

[MODIFIED]



SUPREME COURT OF THE PHILIPPINES
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Republic of the Philippines
Supreme Court
Manila

FIRST DIVISION

PEOPLE OF THE PHILIPPINES,
Plaintiff-appellee,

G.R. No. 273190

Present:

- versus -

GESMUNDO, C.J.,
Chairperson,
HERNANDO,
ZALAMEDA,
ROSARIO,* and
MARQUEZ, JJ.

XXX,¹

Accused-appellant.

Promulgated:

OCT 16 2024

[Signature]

X-----X

DECISION

HERNANDO, J.:

This appeal² challenges the Decision³ of the Court of Appeals (CA) which affirmed the Joint Judgment⁴ of the Regional Trial Court. The appellate court and the trial court found XXX guilty beyond a reasonable doubt of qualified trafficking in persons under Section 4(a), in relation to Section 6(a), but acquitted XXX for a violation of Sections 5(b) and 10(a) of Republic Act No.

* On official leave.

¹ In line with the Amended Administrative Circular No. 83-2015, as mandated by Republic Act No. 9208, the names of the private offended parties, along with all other personal circumstances that may tend to establish their identities, are made confidential to protect their privacy and dignity.

² *Rollo*, pp. 3-5.

³ *Id.* at 9-31. The November 16, 2023 Decision in CA-G.R. CR-HC No. 15750 was penned by Associate Justice Ramon M. Bato, Jr. and concurred in by Associate Justices Alfonso C. Ruiz II and Eleuterio L. Bathan of the Special Third Division, Court of Appeals, Manila.

⁴ *Id.* at 34-52. The March 26, 2021 Joint Judgment in Crim. Case No. 13-1155 to FC-13-1158 was penned by Presiding Judge Jose Pocholo R. Del Rosario of Branch 2-FC, [REDACTED].

7610,⁵ for failure of the prosecution to prove his guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.⁶

The Antecedents

Informations⁷ were filed against XXX for violation of Section 4(a), in relation to Section 6(a), of Republic Act No. 9208, and Sections 5(b) and 10(a) of Republic Act No. 7610. The accusatory portions of said Informations read in this wise:

Criminal Case No. FC-13-1155 – for violation of Republic Act No. 9208, Section 4(a), in relation to Section 6(a), or Qualified Trafficking in Persons

That on or about the 27th day of August 2010 and sometime thereafter, in the [REDACTED], Philippines,⁸ and within the jurisdiction of this Honorable Court, the above-named accused, by means of force, threats and coercion, for the purpose of exploitation, such as prostitution and other forms of sexual exploitation, did then and there willfully, unlawfully, and knowingly receive [(AAA)]⁹ at the port of [REDACTED] and transport and transfer her to [REDACTED] and to [REDACTED] Videoke Bar, both located in [REDACTED], and did then and there willfully, unlawfully and knowingly harbor and employ her as a prostitute in the said bars, accused having [received] a commission therefrom, to the damages and prejudice of [AAA].

That the crime was attended by the qualified circumstance of minority, complainant [AAA], being 15 years of age at the time of the commission of the offense.

CONTRARY TO LAW.¹⁰ (Emphasis in the original)

Criminal Case No. FC-13-1156 – for violation of Republic Act No. 7610, Section 10(a)

That sometime in the month of December 2010, in the [REDACTED], Philippines, and within the jurisdiction of this Honorable Court, the above-named accused, did then and there willfully, unlawfully and feloniously, commit on the person of [AAA], then a fifteen (15) year old minor, acts of child abuse, cruelty

⁵ An Act Providing for Stronger Deterrence and Special Protection Against Child Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination, Providing Penalties for its Violation, and for Other Purposes (1992).

⁶ *Rollo*, p. 52.

⁷ RTC records (Crim. Case No. FC-13-1155), p. 2; RTC records (Crim. Case No. FC-13-1156), p. 1; RTC records (Crim. Case No. FC-13-1157), p. 1; RTC records (Crim. Case No. FC-13-1158), p. 1.

