge Myrna Dimaranan-Vidal, RTC Branch 127, Caloocan City, for investigation, report and recommendation.

During the initial hearing of the case on October 10, 2000, both parties agreed to a continuance because of the absence of complainant's lone and material witness in the person of Juanito Faustino, who was not notified of the hearing on that date.

At the next scheduled hearing on October 27, 2000, Juanito Faustino failed to appear. The Sheriff's Report[11] revealed that the subpoena addressed to him was returned unserved with the information that he was no longer residing at the address indicated therein.[12]

Out of impatience and pique at the slow pace in which the case was proceeding, complainant Judge withdrew his complaint, stating on record that he was "already demoralized and [had] lost faith in the system," considering that it took the Court two (2) years and eight (8) months to give due course to his complaint. In addition, complainant chided the Court, saying that as a Judge he had no cases pending decision and that he saw to it that cases submitted for decision are resolved within the reglementary period provided by law.[13]

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[8] *Id.*, pp. 18-20.

[9] *Id.*, p. 21.

[10] *Id.*, p. 22.

[11] *Id.*, p. 38.

[12] *Id.*

[13] TSN, 27 October 2000, pp. 3-4.

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Considering the manifestation of complainant Judge, the investigator issued an Order dated October 27, 2000[14] recommending the dismissal of the administrative case against respondent Aruelo.

Despite the foregoing, the investigating Judge nonetheless submitted a Report dated November 8, 2000,[15] which reiterated the dismissal of the administrative complaint against respondent Aruelo but further recommended that he be reprimanded and sternly warned that a repetition of the same or similar acts will be dealt with more severely. She noted that respondent's uncalled for and manifest undue interest in the outcome of a pending incident in cases before Branch 131 was highly improper and constituted grave misconduct.

The Court, through the OCA, received the report and records of the case from the Investigating Judge on November 10, 2000.[16] Upon receipt thereof,[17] the Court then issued a Resolution dated December 4, 2000[18] noting the report and referred the case to the OCA for evaluation report and recommendation.

On May 9, 2001, the OCA submitted its report and recommendation. The OCA differed with the findings of the investigating Judge that respondent be merely reprimanded. Instead, it recommended that he be fined Two Thousand Pesos (P2,000.00) and sternly warned that a repetition of the same or similar acts in the future will be dealt with more severely.

Meanwhile, complainant Judge filed on August 9, 2001 a Manifestation reiterating his desire to withdraw the complaint, stating, *inter alia,* "[T]hat the reason for the inability of the undersigned to locate his witnesses is because he filed this case as early as February 23, 1998 and yet it was only on October 10, 2000 that undersigned was called upon to substantiate his case."

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[14] *Id.*, p. 40.

[15] *Id.*, pp. 44-47.

[16] *Rollo* p. 57.

[17] *Id.*

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 58.

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Giving vent to his irritation at what he perceived was the foot-dragging of the OCA and this Court on his case, he peevishly declared in the hearing of October 27, 2000 as follows:

Court

> Per Sheriff's return the subpoena was not personally served to the witness but the same was left to one Ligaya Santiago, the sister of the witness, and per information gathered by the Sheriff, the subject person is already staying somewhere in Camarin, Caloocan City.
>
> Now, what is your pleasure?

Judge Fineza

> Well, in view of the Sheriff's return that the principal witness is no longer staying at his given address I think ... this representation cannot pursue this matter therefore move for the dismissal of this administrative matter *because the Supreme Court and the OCA did not take prompt action on this matter. It took for (sic) two years and eight months without favorably giving due course to this administrative case which was filed by this representation against the respondent I am downgraded (sic) not to say I am saddened by the inaction of the Supreme Court* so I am withdrawing my complaint. But this time I am reiterating my motion to withdraw this case considering that I cannot pursue this case without my witness' testimony. *And it's up to the Supreme Court to take action, as I am emphasizing, stressing and capitalizing that justice delayed is justice denied.*

Court

> *Is that on record?*

Judge Fineza

> *Yes, Your Honor and I am already demoralized and lost faith in the system. And I would like to put on record that as of now this representation has no case pending for decision.*[19]

Rule 2.01, Canon 2 of the Code of Judicial Conduct mandates that "A judge should so behave at all times as to promote public confidence in the integrity and impartiality of the judiciary."[20] Moreover, a judicial office circumscribes the personal conduct of

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[19] TSN, 27 October 2000, pp. 3-4; Italics supplied.

