



ACTION POUR LES ENFANTS

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PRESS RELEASE

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German national Lars Erik GELLNER convicted and sentenced in absentia to ten (10) years imprisonment for sexually abusing six (6) children.

This morning Lars Erik GELLNER was convicted of debauchery by the Trial Judge Sok Seun (in the presence of training Trial Judge Chhun Ngorn) at the Sihanoukville Municipal Court. He was sentenced to ten (10) years imprisonment and was ordered to pay US\$2000 in civil compensation to each of the six (6) victims and their families.

APLE commenced investigations on GELLNER in October 2005 and the six (6) victims filed formal complaints with the Sihanoukville Anti-human trafficking and juvenile protection unit on 2 December 2005.

On 14 January 2006 GELLNER was served with a letter from the Sihanoukville Prosecutor, Meas Sopheap requesting that he appear at the Sihanoukville Court on charges relating to six (6) counts of debauchery under Article 8 of the 1996 Cambodian Law on the Suppression of the Kidnapping, Trafficking and Exploitation of Human Beings. GELLNER signed this letter acknowledging its receipt but subsequently fled Cambodia on 15 January 2006. He has not since been located.

The trial resumed today at 0800hrs after the Trial Judge delayed the proceedings on 12 February 2007 owing to the appointed defence lawyer's failure to adhere to required proceedings.

Four (4) of the boy victims were in attendance at the trial and testified as to having been abused by GELLNER on a number of occasions in pairs and other times as a group. The age of the victims ranged from 12 to 19, with three of the boys 15 years or older.

APLE welcomes today's verdict as a positive step in the protection of Cambodian children from travelling sex offenders, but does view the manner in which this case was processed as problematic. The fact that the trial was conducted over a year after the summons was issued and the Sihanoukville authorities were informed of GELLNER fleeing Cambodia has demonstrated the reluctance of the Cambodian judicial system to process such cases promptly and with due care. Moreover, the six (6) counts of debauchery are questionable under Cambodian law as three (3) of the children should, as a result of their age, merely have served as witnesses to the crime.

APLE hopes that this conviction will encourage the relevant authorities to determine GELLNERS' whereabouts and prevent him from abusing further children.