Activists decry court ruling

Written by Cameron Wells
Friday, 27 August 2010 15:02 - Last Updated Friday, 27 August 2010 15:02

Photo by: Heng Chivoan  A guard leads convicted Russian paedophile Alexander Trofimov, 42, out of the Appeal Court following an extradition hearing in June.

In many ways they are taking two steps forward, but reducing the sentence is setting them back.

**IN DATES: Trofimov's catalogue of crimes**

**October 17, 2007**
Alexander Trofimov is arrested in Sihanouk-ville on suspicion of sexually abusing up to 19 Cambodian girls.

**March 11, 2008**
Preah Sihanouk provincial court sentences him to 13 years in jail after convicting him of having sexual intercourse with a minor.

**October 3, 2008**
Trofimov's sentence is reduced to six years on appeal.

**November 26, 2008**
Activists decry court ruling

Written by Cameron Wells
Friday, 27 August 2010 15:02 - Last Updated Friday, 27 August 2010 15:02

Preah Sihanouk court sentences Trofimov to eight more years in a separate case involving three underage girls.

January 19, 2009
The court sentences him to an extra three years in a third case involving 17 more girls.

August 18, 2010
In a letter to the Appeal Court, Trofimov admits to a raft of child sex charges and offers apologies to his victims. His lawyers ask for a reduced sentence.

August 26, 2010
The Appeal Court slashes Trofimov’s sentence to eight years after combining his three charges. He will be eligible for parole in 2013.

RIGHTS groups have slammed yesterday’s decision by the Appeal Court to slash the sentence of convicted paedophile Alexander Trofimov, saying the decision could harm Cambodia’s international image as a country committed to fighting child sex crimes.

Trofimov – the 42-year-old former director of the US$1 billion Koh Puos development in Preah Sihanouk province – saw his 17-year sentence reduced to eight years after three separate charges were merged. Under Cambodian law, prisoners are eligible for parole after serving two-thirds of their sentence, so Trofimov could be free as early as February 2013.

Samleang Seila, director of child protection NGO Action Pour Les Enfants, said he was concerned about the precedent of the court’s decision to consolidate Trofimov’s three charges.

“This is why we are worried: Paedophiles will have their sentences reduced,” he said.

“We try to advocate for severe punishment for paedophiles. This is the biggest case ever with the consolidation of charges.”
“We don’t wish the court [to] make these decisions.”

Patchareeboon Sakulpitakphon, a Thailand-based programme officer for Combating Child Trafficking and Child Sex Crimes at ECPAT International, said Cambodia is “weakening its own image” by consolidating the charges.

“It’s weakening the message of the judicial system,” she said. “Offenders know this, and it is not enough of a deterrent. If they hurt a child they should spend [many] years in prison.”

She said the court’s decision had undermined Cambodia’s hard work cracking down on child sex offenders.

“In Cambodia there is good progress in going after paedophiles. They are arresting more than normal,” she said. “In many ways they have taken two steps forward, but reducing the sentence is setting them back.”

The sentence reduction caps an eventful history in Cambodia’s highest-profile paedophile case,
Activists decry court ruling

Written by Cameron Wells
Friday, 27 August 2010 15:02 - Last Updated Friday, 27 August 2010 15:02

one that includes allegations of bribery and fraud.

In June last year, Prum Piseth, a Justice Ministry official, was arrested for allegedly forging documents, including one that approved the extradition of Trofimov to Russia, where he is also wanted for child sex crimes. The official was sentenced to eight years in prison and fined 10 million riels ($2,380).

A concurrent civil case was held against the official, in which Trofimov's assistant sued Prum Piseth for $253,500 Trofimov allegedly paid to have the documents forged.

Ou Virak, executive director of the Cambodian Centre for Human Rights, said the decision to reduce the sentence proved that “with the right amount of money, you can buy anything” in Cambodia.

“It was expected that the court could be corrupted,” he said.

“It’s difficult to believe this decision arrived based on the law, through the proper implementation of the law.

“What message this sends is that you can probably buy freedom with the right amount of money. The message sent out is that Cambodia remains a haven for paedophiles.”

However, Thou Mony, one of the judges that handed down the verdict, defended the decision, saying that the Kingdom’s new Penal Code allowed charges to be consolidated.

“Eight years is enough because we followed the new Penal Code in merging the sentences, which means we implement the largest sentence,” he said.

“What we decided has followed the law.”

WITH ADDITIONAL REPORTING BY CHHAY CHANNYDA