

# Dutch Expatriate Cleared of Debauchery Charge

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A Dutchman who was charged with luring children into sex by wearing a furry toy hat was acquitted at Phnom Penh Municipal Court on Thursday after the presiding judge cited a lack of evidence.

Rene Paul Martin Aubel, 48, was arrested April 29 and charged with debauchery after several boys, some as young as 10, claimed to have had sex with him. At the time, police said they had confiscated more than 50 pornographic photos of young boys from Aubel's Phnom Penh hotel room.

Aubel denied taking or having any knowledge of the photos in

court on Thursday, and said that, although he was familiar with some of his accusers from encounters on the street, he had never had sexual relations with them.

The Dutchman said that he had met two of the six boys who were present in court on Thursday, but only because they were shoeshine boys who had approached him asking for food and money.

Aubel's case gained notoriety after police submitted as evidence a hat styled in the shape of a lion's head and mane, which they accused the Dutchman of wearing in the street to attract children's attention.

Despite the photographs and the boys' testimony, Presiding

Judge Kong Sarith said that there was not enough proof to support the charges.

Citing improper handling of evidence, he delivered a judgment of not guilty and released Aubel.

Officials from the NGO Action Pour Les Enfants, which assisted in the initial investigation, expressed disappointment with the verdict.

"I will complain to the Appeals Court and to the Ministry of Justice in the Netherlands," director Hang Vibol said after the trial. "The judge is not fair."

As for Aubel, the Dutchman smiled after the verdict was read and said: "I would like to say thank you to the Cambodian judge who gave me justice."