# EDITORIAL — Where’s the mastermind? | Philstar.com

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It’s been eight years since South Korean businessman Jee Ick-joo was snatched from his home in Angeles City, together with his housemaid Marisa Morquicho, by members of the Philippine National Police Anti-Illegal Drugs Group. To this day, Jee’s relatives, friends and other South Koreans are still waiting for the convicted mastermind to face punishment.

In one of the most notorious abuses of the drug war in the previous administration, Jee was taken on Oct. 18, 2016 by AIDG members in his own sport utility vehicle to PNP headquarters at Camp Crame, where he was strangled to death inside the SUV. His body was taken to a funeral parlor and cremated, and the ashes flushed down the toilet.

The accused mastermind, police Supt. Rafael Dumlao of the AIDG, was cleared by Angeles City Regional Trial Court Judge Eda Dizon in June 2023, but the ruling was overturned by the Court of Appeals in July this year. The Supreme Court said the CA, in convicting Dumlao as the mastermind, found Dizon’s trial to be “a sham and an apparent mockery of the judicial process such that Dumlao’s acquittal was a foregone conclusion and in total disregard of the evidence.”

Based on the CA ruling, Dumlao faces life in prison without eligibility for parole for Jee’s kidnapping with homicide, another life term for the kidnapping and serious illegal detention of Morquicho, plus 35 years for stealing Jee’s SUV. Dumlao’s co-defendants were convicted last year.

The only problem at this point is finding Dumlao. Judge Eda Dizon had granted him bail prior to his acquittal by the lower court, and his whereabouts are unknown as his compatriots marked the anniversary of his death yesterday. Dumlao has had sufficient time, since July when the CA reversed his acquittal, to make himself scarce.

The conviction can be appealed to the Supreme Court, but shouldn’t his bail be canceled? And even if it is canceled, can he still be found? Perhaps the SC will affirm the guilty verdict. But by the time the SC issues a final ruling on his case, Dumlao may no longer be around to pay for the heinous crime. What about Judge Eda Dizon? Will she face sanctions for what the CA found to be her “grave abuse of discretion” in clearing Dumlao?

The Philippine judicial system leaves too much room for injustice, and it is dramatically illustrated in the case of Jee Ick-joo.