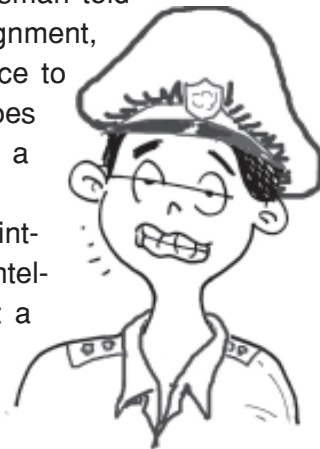


## Hard evidence

**P**olice CSupt Usman Sali had just been appointed Chief of the Narcotics Unit of a big city in Southern Mindanao. He knew that this was his chance to prove himself – that he could do as well as his Christian colleagues. His seven years in the service have been a series of highs and lows, beginning with his recruitment into the force where the personnel officer made it clear that he doubted Usman’s abilities. Sensing this, the Muslim lawyer promised to himself that he would do his best in any task – be it directing traffic or handling a sensitive case, if only to prove his worth. “Nothing to be disappointed of, so far,” Usman told himself. With this new assignment, he will have another chance to prove that being a Muslim does not make him any less of a police officer.

Not long after his appointment, his first case came. Intelligence reports had it that a Chinese druglord was operating somewhere in the vicinity. His hideout was a huge house in a



highly secured village in the city. As the days went on, details of the man's operations came in. The initial information was confirmed. Furthermore, there was to be a huge transaction somewhere in a most unlikely place – a dumpsite.

CSupt Usman lost no time in organizing his men for an entrapment operation. It was most important to catch the suspects red-handed, while the transaction was underway. With the carefully laid out plan, Usman and his men waited for the appointed day and time when they could carry-out the operations.

On that day, before leaving their office, Usman and his men met for a last minute briefing. A Christian officer led a pray-over of the whole group. Usman, being a Muslim, went inside his office for a short prayer to Allah, invoking Him for guidance and protection. He, too wanted to believe that God would be with them in this operation.

Boarding three private cars, the group set off to the dumpsite and waited patiently for the suspects. As planned, they took extra care in disguising themselves as ordinary citizens, scavenging for anything that could be recycled. Some hid from view behind mounds of garbage. They, however, kept themselves alert of the goings on in their surroundings. Soon enough, a black Toyota land cruiser came into view. Two other cars followed. The group took notice of everything that was transpiring before their very eyes. When at last, the time to move in came, Usman signaled for his men to close in on the group. A brief firefight ensued. Caught by surprise, the suspects managed to fire only a couple of shots before being overpowered. Still, two of Usman's men lay wounded at the scene.

One of Usman's men brought an attaché case that was recovered from the black Land Cruiser. Usman brought it with him to the police headquarters, intending to use it as evidence. He could almost guess what was inside – money, lots of money.

"Sir, Inspector Ramos and SPO1 Faisal are wounded," said one of his men.

"*Grabe ba? Dalhin agad sa ospital* [Are they seriously wounded? Bring them to the hospital]," he ordered.

"Er, Sir, what if they ask for deposit?" asked the man.

Usman thought for a minute. Then, he got his wallet and took five hundred pesos from it. He handed it to the policeman, who upon seeing the amount could only scratch his head.

Back at the headquarters, Usman opened the attaché case in front of his junior officers. As expected, it yielded wads and wads of bills – in one thousand and five hundred denominations. They gasped at the sight of so much money.

"Sir, that's a lot of money. What do we do with it?" one junior

officer asked him.

“Use it as evidence, of course,” he answered matter-of-factly. “Let us have it accounted and kept so we would have something to use as evidence.”

There was a brief silence. He could see the men exchanging glances. He wondered why.

“Sir, Ramos and Faisal are in the hospital. Joson is seriously wounded. They wouldn’t be able to report for work in the coming weeks,” said another of his men.

“Yes, I remember,” he answered.

“Where will we get the money for their hospitalization?” the man asked.

Usman was silent as he pondered the question. He had included a request for operational funds to support his office’s activities, but the head office said they had no budget for it. He knew that, sooner or later, something like this would happen.

One of the junior officers broke the silence. “Sir,” he said, “I hope you won’t be surprised by what I am about to suggest to you. But perhaps we could use some of that money for their hospitalization. They come from poor families, sir. And they were wounded in the line of duty.”

“Nobody knows how much money there is in that attaché case, sir, but perhaps we can take some for our operations.”

“That has been our usual practice, sir.”

Usman could feel the acid flowing in his guts as he heard his men. “Here it goes,” he said to himself. He also thought of his wounded men. Surely, there was something for them? But from where? Usman stared at the attaché case that was full of money. He looked at the junior officers surrounding him. He could see the expectant look in their eyes. But this was evidence—hard evidence. Disposing of evidence was not allowed under the law. Should he heed the advice of his men or follow the law that he promised to uphold and protect?



“I entered the police force to serve my country. When I joined the police, I wanted to be the best policeman around. But there is a different reality that operates within the organization. So, as a new officer, you start learning the rules of the game. If you want to rise in the ranks, you should do what your superior officers do. If you don’t follow the rules of the game, you lose. If you slug it out, you are outnumbered. In the end, you have to sacrifice something. If you dream to become a general someday, you have to bend, because if you do not, you will be left behind.”