Republic of the Philippines
REGIONAL TRIAL COURT OF PALAWAN
Fourth Judicial Region

Branch 95

Roxas, Palawan

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INCOMING OUTGOING

BY: ____ DATS NO. ____

TIME:

DENR MIMAROPA

Email: rtc95roxaspalawan@gmail.com Contact Number: 0950-345-9348/0936-683-9473

REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES,
Plaintiff,

CIVIL CASE NO. 4542

-versus-

FOR:

HEIR OF INDALECIO NAMUCO, NAMELY: EMMY TEJEDOR and THE REGISTER OF DEEDS OF PALAWAN, Defendants. CANCELLATION OF FREE PATENT and ORIGINAL CERTIFICATE OF TITLE and REVERSION.

DECISION

Before this Court is a civil case filed by the Republic of the Philippines through the Solicitor General praying for the declaration of Free Patent Number (IV-A-11) 1269 and Original Certificate of Title (OCT) number E-4948 of the Registry of Deeds of Palawan in the name of Indalecio Namuco as void *ab initio* and ultimately for the reversion of the parcel of land covered by the aforementioned award and title. The antecedent facts of the case are as follows:

The plaintiff alleged on its complaint that on July 23, 1956, Indalecio Namuco (Indalecio for brevity) filed with the Bureau of Lands an application for free patent, Bureau of Lands No. 2-367, which covered a portion of land identified as Lot No. 894, PLS-232 situated in Del Pilar, Roxas, Palawan, consisting of 9,060 square meters. Indalecio alleged in his application that there was no other person claiming or occupying the parcel of land he applied for and he entered and cultivated the same since April 1946. During the pendency of his Free Patent Application, Indalecio transferred his rights and interests over the subject land to Antonio Lavega (Antonio for brevity) on December 11, 1965, and the latter eventually ceded his rights to his son Romeo Lavega (Romeo for brevity) who filed his own Homestead Application over the same parcel of land. The Free Patent



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application of Indalecio was approved on February 24, 1983, despite the transfer of his rights over the subject land, by virtue of an order dated February 24, 1983. It was indicated therein that he or his predecessor-in-interest continuously occupied and cultivated that since July 4, 1944. Accordingly, a Free Patent No. (IV-A-11) 1269 was issued to Indalecio and a subsequent corresponding Original Certificate of Title No. E-4948 (OCT No. 4948) was issued to him by the Register of Deeds of Palawan on October 30, 1984.

However, Romeo Lavega filed a Protest with the DENR Regional Office No. IV on December 12, 2003 against the issuance of patent in favor of Indalecio alleging that the latter already executed a transfer of rights and interests long time ago in favor of his father, Antonio Lavega, covering the subject property. Because of this, an investigation was conducted by CENRO Roxas, Palawan and it was found out that neither Indalecio or his heirs nor Lavegas has possession of the subject land. Ultimately their respective application and already issued patents were cancelled and the said land was recommended for reversion to public domain. The CENRO also stated that Indalecio transferred no rights whatsoever to his heir Emmy Namuco-Tejedor (Emmy for brevity) because he has already transferred his rights to Antonio Lavega. Conclusively, the plaintiff alleged that the fraudulent act and misrepresentation of Indalecio Namuco misled the DENR in issuing the patent to the prejudice of the State over its patrimony.

On the other hand, the defendant alleged on her Answer that after an investigation by the DENR, Indalecio has continuously occupied and cultivated the subject land himself through his predecessor-in-interest since July 04, 1944. Emmy denied that her late father transferred his rights and interests over the subject land to Antonio Lavega. She added the DENR Regional Office has no jurisdiction over the protest of Romeo Lavega. Emmy also alleged that the Administrative Proceedings for the cancellation of land titles issued by the DENR has already prescribe considering that the title was issued on October 30, 1984 and the investigation concerning the protest of Lavega with respect to subject land was only conducted in 2004. Lastly, she reiterated that the application of her father Indalecio for the title over the subject property was made in good faith being in the possession thereof as early as July 04, 1944.

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Evidence for the Plaintiff.

