



## **Philippines Against Child Trafficking The National Secretariat**

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### **PRESS RELEASE**

#### **Quezon province gets its first trafficking conviction**

The owners of a videoke bar and a recruiter were the first persons convicted of human trafficking in Quezon province. They were sentenced to 17 to 20 years imprisonment sentence in violation of RA 9208 or the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2003. Convicted were Erick Rosas Morilla and Riza Doromal Pingcas, business owners-managers of the Erick Rose videoke bar in Real, Quezon and the latter's sister Rona Doromal Pingcas who served as their recruiter.

Infanta Regional Trial Court Judge Arnel C. Mesa found the three accused "guilty beyond reasonable doubt" of the crime and ordered each of them to pay each victim a fine of two million pesos in exemplary damages.

The accused were found guilty of recruiting the victims – Gina, 24 years old, and Suzette, 23 years old (not their real names) – in Negros Occidental, transporting them to Manila and to their final destination, a videoke bar in Real municipality, Quezon province. Once there, the victims were "forced and/or ordered to entertain male customers in the videoke bar every night from May 16 to May 24, 2009 for a fee or consideration in the form of lady's drinks." The court further added that complainants were forced to go out with their male customers and have sex with them for a fee.

The two victims were recruited by Rona Pingcas to work as waitresses in the videoke bar and were promised a monthly salary of PhP3,500. Suzette then invited her cousin Gina to join her in working in the said bar.

According to the Suzette's testimony, the customers touched them and they resisted. However, when Riza and Erick saw them avoiding the sexual advances of customers, they scolded them. "Wag daw po kaming maarte, " ["We should not be coy"] Suzette told the court.

In her testimony, Suzette further said that on one occasion, a customer wanted to take Suzette out but she refused. Even as she begged the customer not to take her out explaining that they were being forced by Riza and Erick to do such things, the customer instead threatened to tell Riza



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about her stubbornness. At one point, she said Erick Rosas threatened to bury her alive ( “Ililibing daw po (niya) kami ng buhay”) if they refused to follow orders.

Gina also told the court that Riza Pingcas refused to allow them to go home, and also threatened to dump their bodies at sea (“Pag umalis daw po kami ay ililibing kami ng buhay sa dagat”).

Their recruiter, Rona Pingcas, upon learning that Suzette had contacted her father also warned the victims that they would be buried alive if they tried to leave. “Ililibing niya (daw) po kami sa tabing dagat, sasabihin niya po sa parents naming na sumama daw kami sa mga boyfriends namin,” Suzette testified.

Despite the fact that the victims waived their right to recover moral damages, the court awarded the victims exemplary damages “by way of example or correction for the public good.” The case was filed in January 2010 after the victims were rescued from the videoke bar by the local social welfare and development office. Suzette was able to contact her father through her cellphone which she was able to bury under the sand for safekeeping. The latter told them to wait for rescue.

Gina and Suzette cried when the decision was read. *“Salamat po sa mga tumulong sa amin, kayo na hindi umalis sa tabi namin. Kay God na hindi kami pinabayaan. Masaya kami na naibangon namin ang aming dangal bilang tao sa kabila nang naloko kami, inargabyado kami. Ngayon bingyan niya kami ng daan upang makabangon kami. Sa mga taong tumulong sa amin na kahit buhay nila tinataya sa anumang panganib.”* ["Our thanks to those who helped us and never left our side. Our thanks to God who did not abandon us. We are happy for having our dignity intact despite what we went through"]

Suzette particularly thanked the Provincial Social Welfare and Development Office of Negros (Occidental), the Municipal Social Welfare and Development Office of Real, Quezon and the Philippines Against Child Trafficking who put together their human and material resources and provided assistance to ensure that the victims were able to regularly attend hearings and sustain their participation in the case from 2010 to 2012.



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Suzette appealed to other trafficking victims not to be afraid to fight for what is right. “Walang masama na nananalo sa mundong ito. Palagi lang silang magdasal sa harap ng problemang dumarating.” To other traffickers, Gina hoped they would stop such activities. “Sana maisip nila na may pamilya din sila, may anak din sila na naghahangad ng magandang buhay. Pakiusap ko lang, sana tigilan niyo na. Magbagong buhay na kayo.” ["No evil can triumph in the world as long as people pray amid the problems they face. To the traffickers, you have families, and children for whom you wish a better life. Think about this and stop what you are doing. Change your lives"]

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