



AFESIP INTERNATIONAL

*Acting For Women in Distressing Circumstances
Agir Pour Les Femmes En Situation Précaire*

AFESIP Press Release

Answer to Statement released by the Ministry of Interior on 12 December 2004

In answer to the release of a “Statement of The Spokesman of the Ministry of Interior” (hereafter the Statement), AFESIP would like to make the following points:

Validity of Statement

The English version of the Statement has no identification number and no named signature at the bottom. This brings the validity of the document into question and further highlights the high probability that no person wants to be held accountable to the facts and details inherent in this document. This lack of accountability after the event supports contradictions between documental evidence of authorizations given to undertake the raid and the release of 8 suspects without explicit authorization from any one person.

Abduction

Paragraph 2 of the Statement describes wrong interpretations of accounts given by two AFESIP Staff, namely Ms Seoung Kamaryan and Mr Phy Sophon and subsequently states that there was “*no abduction of those women*”.

AFESIP strongly questions this pre-judgement, made without proper investigation of the facts and the serious bias in the interpretation of those facts gathered. The girls and women brought to the Shelter were under police investigation and were in process of being interviewed and questioned following alleged criminal activity at the Chai Hour II Hotel. AFESIP staff explicitly informed all the women and girls that if they wanted to leave following the questioning, they would be free to do so. Some family and relatives that gathered around the centre on the morning of 8 December 04 were allowed access to the shelter and were also present inside the shelter at the time of the break in. Whereas it is true and has not been denied that some of the women wanted to leave the shelter, some of them surely did not want to leave the shelter and up to half of them seemed under the age of 18 years of age. Notwithstanding all of these facts, AFESIP would like to state once again that these women and girls were still under going police interviewing in connection to the alleged large scale brothel operation at Chai Hour II Hotel. Therefore all women and children residing at the Shelter from the raid were still technically under police investigation and were forceably removed from this official law enforcement process.

Whereas it cannot be verified whether any of the men and women were carrying arms, eye witnesses claim that some of the attackers were wearing military and bodyguard uniforms. Furthermore, the man leading the attackers was positively identified as “Long”, who arrived at the shelter the night before and then subsequently arrested, detained and released by the police. He had been previously identified in preliminary investigations as one of the owners of the business at Chai Hour II Hotel. Eye witnesses clearly state that no person from inside the shelter helped in breaking down the gates, and it was wholly a force of 25 to 30 men and women from the outside. Once the gates had opened the girls and women were ordered to move out. There is no doubt that many of them had wanted to leave, however, there is also no doubt that some of them did not want to leave, were underage and were afraid to return to the Hotel. Thus, according to these facts, **AFESIP accuses those attackers as having abducted children for sexual exploitation.**

“Peaceful Protest”

Paragraph 3 of the Statement describes a *peaceful protest by the workers of the hotel*. The legality of the protest is questioned as well as the reason why it was allowed to occur. AFESIP highlights this to exhibit yet another “waivering” of procedures without proper and official reason.

AFESIP INTERNATIONAL

#23, Street 315, Tuol kork, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Tel /Fax: +855 (0)23 884 123

Mobile: +855 (0)12 915 916

<http://www.afesip.org>

pierre.legros@afesip.org

afesipmekongcord@online.com.kh

1/3

The Statement describes the protest by “workers and staff” of the Chai Hour II Hotel. AFESIP would like to highlight that these people *claimed* to be workers of the hotel that were brought to the AFESIP Shelter. Considering that the Chai Hour II Hotel is alleged to have been offering sexual services from up to 200 women and children aged 15 and above and considering that such a large scale alleged operation of prostitution is surely the work of organized criminals; AFESIP questions the truthfulness of their claim to be those women. In addition, AFESIP recognizes these actions as manipulation of these women by these organized criminals.

These questions are raised from the fact that preliminary investigations by the Dept of Anti-Human Trafficking and Juvenile Protection, as well as AFESIP, before, during and after the raid on the Chai Hour II Hotel, made an explicit finding of up 200 girls and women from the age of 15 years and over being offered for sexual services. Nothing is mentioned regarding this fact in the Statement.

Furthermore, as mentioned above and also in the official AFESIP Press Statement, any complaints, if genuine, should be made against the Cambodian Authorities who conducted independent investigations into the alleged criminal activities and thereafter conducted a raid on the said premises and were in the process of investigating the case.

For Court of Law to Decide

The Statement makes a judgement, namely that there was “no abduction”, which is surely a question for a court of law to decide. Further, the question of whether there were illegal activities of large scale prostitution occurring at the Chai Hour II Hotel is also a question for a court of law to decide, based on all evidence collected. The Statement, as a whole, shows bias and judgement on all these issues highlighting a clear one-sided manipulation of facts.

No mention of the 8 suspects released for no official reason is made. Neither is there any reference to the findings, made from the interviews of 10 girls and women after the raid occurred and before the 8 suspects were released, that these 10 individuals were in fact being prostituted and that the Chai Hour II Hotel was in fact pimping, procuring and trafficking with the presence of Vietnamese.

No mention of the breaking of the gates and the illegal trespassing of the attackers on to AFESIP property as a criminal offence is mentioned and neither any statement saying that such action would be investigated and prosecuted.

No other witnesses of the crime scene of the break in were interviewed, one of which has made a statement to AFESIP that he recognized two of the attackers as bodyguards of the Chai Hour II Hotel.

No mention is made as to the other women and girls that were residing at the Shelter before the raid as well as those girls identified as under 18 years of age. Allegations and findings of commercial sexual exploitation of children on the premises of Chai Hour II Hotel are not mentioned at all.

Following investigations undertaken by the Department of Anti-Human Trafficking and Juvenile protection, AFESIP asserts that any denials of prostitution activities by those connected to Chai Hour II Hotel are false. Such false statements made should render any further allegations and claims regarding this affair also unreliable and untrustworthy.

Independent Enquiry Committee

Whereas we welcome the alleged decision to establish an Inter-Ministerial Committee, including representatives of Foreign Missions and the Civil Society, to search for the truth, we feel that the content of the Statement is biased and will have an undeniable prejudicial influence on the views of officials involved in the investigation. In furtherance of the search for the truth we ask for the release of all related official documents to the case, including the findings made of the initial 10 girls and women interviewed at the Dept of Anti-Human Trafficking and Juvenile Protection of the Ministry of Interior on 7 December 04. AFESIP believes that these girls and women gave testimonies describing pimping and procuring of sexual service on them.

Conclusion

All of the above comments highlight the inconsistency between investigations undertaken by the Department of Anti-Human Trafficking and Juvenile Protection and the sudden turnaround by the Ministry of Interior. Such

inconsistencies are apparent from documentary evidence and highlight a sudden change in interests and the attempt to halt a process of investigation into criminal activities. This is further layered upon by a glaring unwillingness to stand accountable to this sudden shift in attitude and the positive dismissal of official procedures and legal process.

AFESIP maintains its appeal to find the underage girls that were brought to the Shelter as well as the residents that were housed at the shelter before this raid and have nothing to do with this case. Furthermore, AFESIP asks for the reasons as to the release of those 8 suspects, one of which was positively identified as leading the group of attackers in breaking into the Shelter. **AFESIP firmly accuses these attackers of kidnapping children for sexual exploitation.**

AFESIP
16:50
13 December 2004