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Filmmaker Charged with Hindering Anti-Prostitution Efforts

BY EANG MENGLENG AND ZSOMBOR PETER | MARCH 3, 2014

The Phnom Penh Municipal Court has charged an Australian filmmaker with hindering the work of an unnamed organization in its efforts to help prostitutes or those at risk of prostitution, and summoned him for questioning on Friday.

James Ricketson, 64, said he was not provided with an English version of the summons and would not attend the questioning unless the court explained the accusations against him and revealed who was behind them.

According to a copy of the summons, Mr. Ricketson was charged under the anti-human trafficking law with “hindering the act of prevention, assistance or re-education undertaken either by a public agency or by a competent private organization for the benefit of persons engaging in prostitution or being in danger of prostitution.”

The summons does not name the organization or agency in question, or who filed the complaint.

Investigating Judge Pu Povsun, who issued and signed the summons, declined to elaborate.

“I summoned James Ricketson for questioning,” he said. “He has been charged.”

The summons calls Mr. Ricketson to the court for questioning on March 7 and adds that if he does not show up, “we will issue a warrant to bring him.”

Mr. Ricketson said he was not supplied with an English copy of the document.

“I will not go for the scheduled questioning without knowing what it is I have

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been accused of, who has made the accusation and what documents I am expected to bring along,” he added.

Mr. Ricketson and his video camera have been a regular presence at opposition CNRP rallies and protests since July’s still disputed national election, which he is documenting for a planned film about the CNRP. But Mr. Ricketson does not believe the court case is related.

Instead, Mr. Ricketson accuses the Brisbane-based Citipointe Church of retaliating against him for his years-long efforts to help a Cambodian family retrieve two daughters from the organization’s She Rescue Home. The church’s website describes it as a safe house for girls who are either “at risk” or the victims of rape, prostitution, or trafficking.

Mr. Ricketson said he has been documenting the plight of the mother of the family since she was a young, homeless girl in the early 1990s and for the past five years been trying to help her retrieve her two daughters from the safe house.

He said church officials have repeatedly warned that they would take him to court and have him jailed or deported for his efforts and were now making good on the threat.

Chap Chanti, the mother, said she sent her two daughters, now 11 and 12, to stay at the safe house during a bout of extreme poverty. Since her finances improved in 2009, she’s been trying to get them back with Mr. Ricketson’s help.

“I don’t know if Citipointe is suing Mr. James, but they are angry with him for trying to return my daughters home,” she said.

Citipointe officials did not reply to a request for comment.

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