[20] See *Contreras v. Solis,* 260 SCRA 572, 581 [1996].

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a judge and imposes a number of restrictions thereon which he has to pay for accepting and occupying an exalted position in the administration of justice.[21] The irresponsible or improper conduct of a judge erodes public confidence in the judiciary.[22] It is thus the duty of the members of the bench to avoid any impression of impropriety to protect the image and integrity of the judiciary.[23]

Toward this end, a judge is charged with exercising proper care and restraint in his speech. His language, both written and spoken, must be guarded and measured lest the best of intentions be misconstrued.[24] In the case at bar, the unflattering remarks uttered by complainant Judge against this Court tainted the image of the Judiciary, of which he himself is a member. In fact, to blatantly declare in open court his demoralization and loss of faith in the very system to which he owes fealty is judicial apostasy, bordering on legal hereticism towards an institution of which his sworn obligation is to keep at all times unsullied and worthy of the people's trust.[25]

At the risk of sounding trite, a judge should conduct himself at all times in a manner which would reasonably merit the respect and confidence of the people for he is the visible representation of the law.[26] From the standpoint of the conduct and demeanor expected of a judge, complainant should have avoided making derogatory statements which placed not only the Court but the entire Judiciary in a bad light much more so considering that, as clearly borne out by the records, the Court, in fact, acted with dispatch on the incidents of the case submitted to it for resolution. In short, the Court could hardly be faulted with judicial indolence,

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[21] *Apiag v. Cantero*, 268 SCRA 47 [1997].

[22] *Panganiban v. Guerrero, Jr.*, 242 SCRA 11 [1995].

[23] *Calilung v. Suriaga,* 339 SCRA 340, 361-362 [2001]; *Galang v. Santos,* 307 SCRA 582 [1999], citing *Nazareno v. Almario*, 268 SCRA 657 [1997].

[24] *Dacera, Jr. v. Dizon, Jr.*, 337 SCRA 144, 149 [2000], citing *De Vera v. Dames, III,* 310 SCRA 213 [1999], citing *People v. Serrano*, 203 SCRA 171 [1991], citing *Fecundo v. Berjamen*, 180 SCRA 235 [1989].

[25] *Garcia v. Dela Peña*, 229 SCRA 766 [1994].

[26] *Chan v. Agcaoili*, 233 SCRA 331 [1994].

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given the prevailing facts of this case. Suffice it to state in this regard that the complaining judge's choice of words, aside from being baseless, only underscores a deplorable deficiency of judicial decorum on his part which requires that a magistrate of the law must at all times be temperate in his language.[27]

Even if complainant were of the opinion that time was of the essence in the pursuit of the administrative case, he nonetheless should have the patience and circumspection to give the Court enough leeway to attend to his cause, considering that its time and resources are not merely limited to addressing adjudicative functions but other administrative and fiscal concerns as well. A display of petulance and impatience in the conduct of a trial is a norm of behavior incompatible with the needful attitude and sobriety of a good judge.[28]

Indeed, the brazenness of complainant's remonstrations and his insolence in even going on record that the Court has been sleeping on its job in acting upon his case not only underscores his callous disregard of the myriad administrative and judicial travails the Court has to contend with as the Tribunal of Last Resort, among them, the chronic problem of an overflowing docket of which his case is but one additional aggravation. It also betrays his absolute lack of appreciation and disrespect for the efforts and measures undertaken by the Court to cope with these concerns. Needless to state, such presumptuousness is only too deserving of rebuke.