The plaintiff presented Mr. Ronnie Lilang (Lilang for brevity). He is a Land Management Officer 2 of Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) of Roxas, Palawan. In his Judicial Affidavit² as his direct testimony, he testified that he is a Special Investigator at the Department of Environment and Natural Resources - Community Environment and Natural Resources Office (DENR-CENRO) of Roxas, Palawan. As such, he facilitates registration of interests over public lands, investigation of claims and conflicts involving patented lands, and among others. He said that he was the one who ordered the investigation over the present case involving a parcel of land with OCT No. E-4948 in the name of Indalecio Namuco as per order of DENR Region IV-B Executive Director Dionisio Tolentino, Jr. Witness Lilang was also designated as hearing officer and as such he was ordered to investigate the case of Indalecio Namuco, represented by Emy Tejedor, pursuant to the protest filed by Romeo Lavega involving the land subject of this case identified as Lot No. 894, PLS-232 situated in Del Pilar, Roxas, Palawan, consisting of 9,060 square meters. He conducted hearing and ocular inspection of the subject property and evaluated the case. The Romeo Lavega's protest is about the annulment of Patent No. (IV-A-11) 1269 issued on February 24, 1983 covering the subject parcel of land which was allegedly inordinately issued in favor or Indalecio Namuco. However, the rights and interest over it has already acquired by Antonio Lavega, the father of Romeo Lavega, by virtue of Transfer of Rights from Indalecio Namuco to Antonio Lavega dated December 11, 1965. Antonio subsequently ceded his rights over the subject property to his son Romeo Lavega.

Witness Lilang said that their office has no copy in the records of the said Free Patent No. (IV-A-11) 1269 and of the Order of Approval and Issuance of Free Patent in the name of Indalecio Namuco. Hence, he cannot consider that there had been actual issuance of the said free patent. This is the reason why their office issued Homestead Patent No. (IV-25) 1446 in the name of Romeo Lavega covering the same parcel of land. He added that they have a copy of a letter from Emmy N. Tejedor stating that the complete records of Free Patent No. (IV-A-11) 1269 and OCT No. E-4948 are in their possession. Witness Lilang said that he conducted ocular inspection on June 11, 2004 and further investigation reveals

¹ TSN dated October 10, 2017.

² Dated September 21, 2015.

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that the said lot has an area of 9,060 square meters, has only 30 meters one-sided fence built and occupied by Namucos at the west beside a shanty and newly planted coco palm. The protesters have no improvement of their own but there was a road traversing the subject lot, constructed by Romeo Martin who has also a fishpond affecting part of the said land. The witness said that the subject land is not qualified for Free Patent because of lacking of proof of long-time possession. After submission and non-submission of both parties of their respective documents, witness Lilang rendered his investigation and recommended for declaration of Free Patent No. (IV-A-11) 1269 in the name of Indalecio Namuno as null and void after finding that the same was irregularly issued or acquired by virtue of bad faith in the part of Indalecio Namuco. At the time of the issuance of subject Free Patent in the name of Indalecio Namuco, he already transferred and waived his rights over the subject parcel of land in favor of Lavega.

In an Order of Regional Executive Director – MIMAROPA dated November 18, 2005, the Investigation Report of witness Lilang was affirmed and became final and executory. In effect, the Free Patent No. (IV-A-11) 1269 in the name of Indalecio Gabuco which was the basis of the issuance of OCT No. E4849 was cancelled prompting the Office of the Solicitor General to institute the present case.

Witness Lilang said that that the subject parcel of land is alienable and disposable being declared as such on May 29, 1931 up to this day. The protest of Lavega was dropped. On the other hand, the application of Namuco was cancelled. He believes that Mr. Martin was interested in the parcel of land subject of this case because he saw the waiver of rights from Lavega to Martin and the latter also occupied portion of the subject lot. Likewise, Namuco Family is interested in the subject land. The waiver of right executed by Indalecio Namuco in favor of Antonio Lavega was presented to the witness Lilang by Romeo Lavega.

To bolster their case, the plaintiff submitted its evidence and were for purposes for which they were respectively offered, these are the Protest dated December 12, 2003;³ the Letter of Emmy N. Tejedor dated December 23, 1996;⁴ the Investigation Report dated September 23, 2004;⁵ an Undated Memorandum

³ Exhibits "C" to "C-4".

⁴ Exhibit" E-1".

⁵ Exhibits "G" to "G-4".

