

NATIONAL

US Man, 3 Women Charged in Pedophilia Case

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A US national accused of pedophilia was charged with rape and debauchery at Phnom Penh Municipal Court Tuesday, while three women were charged with human trafficking for allegedly supplying young female victims to the suspect.

Michael Joseph Pepe, 53, is accused of having sex with an unspecified number of girls aged eight to 13 years, Deputy Prosecutor Nget Sarath said.

Two of the women charged with trafficking are mothers of Pepe's alleged victims, while a fourth woman, Pepe's cook at his Tuol Kok district home, was charged with conspiracy in trafficking.

"I charged five people in this case," Nget Sarath said. "The sus-

pect did not confess to the crime but we received much useful evidence," he said.

Chhu Che Seing, Pepe's 28-year-old girlfriend, was charged with trafficking along with mothers Kruong Lang, 48, and Ly Kim Eng, 35. Kruong Lang is accused of supplying her nine- and 10-year-old daughters to Pepe for sex, and Ly Kim Eng of providing her 13-year-old daughter. The name of the cook was not provided.

Seated across from the women at the courthouse, Pepe told a reporter that it would be a bad idea to discuss the allegations.

"I will say one thing, all these women here are innocent," he said, adding that they had only been trying to help their families.

He said he has spent \$28,000 of his own money on charitable causes

since coming to Cambodia, and collects a disability pension from the US for bipolar disorder, psychosis and injuries incurred in the military.

Chhu Che Seing told a reporter that she trained a 13-year-old girl in how to have sex with Pepe and had paid \$300 to the girl's mother, Ly Kim Eng.

Ly Kim Eng said that she, her daughter and two-year-old son went to live with Pepe after she was fired from her factory job in November.

Ly Kim Eng said she was shocked when she received a call from police telling her that her daughter had been raped. "I will file a complaint to police to find justice for my daughter," she said before being charged.

Kruong Lang said she was unaware of what had happened to her children.