

Critics decry 'cynical' paedophile apology

Written by Cameron Wells

Friday, 20 August 2010 15:03 - Last Updated Friday, 20 August 2010 15:03

OBSERVERS have questioned the contrition behind this week's confession by convicted Russian paedophile Alexander Trofimov, branding it a "cynical" attempt to consolidate his charges and reduce his sentence.

During an Appeal Court hearing on Wednesday, presiding Judge Seng Sivutha read out a letter in which the 42-year-old confessed to two of the three charges he is appealing against and called for the dismissal of the third.

"I acknowledge and confess my guilt on two of the three counts, and for the third count I would like the charges lifted against me," the letter said.

"With my confessions of guilt, I would like to make my apology to all Cambodian people and families of the victims who were sexually abused by me."

Defence lawyer Saing Vannak requested that the numerous charges against his client be absorbed into one, meaning that Trofimov would face a maximum eight years in prison if the charges in the third case were lifted.

This guy [has] left his prison cell and continued to live a normal life. His cell is like a hotel room.

He is already serving a cumulative 17 years in jail.

Under Cambodian law, a prisoner is eligible for parole after serving two-thirds of his sentence, so if Trofimov's request is granted by the court, he could be released as early as February 2013, having served less than five and a half years behind bars.

Court observers, however, said that reducing Trofimov's sentence would "reflect poorly" on the Cambodian legal system.

"I wouldn't be surprised if the court allowed it," said Ou Virak, executive director of the Cambodian Centre for Human Rights.

"If it was just one charge or one violation, they might make a reasonable request. But these are different kinds of crime."

He called Wednesday's apology "cynical", considering Trofimov's actions since his arrest in October 2007.

"This guy [has] left his prison cell and continued to live a normal life," he said. "His cell is like a

Critics decry 'cynical' paedophile apology

Written by Cameron Wells

Friday, 20 August 2010 15:03 - Last Updated Friday, 20 August 2010 15:03

hotel room.”

Ou Virak added: “He has never been remorseful, never apologised to his victims.”

Sok Sam Oeun, executive director of the Cambodian Defenders Project, said that the consolidation of charges was a possibility under the Kingdom’s new Penal Code.

“The Penal Code is just passed, and they can combine the cases,” he said.

“If one charge is put into the same case, and the law says it can be combined, then I think it is OK.”

Although the Penal Code will not come into full effect until December, the relevant provisions could be used in Trofimov’s case, he said.

But Samleang Seila, director of child protection NGO Action Pour Les Enfants, said his organisation, which provided lawyers for the victims in the hearings, would appeal if the judge allowed the court to take such a route.

“It is not fair if the court decides to reduce his jail term,” he said.

“We will appeal to the Supreme Court because it is not fair, the crimes he committed. The court is better maintaining the current sentences.”

The Appeal Court is expected to hand down a verdict in all three cases on August 26.

ADDITIONAL REPORTING BY SAM RITH