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signed by CENRO Florencio Diaz;⁶ an Order dated November 11, 1976;⁷ a Transmittal dated June 27, 1997;⁸ and a Transmittal dated August 5, 1997.⁹ The other exhibits submitted by the plaintiff are admitted as part of the record of the case.¹⁰

Evidence for the defendants.

The defense presented their only witness, Emmy Namuco Tejedor (Tejedor for brevity). 11 She testified through her judicial affidavit that is one of the heirs of late Indalecio Namuco who was originally named owner of the parcel of land subject of this case. When Indalecio died in year 2000, one of the properties he left is a parcel of land subject of this case, contained and described under OCT No. 4948, Lot No. 894, PLS-232 with an area of 9,060 square meters located at Brgy. 1, Poblacion, (former Barrio Del Pilar) Roxas, Palawan. As far as she knows, her father applied for Free Patent for the said land and eventually a land title was issued in 1984. She said that her father took possession of the subject land even before Emmy Tejedor was born and in 1970's they lend the said land to a mining company and she was the one authorized to receive royalties but she cannot provide one because it happened long time ago. She and her father knew Antonio Lavega. Emmy denied and did not believe that her father had transferred the rights and interests over the subject parcel of land to Antonio Lavega because she had never seen the latter to have claimed, took possession or lived in the said parcel of land. Antonio Lavega has never communicated the said claim to Emmy even though they often meet each other.

She said that she also knew a certain Romeo Martin. He is the owner of parcel of land adjacent to the lot subject of this case. He is also claiming ownership of the subject lot. Emmy said that Martin was disturbing them since then. They filed cases against each other because Martin is insisting that he is the owner of the subject parcel of land and he is always making trouble. She also said that maybe Martin has an interest in the subject land because he wants it to be his

¹¹ TSNs dated August 17, 2021 and September 23, 2021.

⁶ Exhibit "P".

⁷ Exhibit "S".

⁸ Exhibits "X" and "X-1".

⁹ Exhibits "Y" and "Y-1".

 $^{^{10}}$ Exhibits "A", "B", "D" and "D-2", "E", "F" and "F-1", "H", "I", "J", "K" and "K-1", "L" and "L-1", "M", "N" and "N-1", "O", "Q", "R", "T" and "T-1", "U" and "U-1", "V" and "V-1", "W", "W-1", and "W-2".

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roadway going to his land. Instead of requesting for an easement Martin initiated a complaint to DENR to cancel the land title of Namuco. Emmy Tejedor insisted that Martin has no right whatsoever to the subject parcel of land. They are the ones who have better right to the said land especially that they have already registered it to their names. Emmy also built a house in the subject land. She likewise fenced it and planted trees therein. But their gate was destroyed by Martin in April 2012.

She said that she often stays and reside in Puerto Princesa City by reason of her occupation. She has no knowledge that the subject property which was subsequently covered by OCT No. 4948 being claimed by her father was already transferred to another person because they are holding the certificate of title for the same and her father did not tell her anything about it.

Both parties stipulated as to existence of OCT No. 4948 in the name of Indalecio Namuco and as to existence and issuance of TCT No. 065-2011000188 by virtue of cancellation of OCT No. 4948.

To bolster their case, the defendant submitted in evidence the TCT No. 065-2011000188;¹² the Affidavit of Publication;¹³ the Certificate Authorizing Registration;¹⁴ a Tax Clearance Certificate; ¹⁵ Official Receipts No. 5399796, 6089256 and 6089255 all dated January 24, 2011;¹⁶ Official Receipt No. 1000725322 dated March 07, 2011;¹⁷ Official Receipt No. 6157557 dated March 24, 2011;¹⁸ and Photographs.¹⁹

Discussion.

The herein plaintiff is seeking for the cancellation of Free Patent, cancellation of the Original Certificate of Title, as well as all its derivative titles, issued by virtue of such grant and reversion of the subject parcel of land into public

¹² Exhibit "1".

¹³ Exhibit "2".

¹⁴ Exhibit "3".

¹⁵ Exhibit "4".

¹⁶ Exhibits "5", "6", and "7", respectively.

¹⁷ Exhibit "8" to "8-2".

¹⁸ Exhibit "9".

