

NATIONAL

Lawyers Will Not Attend Debauchery Trial

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Nach Try, the lawyer originally assigned to defend a 73-year-old Austrian man accused of sexually abusing a 14-year-old girl, said Wednesday that he would not attend the suspect's trial on Friday, as he had not been summoned or informed of the trial date.

Ham Mengse, the judge presiding over the trial in Phnom Penh Municipal Court, said Wednesday he had summoned lawyer Uk Saroeun, instead of Nach Try, to represent Austrian national Ernst Ivankowitsch.

But Uk Saroeun on Wednesday denied he had been summoned and said he was not Ivankowitsch's lawyer. Nach Try said he did not know where Ivankowitsch was, and added that he

had not met with the suspect since he was released on bail by the Municipal Court on Nov 7.

"Even if I receive a summons now, I will still not be able to attend because I have been assigned...another case for the same day," Nach Try said.

Ivankowitsch was arrested in Phnom Penh on Nov 6, after police raided his hotel room and caught him on video putting on his underwear, in the company of a naked girl who later told police that he had sexually abused her since she was 9 years old. He was initially charged with debauchery but released on Nov 7 on court orders.

Huot Sophorn, the lawyer representing Ivankowitsch's alleged victim, said Wednesday that he did not believe Ivankowitsch would attend the trial. He added

that he would call for the trial to be suspended if Ivankowitsch is not present.

"According to the legal process, the offender needs to show up in court," Huot Sophorn said. "If he does not come, how can the judge make a decision?"

The court needs to investigate the case more thoroughly before a fair trial can be assured for Ivankowitsch, Huot Sophorn said. More witnesses need to be questioned and further evidence needs to be collected, he added.

Minister of Women's Affairs Mu Sochua said Wednesday that she would not support a trial in absentia and added that ministry representatives would be attending the trial.

"I will definitely ask questions about what conditions he was given bail on," Mu Sochua said.