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ANATOMY OF AN ERROR

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A major philatelic error was committed in an issue honoring the 50th Anniversary of the United Nations. I am the one to blame and I accept full responsibility for the fiasco.

The issue was included in the schedule prepared in 1994 for stamps to be issued in 1995. So at a regular meeting in April 1995 of the Stamp Advisory Committee of the Philippine Postal Corporation, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) confirmed the selection of five prominent Filipinos who served the UN with distinction who were to be featured on the stamps.

They were the Hon. Carlos P. Romulo, the first Filipino to serve as President of the UN General Assembly; Justice Cesar C. Bengzon, a former member of the International Court of Justice; Rafael M. Salas, former Assistant Secretary General; Hon. Salvador P. Lopez, former Secretary for Foreign Affairs; and Dr. Jose D. Ingles, former Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs, and my elder brother.

The pictures of the honorees as received from the DFA were blurred photocopies, unsuitable for reproduction. I volunteered to get clearer pictures of the honorees. I had no difficulty in getting the pictures except for Justice Bengzon. I had to make several telephone calls before I could get a positive response. The irony of it is that the family lives only a few blocks from my house. My fatal mistake was in asking

for and receiving a picture of “Justice Bengzon”. After I got the picture, I just turned it over to the Design Section of the Philippine Postal Corporation. The picture of Carlos P. Romulo was displayed on a souvenir sheet (Figure 1), while the other four honorees were shown on a se-tenant block of four (Front Cover).

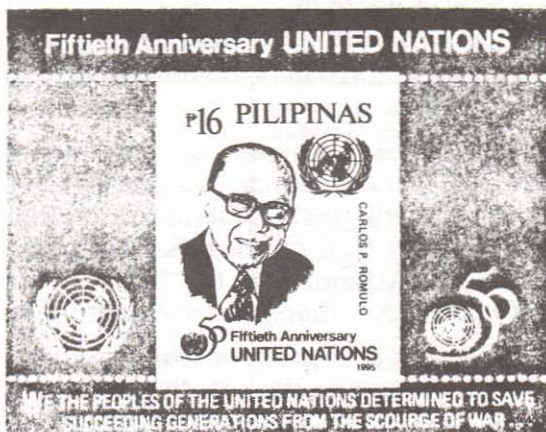


Figure 1

The “Philatelic Bulletin” announcing the issue stated that the stamps would be issued on Monday, September 25, 1995. However, I was advised by Larry Carino that he tried buying the stamps on that day but was told that the delivery had been delayed and to try again the next day. Sale of the stamps was started the afternoon of September 26. Larry did not go to the Post Office on September 26, but instead decided to buy them on Wednesday, September 27 at the meeting of the Stamp Advisory Committee.

At that meeting, I was able to buy one full sheet and several FDCs. When I arrived home, I showed the stamps to my wife Ester, focusing especially upon the stamp picturing my elder brother, Dr. Jose D. Ingles.

To my dismay, Ester was surprised to see that the picture identified as Justice Cesar C. Bengzon was actually that of Justice Jose Bengzon. I was not able to sleep the entire night.

Early the next morning, I went to the Post Office, after having Ester call the residence of Justice Jose Bengzon for confirmation of the mistake. It was too early, however, but the lady who answered consented to be at the house to talk to Ester later that morning. At the PO, I warned Mrs. Lourdes Flores-Cubelo, Manager, Philatelic Division about the error. I mentioned that I was awaiting confirmation from the Bengzon family by ten o'clock that morning. I also visited the office of Mrs. Norma Maog, Assistant Postmaster General for Finance, but she was not there, so I left word that I would call her. Around ten o'clock I called our house and was advised that Bengzon's daughter-in-law was not there, so I left for my office.

Arriving at the office I was informed that the lady had arrived at our house and confirmed that it was really Justice Jose Bengzon and not Justice Cesar Bengzon. I tried to call Mrs. Cubelo, but she was out, so I called Mrs. Maog and advised her that the Bengzon family had confirmed that the picture was not of Justice Cesar Bengzon. She immediately ordered the withdrawal of the stamp from circulation. The next day I submitted my resignation from the Stamp Advisory Committee.

The government printer, Amstar Company, Inc., was instructed to replace the picture of Bengzon with that of Romulo (Figure 2). The corrected version was rushed to completion to enable President Ramos to have the corrected copies before he departed for the UN ceremony in New York, and was released for sale at the Manila CPO on October 9.

On the day the original stamps were issued, the Sales Section at the Manila Central Post Office had with them about 1,000 stamps or 25 sheets of 40 subjects, and the Mail Order Section had about 400 stamps or 10 sheets. On the day the stamps were withdrawn from sale, the Mail Order Section had only five sheets, and the Sales Section less than one sheet. The rest of the sheets were sent to the stamp windows after the Bengzon error stamps had been removed.

Agreement was reached with the family of Justice Cesar C. Bengzon to publish an erratum in the Manila newspapers. The *Manila Bulletin* in of Tuesday, October 31, carried the story with illustrations of both the error and the corrected stamps:

"STAMP ERROR. A major philatelic error was committed in a set of stamps issued by the Philippine Postal Corporation (Philpost) on Sept. 25 to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the birth of the United Nations. The stamps in a block of four depict the pictures of four prominent Filipinos who worked in the United Nations, namely Cesar C. Bengzon, Rafael M. Salas, Salvador P. Lopez, and Jose D. Ingles.



Figure 2

The picture in the upper left corner, however, is not of Justice Cesar C. Bengzon but of his cousin Justice Jose Bengzon. Philpost corrected the error by placing the picture of Carlos P. Romulo in the block of stamps after the family requested that Justice Cesar Bengzon no longer be included in the UN stamps (Figure 2). He will, however, be featured in the Famous Filipino series of stamps to be issued in 1996. Philpost recalled the first set of stamps after two days of sale and issued the corrected set on October 9.” ■