⁸ Geographical location is blotted out pursuant to Supreme Court Amended Administrative Circular No. 83-2015.

⁹ “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]).

¹⁰ RTC records (Crim. Case No. FC-13-1155), p. 2.

and exploitation by inflicting physical harm on her due to her refusal to have sexual intercourse with him, that is, by throwing objects at her, grabbing her hair and pulling her towards the room, which acts are prejudicial to the child's development, and debase, degrade, and demean her intrinsic worth and dignity as a human being, to her damage and prejudice.

CONTRARY TO LAW.¹¹

Criminal Case No. FC-13-1157 – for violation of Republic Act No. 7610, Section 5(b)

That sometime in the month of **February 2011**, in the [REDACTED], Philippines, and within the jurisdiction of this Honorable Court, the above-named accused, did then and there willfully, unlawfully and feloniously, commit on the person of [AAA], then a fifteen (15) year old minor, acts of child abuse, cruelty and exploitation, by inflicting physical harm on her, that is, by kicking her on the hips causing her to fall and hit her jaw, which acts are prejudicial to the child's development, and debase, degrade and demean her intrinsic worth and dignity as a human being, to her damage and prejudice.

CONTRARY TO LAW.¹² (Emphasis in the original)

Criminal Case No. FC-13-1158 – for violation of Republic Act No. 7610, Section 5(b)

That sometime in **September 2010**, in the [REDACTED], Philippines, and within the jurisdiction of this Honorable Court, the above-named accused, actuated by lust, and due to coercion, influence, and control, did then and there willfully, unlawfully and feloniously, persuade, induce and entice [AAA], **then a fifteen (15) year old minor**, to engage in sexual intercourse with him by forcing her to take shabu, a dangerous drug, so that he can perform the sexual act with ease, **accused, in fact succeeded in having sexual intercourse with her**, which acts are prejudicial to the child's development and debase, degrade and demean her intrinsic worth and dignity as a human being, to her damage and prejudice.

CONTRARY TO LAW.¹³ (Emphasis in the original)

Upon consolidation of the cases, joint trial proceeded. During the arraignment on June 17, 2013, XXX pleaded not guilty to the four charges against him.¹⁴ During the preliminary and pre-trial conference, the parties entered into a stipulation where the following were admitted: (a) XXX's identity as the accused; (b) the minority of private complainant AAA; and (c) XXX and AAA met at the [REDACTED] in August 2007.¹⁵ Subsequently, trial on the merits ensued.

¹¹ RTC records (Crim. Case No. FC-13-1156), p. 1.

¹² RTC records (Crim. Case No. FC-13-1157), p. 1.

¹³ RTC records (Crim. Case No. FC-13-1158), p. 1.

¹⁴ *Rollo*, p. 37. RTC records (Crim. Case No. FC-13-1158), p. 36.

¹⁵ *Rollo*, p. 37. RTC records (Crim. Case No. FC-13-1158), p. 63.

The prosecution presented the following witnesses: (a) AAA; (b) BBB; and (c) Lea Daet (Daet)¹⁶ whereas the defense presented XXX as its lone witness.¹⁷

Version of the Prosecution

AAA testified that she stayed with a certain Margie in [REDACTED] when she was around 14 years old. She worked as a house helper but Margie also ordered her to work at the former's videoke bar to entertain their male customers; and the money that she received from these male customers were remitted to Margie.¹⁸ In August 2010, AAA and Margie arrived at the port of [REDACTED] where AAA met XXX for the first time. Thereafter, they went to [REDACTED] in [REDACTED] where AAA was employed as a Guest Relations Officer who entertains guests and performs sexual favors in exchange for money.¹⁹