¹⁹ Exhibits "10" to "14".

domain. The plaintiff alleged that Indalecio Namuco committed a fraudulent act and misrepresentation that misled the DENR in issuing the Free Patent in his favor and subsequently, a certificate of title for the subject land. Allegedly, this act is a violation of Section 91 of Commonwealth Act No. 141, commonly known as the Public Land Act, which read to wit:

SECTION 91. The statements made in the application shall be considered as essential conditions and parts of any concession, title, or permit issued on the basis of such application, and any false statements therein or omission of facts altering, changing, or modifying the consideration of the facts set forth in such statements, and any subsequent modification, alteration, or change of the material facts set forth in the application shall ipso facto produce the cancellation of the concession, title, or permit granted. It shall be the duty of the Director of Lands, from time to time and whenever he may deem it advisable, to make the necessary investigations for the purpose of ascertaining whether the material facts set out in the application are true, or whether they continue to exist and are maintained and preserved in good faith, and for the purposes of such investigation, the Director of Lands is hereby empowered to issue subpoenas and subpoenas duces tecum and, if necessary, to obtain compulsory process from the courts. In every investigation made in accordance with this section, the existence of bad faith, fraud, concealment, or fraudulent and illegal modification of essential facts shall be presumed if the grantee or possessor of the land shall refuse or fail to obey a subpoena or subpoena duces tecum lawfully issued by the Director of Lands or his authorized delegates or agents, or shall refuse or fail to give direct and specific answers to pertinent questions, and on the basis of such presumption, an order of cancellation may issue without further proceedings. (Underlining ours)

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It has been held that a complaint for reversion involves a serious controversy, involving a question of fraud and misrepresentation committed against the government and it is aimed at the return of the disputed portion of the public domain. It seeks to cancel the original certificate of registration, and nullify the original certificate of title, including the transfer certificate of title of the successors-in-interest because the same were all procured through fraud and misrepresentation. Thus, the State, as the party alleging the fraud and misrepresentation that attended the application of the free patent, bears that burden of proof. Fraud and misrepresentation, as grounds for cancellation of patent and annulment of title, should never be presumed but must be proved by clear and convincing evidence, mere preponderance of evidence not even being adequate. ²¹

The standard of proof of clear and convincing evidence is derived from American common law. It is less than proof beyond reasonable doubt (for criminal cases) but greater than preponderance of evidence (for civil cases). The degree of believability is higher than that of an ordinary civil case.²² The burden of proof rests on the party alleging fraud.²³

In the present case, the only issue is whether or not Indalecio Namuco committed fraudulent act and misrepresentation when he allegedly sold or waived all his rights, interest and participation over the subject parcel of land in favor of Antonio Lavega, after the waiver has been executed and pending the approval of his application for Free Patent over the said parcel of land.

The evidence submitted by the plaintiff consists mainly of documents resulted from investigation of DENR of the protest of Romeo Lavega. On the other hand, the evidence of the defendants purported their continuous occupation of the subject parcel of land and that the rights over it has never been waived, sold or transferred to another person.

²⁰ Saad Agro-Industries, Inc., vs. Republic of the Philippines, G.R. No. 152570, September 27, 2006. Citing Morandarte v. Court of Appeals, G.R. No. 123586, 12 August 2004.

²² Riguer vs. Mateo, G.R. No. 222538, June 21, 2017.

²³ Ganancial vs. Cabugao, G.R. No. 203348, July 06, 2020. Citing Riguer vs. Mateo, G.R. No. 222538, June 21, 2017.

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The Protest²⁴ of Romeo Lavega alleged that the rights and interests over the disputed parcel of land was already transferred in favor of his father Antonio Lavega on December 11, 1965 by Indalecio Namuco. This protest is bolstered by a public document denominated as "Transfer of Rights and of Interest over a Parcel of Land" which bears the identification of the subject land. It is categorically stated therein that Indalecio Namuco sold, conveyed and transferred all of his rights, interest and participation over the said land unto Antonio Lavega. The result of investigation of plaintiff's witness Ronnie Lilang shows that the Free Patent Application for subject parcel of land (Lot No. 894, PLS-232) by Indalecio Namuco was already rejected in year 1988 on account of aforementioned conveyance document executed in 1965 in favor of Antonio Lavega. In the same year of the rejection of Namuco's application, Romeo Lavega's Homestead Patent application was approved and became a holder of HP (IV-25) 1446 over the subject land.²⁵

