

right to nominate a candidate for

talks about positions before the

ministries it now controls.

Activist Blasts Release of Suspected Pedophile

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THE CAMBODIA DAILY

A child rights organization expressed outrage on Friday after court officials released a 73-year-old Austrian man whom police discovered Thursday with a naked 13-year-old Cambodian girl in his Phnom Penh hotel room.

Ernst Ivankowitsch, 73, was videotaped during the raid by police and child rights activists. In the footage, Ivankowitsch is questioned by police as he hastily pulls on his trousers and confesses that he had a sexual relationship with the young girl.

The suspect also said that he wished to marry the diminutive 13-year-old, who was wrapped only in a bathroom towel.

Ly Rasy, bureau chief of the

municipal minor crime department, said Friday the suspect was arrested in his hotel on Kampuchea Krom Boulevard with the 13-year-old.

"We made an arrest based on the NGO report. Without the NGO, we could not make the arrest because the parents of the victim did not complain. [The parents] requested to release the suspect," Ly Rasy said.

Municipal Court officials confirmed on Friday that the suspect was released.

Prosecutor Sok Roeun said Ivankowitsch was charged with debauchery. However, the girl had volunteered to be his "girlfriend" and a letter from commune officials stated the girl was 16 years old.

"I did not detain him because

he is 73," said Investigating Judge Kim Sophorn. "The victim's family also demanded his release," said Kim Sophorn, adding the girl's parents say she is 16.

Hang Vibol, the director of Action Pour Les Enfants who mounted the investigation, alleged on Friday the suspect has had sexual relations with the girl since 1998.

"The release means our Cambodian laws do not protect the underage [children]," Hang Vibol said.

Hang Vibol said the girl's parents informed him in February that the Austrian had spent about \$10,000 on land and a house for them. The parents of the girl have declined to make a complaint because the suspect has promised to marry their daughter, he said.