At the first instance, AAA was offered to a guest who took the latter out of [REDACTED]. They checked-in at a hotel and had sexual intercourse for a fee. Subsequently, the guest and AAA returned to [REDACTED], and the guest paid a certain Ann, the owner of the bar, for AAA's sexual services.²⁰ In another instance, XXX transported AAA to [REDACTED] where a male client was waiting. The bellboy took AAA to the client who was already inside a room for the sexual services of AAA. The amount of PHP 1,500.00 was paid to AAA, which amount was divided between the bellboy and XXX.²¹ After the sexual service, XXX will fetch AAA from the hotel and bring her back to the boarding house.²² During AAA's stay at [REDACTED], she only received tips from her clients but not her actual salary. Her salary was withheld by Ann allegedly to cover AAA's board and lodging, clothing, and food. She only got to keep around PHP 2,000.00 monthly. The rest were divided among XXX, Margie, and Ann as their commissions.²³

After a few months, XXX transferred AAA to work at [REDACTED] Videoke Bar. Eventually, XXX and AAA became romantically involved as partners and lived together.²⁴ AAA's nature of work at [REDACTED] was similar to the services she performed in [REDACTED]. Her salary was no longer used to pay for her utilities but rather as installment payment for the PHP 15,000.00 loan contracted by XXX from a certain Flor which was used to purchase XXX's

¹⁶ *Rollo*, p. 38.

¹⁷ *Id.* at 41.

¹⁸ *Id.* at 12.

¹⁹ *Id.* at 12, 38.

²⁰ *Id.* at 12.

²¹ *Id.* at 13.

²² *Id.* at 39.

²³ *Id.* at 12-13, 38.

²⁴ *Id.* at 13, 39.

motorbike and AAA's dress.²⁵ On AAA's rest days, XXX would still offer her to male clients through a pimp. Payments for said services were divided between the pimp and XXX.²⁶ Moreover, AAA suffered physical abuse in the hands of XXX who would even convince her to use prohibited drugs before their sexual intercourse.²⁷

In March 2011, BBB, a co-worker of AAA in [REDACTED], reported to the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group (CIDG) that a minor was employed as a prostitute in [REDACTED]. Personally, she witnessed XXX pimping AAA. The CIDG conducted a raid at [REDACTED] where AAA was rescued.²⁸ Daet, the Social Welfare Office Head of the Haven for Women and Girls of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) in [REDACTED], took custody of AAA after her rescue by the CIDG.²⁹

Version of the Defense

XXX denied the allegation that he was prostituting AAA or offering her for sexual favors to male clients. He maintained that he was unaware that AAA was going out with male clients in exchange for money.³⁰ XXX narrated that in August 2010, a certain Apple rented his tricycle to fetch some people in the port of [REDACTED] and bring them to [REDACTED]. When XXX arrived at the port, he met AAA and Margie and brought them to [REDACTED], then he received his payment and proceeded to ply his usual route.³¹ XXX testified that AAA told him that she was 19 years old when they first met. He got to know AAA when the latter hired him to bring her to a boarding house from [REDACTED]. He and AAA became close with each other. He fetched AAA to and from her work at [REDACTED]. XXX claimed that he knew AAA was working at [REDACTED] as a waitress. Eventually, they became lovers.³²

XXX contended that he was driving his tricycle when he knew that AAA was rescued from a raid conducted by the CIDG. He went to the police station in [REDACTED] where he talked to AAA and discovered that the latter was working as a prostitute. He was likewise shocked knowing that AAA was still a minor.³³ AAA apologized for lying about her work and age. She

²⁵ *Id.* at 13, 39–40.

²⁶ *Id.* at 13.

²⁷ *Id.* at 13, 39–40.

²⁸ *Id.* at 13, 40.

²⁹ *Id.* at 40.

³⁰ *Id.* at 41.

³¹ *Id.* at 14, 41.

³² *Id.* at 40–41.