Further, in the same investigation report, it stated that herein defendant Emmy Tejedor is unwilling to cooperate by refusing to present for scrutiny the sources of her evidence. She also failed to refute the allegation that her father has already transferred his rights, interest and participation over the subject land. Pursuant to Section 91 of Commonwealth Act No. 141, which read to wit:

X x x x. "In every investigation made in accordance with this section, the existence of bad faith, fraud, concealment, or fraudulent and illegal modification of essential facts shall be presumed if the grantee or possessor of the land shall refuse or fail to obey a subpoena or subpoena duces tecum lawfully issued by the Director of Lands or his authorized delegates or agents, or shall refuse or fail to give direct and specific answers to pertinent questions, and on the basis of such presumption, an order of cancellation may issue without further proceedings."

Hence, the investigation officer presumed that defendant Tejedor casts doubts unto her submitted exhibits. Likewise, the investigator ruled that she lost further reason to insist her claim.²⁶

²⁴ Exhibit "C".

²⁵ Exhibit "G", par. 17.

²⁶ Exhibit "G", par. 19.

As evidence for the plaintiff, a memorandum issued by Florencio Diaz (OIC-CENRO), stated that the application of Indalecio Namuco was rejected by the District Land Officer on September 12, 1988 by virtue of an order. It was also stated therein that the subject lot was obviously titled without the knowledge of the District Land Officer. Moreover, the carpeta of the said land application cannot be found on their record.²⁷

On the other hand, defendant Tejedor stated that she has no knowledge about the alleged transfer of rights, interest and participation of his father to Lavegas over the subject parcel of land. She added that the Lavegas never manifest their claim over the said land even though they always see each other. All documentary evidence of the defendants purports the regularity in transfer of OCT E-4948 in the name of Indalecio Namuco into TCT No. 065-2011000188 in the names of siblings Rebecca Carceller and defendant Emmy Tejedor. The totality of evidence of the defendant fails to address the present and real issue in this case and refute the allegations of the plaintiff.

The Court gives accord and credence to the investigation of Plaintiff's witness DENR Special Investigator Ronnie Lilang for it was testified upon in Court and he satisfactorily explained their case and evidence. Further, the Court gives weight to evidence produced by government agency, DENR in this case, for regularity in the performance of their duty is presumed.

The testimony of plaintiff's witness satisfactorily addressed the issue in this case. Based on his investigation, he proved that indeed Indalecio Namuco committed a violation of Public Land Act that will warrant the cancellation of Free Patent, the Original Certificate of Title issued in his name and all of its derivative titles. His testimony was well supported by documentary evidence which repeatedly indicated that the Free Patent Application of Indalecio Namuco was denied or rejected while the Homestead Application of Romeo Lavega was granted or approved. It was also indicated in the findings in a Memorandum dated June 27, 1997 that Indalecio Namuco already transferred or waived his right over the subject land in favor Antonio Lavega. Further, in a memorandum, it was also

²⁷ Exhibit "P".

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stated that after exhaustion of effort, the carpeta of land application of Namuco cannot be located and was declared missing.

Careful study of the record of the case as well as evidence submitted by the plaintiff, it is clear and proven that Indalecio Namuco had already transferred his rights, interest and participation over the subject parcel of land in favor of Antonio Lavega pending approval of the former's free patents application. This is a clear violation of Section 91 of Commonwealth Act 141 which requires the applicant to represent and declare truthful facts concerning his land application and that he continuously posses and occupy the subject land he applied for grant in his favor. Logically, it follows that all heirs of Indalecio Namuco ceased to have rights and interest over the subject land after its conveyance to Lavega. The Court cannot find any reason for heirs of Namuco to stay and occupy the subject land. They should have completely delivered it to the transferee. Considering the foregoing, it is clear that the Free Patent No. (IV-A-II) 1269 must have not been issued to Indalecio Namuco as well as the OCT-4948. Defendant Tejedor cannot insist the indefeasibility of OCT E-4948 in the name of Indalecio Namuco as well as its derivative land title TCT No. 065-2011000188 in the names of siblings Rebecca Carceller and defendant Emmy Tejedor because they are proceeds of a fraudulent act which the Public Land Act abhors. A title emanating from a free patent which was secured through fraud does not become indefeasible, precisely because the patent from whence the title sprung is itself void and of no effect whatsoever.²⁸