In *Gozun v. Liangco*,[29] the Court reiterated the dictum that "It is the duty of the members of the bench to avoid any impression of impropriety to protect the image and integrity of the judiciary.[30] A judge who tarnishes the image of the judiciary or brings it to public contempt, dishonor or disrespect must be administratively dealt with and punished accordingly."[31]

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[27] *Turqueza v. Hernando*, 97 SCRA 483 [1980].

[28] *Torres v. Villanueva*, 331 SCRA 496, 502 [2000], citing *Santiago v. Santos*, 63 SCRA 392 [1975].

[29] 339 SCRA 253, 261 [2000].

[30] *Galang v. Santos, supra; Dumo v. Perez*, 322 SCRA 545 [2000]; *NBI v. Reyes*, 326 SCRA 109 [2000]; *Nabhan v. Calderon*, 324 SCRA 709 [2000].

[31] *Yu-Asensi v. Villanueva*, 322 SCRA 255 [2000].

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With regard to complainant's desire to withdraw the complaint–

> . . . It should be remembered that a complaint for misconduct, malfeasance or misfeasance against a public officer or employee cannot simply be withdrawn anytime; such withdrawal would not result in the automatic dismissal of the case. *The need to maintain the faith and confidence of the people in the government and its agencies and instrumentalities should not be made to depend on the whims and caprices of the complainants who are, in a real sense, only witnesses therein.*[32]

In short, this Court cannot be divested of its supervisory power to discipline errant members of the Judiciary as well as those employed therein[33] through the mere expedience of a complainant's voluntary desistance in the pursuit of the administrative case.

The Court agrees with the OCA that respondent Romeo P. Aruelo should be sanctioned but finds the recommended penalty too light, given the prevailing facts of the case. Although the investigation failed to prove the claim that respondent received money in exchange for the dismissal of the subject criminal cases, he, nonetheless, made a clear admission of his active involvement in a pending case before the court. The so-called "help" he allegedly extended to an acquaintance who is not even a party to the criminal cases is, in fact, more of an undue interference, which is way beyond his duties as a court employee. Although there is nothing inherently wrong in extending such assistance, still respondent should have been more circumspect in doing so considering the fact that as an employee of the Judiciary, he should avoid any impropriety or appearance thereof in the performance of his functions. As the Court stressed in *Loyao, Jr. v. Armecin*:[34]

> The conduct and behavior of *every* person connected with an office charged with the dispensation of justice, from the presiding judge to the

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[32] *Mosquera v. Legaspi*, 335 SCRA 326, 330 [2000], citing *Florendo v. Enrile*, 239 SCRA 22 [1999].

[33] *OCA v. Garong*, A.M. No. P-99-1311, 15 August 2001, citing *Angulan v. Taguba*, 93 SCRA 179 [1979]; *People v. Valenzuela*, 135 SCRA 712 [1985]; *Leynes v. Veloso*, 82 SCRA 325 [1978]; *Arbon v. Borja*, 143 SCRA 634 [1986]; *Ramirez v. Macandong*, 144 SCRA 462 [1986]; *Advincula v. Malicudio*, 100 SCRA 39 [1980]; Valentin *v.* Gonzales, 115 SCRA 824 [1982].

[34] 337 SCRA 47, 51-52 [2000].

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lowest clerk, is circumscribed with a heavy burden of responsibility. *His conduct, at all times, must not only be characterized by propriety and decorum but also, and above all else, be above suspicion.*[35]

Only recently, no less than an Associate Justice of the Court of Appeals was meted the supreme penalty of dismissal for trying to intercede on behalf of a suspected drug queen. In that case,[36] an indignant Court minced no words in saying that "The Code of Judicial Conduct mandates a judge to 'refrain from influencing in any manner the outcome of litigation or dispute pending before another court or administrative agency.'[37] *The slightest form of interference cannot be countenanced.* Once a judge uses his influence to derail or interfere in the regular course of a legal or judicial proceeding for the benefit of one or any of the parties therein, public confidence in the judicial system is diminished, if not totally eroded."