³³ *Id.* at 41–42.

asked XXX to inform her relatives regarding her situation.³⁴ XXX travelled to [REDACTED] to meet AAA's grandparent. He introduced himself as AAA's boyfriend and narrated everything that happened to AAA. XXX and AAA's grandparent subsequently went to [REDACTED].³⁵ When they visited AAA, the latter officially introduced XXX to her grandparent and asked XXX to take care of her grandparent. AAA also asked XXX to promise that he would wait for her release from the DSWD.³⁶

He was in a relationship with AAA from October 2010 to March 2011. They ended their relationship when AAA accused him of failing to wait for her until the DSWD would release her and entering into a relationship with another girl.³⁷ XXX tried to communicate with AAA again but the DSWD disallowed the same pursuant to a court order.³⁸ In sum, XXX denied the allegations and charges against him.

Ruling of the Regional Trial Court

In the March 26, 2021 Joint Judgment,³⁹ the trial court convicted XXX of qualified trafficking in persons but acquitted him in Criminal Case Nos. FC-13-1156 to FC-13-1158 for violation of Republic Act No. 7610.⁴⁰

By so acquitting XXX, the trial court held that AAA's testimony alone, without any corroborative nor documentary evidence, was insufficient to convict XXX of violation of Republic Act No. 7610 beyond a reasonable doubt.⁴¹ Moreover, it took more than 15 months for AAA to file a complaint against XXX despite being housed in the DSWD where there is no more threats of force, intimidation or undue influence.⁴² Hence, the presumption of innocence prevails in favor of XXX. However, since XXX's acquittal is based on reasonable doubt, he could still be held civilly liable.⁴³

As to the charge of qualified trafficking in persons, the trial court resolved that XXX transported and harbored AAA for the purpose of exploitation and prostitution. AAA's clear testimony as to the specific acts which constituted the offense bears more weight than XXX's defense of denial. BBB's testimony corroborated AAA's narration of her plight.⁴⁴ The offense was qualified since

³⁴ *Id.* at 14.

³⁵ *Id.*

³⁶ *Id.*

³⁷ *Id.* at 14, 42.

³⁸ *Id.* at 14.

³⁹ *Id.* at 34-52.

⁴⁰ *Id.* at 52.

⁴¹ *Id.* at 43-47.

⁴² *Id.* at 46.

⁴³ *Id.* at 46-47.

⁴⁴ *Id.* at 48-50.

AAA's minority was proven when her Certificate of Live Birth was formally offered by the prosecution without any opposition from the defense.⁴⁵

The *fallo* of the judgment reads in this wise:

WHEREFORE, this Court finds ... [XXX]:

NOT GUILTY in Criminal [Case] Nos. 13-1156, 13-1157 and 13-1158, all for violation of Republic Act No. 7610, for the failure of the prosecution to prove his guilt beyond [a] reasonable doubt. He is however, as damages, ordered to pay the victim, AAA, the amount of Seventy Five Thousand Pesos ([PHP] 75,000.00) as civil indemnity, Seventy Five Thousand Pesos ([PHP] 75,000.00) as moral damages, and Seventy Five Thousand Pesos ([PHP] 75,000.00) [as] exemplary damages for each of the three (3) cases all with legal interest at the rate of six percent (6%) *per annum* from finality of this Decision until full payment.

GUILTY in Criminal Case No. 13-1155, for Qualified Trafficking in Persons under Republic Act No. 9208, and is hereby sentenced to suffer the penalty of LIFE IMPRISONMENT and pay a fine of Two Million Pesos ([PHP] 2,000,000.00). He is likewise ordered to pay AAA the amount of Five Hundred Thousand Pesos ([PHP] 500,000.00) as moral damages, and One Hundred Thousand Pesos ([PHP] 100,000.00) as exemplary damages with legal interest at the rate of six percent (6%) *per annum* from finality of this Decision until full payment.