While it is true that once a patent is registered and the corresponding certificate of title is issued, the land covered by them ceases to be part of the public domain and becomes private property. Further, the Torrens Title issued pursuant to the patent becomes indefeasible a year after the issuance of the latter. However, this indefeasibility of a title does not attach to titles secured by fraud and misrepresentation. Well-settled is the doctrine that the registration of a patent under the Torrens System does not by itself vest title; it merely confirms the registrant's already existing one. Verily, registration under the Torrens System is not a mode of acquiring ownership.²⁹

²⁸ Yap vs. Republic, G.R. No. 199810, March 15, 2017. Citing Lorzano v. Tabayag, Jr, 68 l Phil. 39 (2012). ²⁹ *Ibid.* Citing Republic v. Heirs of Felipe Alejaga, Sr., 441 Phil. 656 (2002).

Entitlement to agricultural lands of the public domain requires a clear showing of compliance with the provisions of Commonwealth Act No. 141, as amended, otherwise known as the Public Land Act.³⁰ In the present case, the investigation conducted by DENR revealed that Indalecio Namuco committed a violation of the said law.

On the other hand, the evidence adduced by the defendant cannot even touch the real issue in this case. It fails to refute the allegation of the plaintiff. The documentary evidence submitted by the defendants only proved, at its most, the process on how the defendant transfers the OCT E-4948 in the name of Indalecio Namuco into TCT No. 065-2011000188 in the names of siblings Rebecca Carceller and defendant Emmy Tejedor. This did not overturn the evidence of the plaintiff which proved the violation of Section 91 of Public Land Act committed by predecessor in interest Indalecio Namuco.

In conclusion, the plaintiff had produced a clear and convincing evidence that Indalecio Namuco committed a violation of Public Land Act which warrants the cancellation of Free Patent as well as its Original Certificate of Title granted to him. The totality of the evidence of the plaintiff had overturned the presumption of regularity in the issuance of Free Patent and land title in favor of Indalecio Namuco. It is clear that defendant lost any right over the subject property after the rights, interest and participation over the same was transferred to Antonio Lavega, unless the contrary is proven in a proper proceeding for that issue.

WHEREFORE, premises considered, judgment is hereby rendered GRANTING the prayer of the Plaintiff and rendering the following decretal:

- The Free Patent No. (IV-A-11) 1269 and Original Certificate of Title (OCT)
 No. E-4948 of the Registry of Deed of Palawan in the name of Indalecio
 Namuco, and all its derivative titles are hereby declared VOID AB INITIO;
- The heirs of Indalecio Namuco, namely: Rebecca Namuco-Carceller and Emmy Namuco-Tejedor, or any other person in possession of Transfer Certificate of Title No. 065-2011000188 in the name of Rebecca Namuco-

³⁰ Taar, et al vs. Lawan et al., October 11, 2017, G.R. No. 190922.

Carceller and Emmy Namuco-Tejedor, are hereby ordered to SURRENDER the said land title to Registry of Deeds of Palawan and the latter is hereby directed to cancel the aforementioned title/s, as well as the original thereof, and all of its subsequent titles, if any;

- 3. The heirs of Indalecio Namuco, namely: Rebecca Namuco-Carceller and Emmy Namuco-Tejedor, or any other person claiming rights under Indalecio Namuco and/or Rebecca Namuco-Carceller and Emmy Namuco-Tejedor are hereby ordered to cease and desist from exercising or representing acts of ownership or possession over Lot No. 894, PLS-232 situated in Barrio of Del Pilar, Municipality of Roxas, Province of Palawan; and finally,
- 4. The Lot No. 894, PLS-232 covered by the aforementioned patent and title is hereby ordered reverted back to the land of public domain.

No pronouncement as to cost.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

Given this 20th day of February 2023 at the Hall of Justice, Puerto Princesa City, Philippines.

PAUL B. JAGMIS, JR.

Presiding Judge

Copy furnished:

Atty. Gandhi G. Gagni-Flores

- for the Plaintiff - # 227

Atty. Jean Lou N. Aguilar

- for the Defendants

Emmy Namuco-Tejedor

- Defendant

CENRO, Roxas, Palawan

DENR, Palawan

Register of Deeds, Palawan

File

Record