Even more recently, the Court did not shirk in its responsibility of weeding the Judiciary of misfits when it dismissed one of its own senior lawyers who had twenty-eight (28) years of service behind him for demanding money from a party litigant to influence the outcome of the latter's case pending before it.[38] In dismissing the erring lawyer from the service, the Court emphasized that "[t]he conduct or behavior of all officials and employees of an agency involved in the administration of justice, from the presiding judge to most junior clerk, should be circumscribed with the heavy burden of responsibility.[39] Their conduct must at all times be characterized by, among others, strict propriety and decorum in order to earn

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[35] *Araza v. Garcia*, 325 SCRA 1 [2000], citing *Banogon v. Arias*, 274 SCRA 17 [1997].

[36] *In Re: Derogatory News Items Charging Associate Justice Demetrio Demetria with Interference on Behalf of a Suspected Drug Queen*, A.M. No. 00-7-09-CA, 27 March 2001.

[37] Rule 2.04, Code of Judicial Conduct.

[38] *Doroteo Igoy v. Atty. Gilbert Soriano*, A.M. No. 2001-9-SC, 11 October 2001.

[39] *Biag v. Gubatanga*, 318 SCRA 753, 759 [1999]; *Gacho v. Fuentes*, 291 SCRA 474, 480 [1998]; *OCA v. Alvarez*, 287 SCRA 325, 330 [1998].

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and maintain the respect of the public for the judiciary."[40] The Court further pointed out that the nature and responsibilities of public officers are not mere rhetorical words to be taken lightly as idealistic sentiments but as working standards and attainable goals that should be matched with actual deeds.[41]

All too often, this Court has declared that any act which falls short of the exacting standards for public office, especially on the part of those expected to preserve the image of the judiciary, shall not be countenanced.[42] To reiterate, public office is a public trust. Public officers must at all times be accountable to the people, serve them with utmost degree of responsibility, integrity, loyalty and efficiency.[43] Needless to state, respondent in his ill-advised alacrity to please a party-litigant out of a misplaced sense of trying to be of service, ran afoul of such standards.

WHEREFORE, in view of all the foregoing: 1.] respondent Romeo P. Aruelo, Clerk III, RTC, Branch 122, Caloocan City is hereby *REPRIMANDED* and *FINED* in the amount of Five Thousand Pesos (₱5,000.00); 2.] complainant Judge is likewise *ENJOINED* to be more circumspect in his language and to *SHOW CAUSE* why he should not be administratively sanctioned for speaking against the Court and the Judiciary in general which tends to put it in a bad light.

SO ORDERED.

Davide, Jr., C.J., (Chairman), Puno, Kapunan, and *Pardo, JJ.,* concur.

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[40] *Judge Caguioa v. Flora*, A.M. No. P-01-1480, 28 June 2001, citing *Alawi v. Alauya,* 268 SCRA 628, 637 [1997]; *Quiroz v. Orfila*, 272 SCRA 324, 329-330 [1997]; *Re: Report on the Judicial Audit Conducted in RTC, Br. 82, Odiongan, Romblon,* 292 SCRA 1 [1998].

[41] *RTC Makati Movement Against Graft and Corruption v. Dumlao*, 247 SCRA 108 [1995].

[42] *Re: Absence Without Official Leave (AWOL) of Antonio Macalintal, Process Server, Office of the Clerk of Court,* A.M. No. 99-11-06-SC, 15 February 2000.

[43] *Ibid.*, citing *Rangel-Roque v. Rivota*, 302 SCRA 502 [1999], citing *Gano v. Leonen, supra.*