SO ORDERED.⁴⁶ (Emphasis in the original)

Ruling of the Court of Appeals

In its November 16, 2023 Decision,⁴⁷ the appellate court resolved to deny XXX's appeal. It seconded the findings of the trial court that the prosecution sufficiently established the elements of qualified trafficking in persons.⁴⁸ AAA recounted multiple instances when XXX offered AAA's sexual services to interested clients, and shared in the payment for such service.⁴⁹ BBB corroborated AAA's testimony on the instances of exploitation for prostitution.⁵⁰ As to AAA's minority, the appellate court appreciated the same and added that proving AAA's minority was already sufficient, and proof of the second element of the offense may already be dispensed with.⁵¹ It gave credence to AAA's testimony despite the alleged inconsistencies.⁵²

⁴⁵ *Id.* at 51.

⁴⁶ *Id.* at 52.

⁴⁷ *Id.* at 9–31.

⁴⁸ *Id.* at 16–18.

⁴⁹ *Id.* at 18–24.

⁵⁰ *Id.* at 24–25.

⁵¹ *Id.* at 26–27.

⁵² *Id.* at 28–30.

The dispositive portion of the appellate court's Decision reads:

WHEREFORE, premises considered, the present appeal is *DENIED* for lack of merit.

*SO ORDERED.*⁵³ (Emphasis in the original)

Hence, this appeal.⁵⁴

In the Brief for the Accused-Appellant,⁵⁵ XXX contends that the prosecution failed to prove all the elements of Republic Act No. 9208, Section 4(a), in relation to Section 6(a); that there were material inconsistencies between AAA's affidavits and in-court testimony; and that there was no competent evidence to prove AAA's minority.⁵⁶

Issue

Whether XXX is guilty of violating Republic Act No. 9208, Section 4(a), in relation to Section 6(a).

Our Ruling

The appeal is not meritorious.

We affirm the factual findings of the trial court, which was likewise affirmed by the appellate court. In criminal cases, the entire case is open for review on appeal, and the appellate court has full jurisdiction to revise the judgment and increase the penalty, among others, after examination of the case records.⁵⁷ Following a careful perusal of the records, this Court sustains the trial court and the appellate court.

First, XXX questions AAA's credibility considering the alleged inconsistencies in her affidavit and in-court testimony, as well as the delay in reporting XXX.⁵⁸ XXX asserts that AAA did not mention him in her first affidavit as one of the individuals who brought her to ████████ to work as a prostitute, and it was only in her second affidavit when XXX's involvement was mentioned.⁵⁹

⁵³ *Id.* at 30–31.

⁵⁴ *Id.* at 3–5.

⁵⁵ *CA rollo*, pp. 37–76.

⁵⁶ *Id.* at 46–47.

⁵⁷ *Brozoto v. People*, G.R. No. 233420, April 28, 2021 [Per J. Lopez, J., Third Division].

⁵⁸ *CA rollo*, pp. 48–62.

⁵⁹ *CA rollo*, p. 57; *rollo*, p. 29.

The said inconsistency is more apparent than real. Despite AAA's failure to initially identify XXX as the one who fetched her from the port, this Court cannot discount the fact that XXX nonetheless offered AAA to different clients for sexual favors in exchange for money. The lapse of time in reporting as well as the inconsistency which pertained to trivial details did not affect the essence and elements of the offense that XXX committed. As expounded in *People v. XXX*,⁶⁰ minor inconsistencies pointing to collateral matters do not affect the veracity of the testimonies, especially when there is consistency as to the principal occurrence and the accused was positively identified.⁶¹

Second, XXX insists that AAA's minority was not proven since the prosecution failed to present a certified true copy of AAA's Certificate of Live Birth.⁶² This contention fails to persuade. It is worthy of note that the parties stipulated as to AAA's minority.⁶³ In addition to the stipulation of the parties, and as correctly pointed out by the trial court and the appellate court,⁶⁴ AAA's minority was duly proven through a copy of AAA's Certificate of Live Birth which was marked as part of the prosecution's exhibits, without opposition from the defense, and subsequently admitted by the trial court.⁶⁵ Hence, AAA was a minor when the offense was committed against her.

Having disposed of the procedural matters, We now delve into the substantive aspect of this case. This Court holds that the prosecution sufficiently established all the elements of qualified trafficking in persons as defined and penalized under Republic Act No. 9208, Section 4(a), in relation to Section 6(a). Said provisions read:

SECTION 4. *Acts of Trafficking in Persons.* – It shall be unlawful for any person, natural or juridical, to commit any of the following acts:

- (a) To recruit, transport, transfer, harbor, provide, or receive a person by any means, including those done under the pretext of domestic or overseas employment or training or apprenticeship, for the purpose of prostitution, pornography, sexual exploitation, forced labor, slavery, involuntary servitude or debt bondage[.]

SECTION 6. *Qualified Trafficking in Persons.* – The following are considered as qualified trafficking:

- (a) When the trafficked person is a child[.]

⁶⁰ G.R. No. 260639, March 29, 2023 [Per J. Hernando, First Division].

⁶¹ *Id.*

⁶² *CA rollo*, pp. 69–73.

⁶³ RTC records (Crim. Case No. FC-13-1158), p. 63.

⁶⁴ *Rollo*, pp. 27–28, 51.

⁶⁵ *Id.* at 51.

*Ferrer v. People*⁶⁶ enumerated the elements of the offense based on the act, means used, and purpose in this wise:

On this score, the successful prosecution of trafficking in persons under Section 4(a) requires:

(a) the *act* of “recruitment, transportation, transfer or harboring, or receipt of persons with or without the victim’s consent or knowledge, within or across national borders;”

(b) 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

(c) 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.”⁶⁷ (Emphasis supplied, citation omitted)

The offense is qualified since the trafficked person is a child pursuant to Section 6(a). Section 3(b) defines “child” as a person below 18 years old or over 18 years of age but unable to fully take care of themselves due to physical or mental disability or condition. As in this case, AAA was a 15-year-old minor when the offense was committed against her.⁶⁸ Corollary, the second element, which itemized how trafficking is committed, may be dispensed with if the trafficked person is a child considering that “even without the perpetrator’s use of coercive, abusive, or deceptive means, a minor’s consent is not given out of [their] own free will.”⁶⁹

At this point, We focus on the first and third elements which the prosecution established through the testimonies of its witnesses. AAA’s narration of her ordeal in the hands of XXX was corroborated by the testimony of BBB. There were several instances when XXX received, transported, and transferred AAA, with or without her consent or knowledge within national borders for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

For one, XXX, together with Margie, fetched AAA to bring her to [REDACTED] where she was asked to entertain a male guest. After AAA was introduced to the male guest, they would check-in at a certain place, and have sexual intercourse. The payment would be given to Ann at [REDACTED] where XXX was also present.⁷⁰ In another instance, XXX met AAA and asked her if she could

⁶⁶ G.R. No. 223042, July 6, 2022 [Per J. Lazaro-Javier, Second Division].

⁶⁷ *Id.*

⁶⁸ RTC records (Crim. Case No. FC-13-1158), p. 63.

⁶⁹ *People v. Lopez*, 877 Phil. 782, 797 (2020) [Per J. Gaerlan, Third Division].

⁷⁰ TSN, AAA, September 3, 2013, pp. 9–13. *See rollo*, pp. 18–19.

entertain a male client. Joan, the owner of [REDACTED], would usually look for male clients and inform XXX, who would then bring AAA to Joan. Before AAA serves the male client, the latter first pays Joan and the payment would be turned over to XXX. Afterwards, AAA could already join the male client.⁷¹

Similar arrangements transpire wherein XXX would escort AAA to [REDACTED] where XXX had his own contact person, i.e., a bellboy, who knows the prospective clients.⁷² When XXX transferred AAA to [REDACTED], AAA was still offered to male clients for sexual favors in multiple instances and the payments were made to the pimps and XXX.⁷³ Clearly, XXX committed human trafficking and benefitted from the illegal acts and sexual exploitation done against AAA. It cannot be gainsaid that XXX, as the perpetrator, should suffer the consequences and penalties attached to the heinous deeds he committed against another individual especially considering that his victim was a minor.

Section 10(c) provides for the penalties and sanctions for qualified trafficking in persons. The provision reads:

SECTION 10. *Penalties and Sanctions.* – The following penalties and sanctions are hereby established for the offenses enumerated in this Act:

....

(c) Any person found guilty of qualified trafficking under Section 6 shall suffer the penalty of life imprisonment and a fine of not less than Two million pesos ([PHP] 2,000,000.00) but not more than Five million pesos ([PHP] 5,000,000.00)[.]

The trial court, similar to the recent pronouncement in *Ferrer*,⁷⁴ sentenced XXX to suffer the penalty of life imprisonment and to pay a fine of PHP 2,000,000.00 as well as moral damages in the amount of PHP 500,000.00 and exemplary damages of PHP 100,000.00.

ACCORDINGLY, the appeal is **DISMISSED**. The November 16, 2023 Decision of the Court of Appeals in CA-G.R. CR-HC No. 15750 is **AFFIRMED**. Accused-appellant XXX is **GUILTY** beyond a reasonable doubt of **QUALIFIED TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS** as defined and penalized under Republic Act No. 9208, Section 4(a), in relation to Section 6(a). Accordingly, he is sentenced to suffer the penalty of life imprisonment and to pay a fine of PHP 2,000,000.00. He is also ordered to pay AAA the amounts of PHP 500,000.00 as moral damages and PHP 100,000.00 as exemplary damages. The six percent (6%) interest rate per *annum* shall be imposed on these awards from the finality of this Decision until full payment.


⁷¹ TSN, AAA, September 3, 2013, pp. 9–13. *See rollo*, pp. 19–20.

⁷² TSN, AAA, September 3, 2013, pp. 3–7, 21. *See rollo*, pp. 20–22.

⁷³ TSN, AAA, September 3, 2013, pp. 10–16. *See rollo*, pp. 22–24.

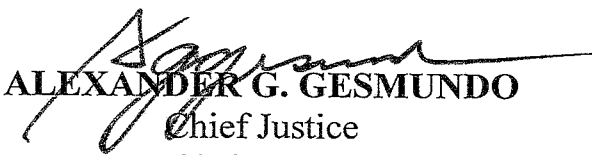
⁷⁴ G.R. No. 223042, July 6, 2022 [Per J. Lazaro-Javier, Second Division].

SO ORDERED.

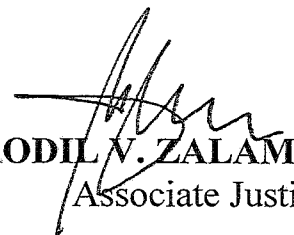


RAMON PAUL L. HERNANDO
Associate Justice
Working Chairperson

WE CONCUR:

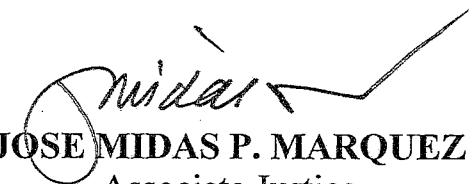


ALEXANDER G. GESMUNDO
Chief Justice
Chairperson



RODIL N. ZALAMEDA
Associate Justice


On official leave
RICARDO R. ROSARIO
Associate Justice



JOSE MIDAS P. MARQUEZ
Associate Justice

CERTIFICATION

Pursuant to Article VIII, Section 13 of the Constitution, 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
Chairperson

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MARIA TERESA B. SIBULO
DIVISION CLERK OF COURT
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