

Child porn operation raided in Philippine school (Update)

February 18 2014, by Teresa Cerojano



Suspects in an alleged Internet porn operation take cover using sheets as they stay inside the Cybercrime Division of the National Bureau of Investigation in Manila, Philippines on Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2014. Government agents raided an Internet child porn operation based in a Philippine school and arrested its president and eight other people, investigators said Tuesday. (AP Photo/Aaron Favila)

Government agents raided an Internet child porn operation based in a Philippine school and arrested its president and eight other people,

investigators said Tuesday.

The suspects used a room at the Mountaintop Christian Academy to post online images and video of children and adults for foreign consumption, said Ronald Aguto, cybercrime investigation head in the National Bureau of Investigation.

Authorities were still investigating, but Aguto said it didn't appear that children at the school were being abused and that the operators were uploading pre-recorded images and video stored.

The school had 2,000 elementary and high school students, Aguto added. Its license was revoked in 2006 for unknown reasons but it had remained open.

Puring Martinez, the arrested president and owner of the private school, told GMA television network she rented out the room to the Internet site operators to augment the income of the school because fees paid by students were not enough to cover costs.

She said she was aware that the Internet links sold can only be opened by a foreigner who will use his card and that the links lead to "naughty" materials.

Martinez' son, Tom, said the school had only 260 preschool, elementary and high school pupils, and that their permit to operate was valid. It was not clear why there was a discrepancy with the NBI information.



Suspects in an alleged Internet porn operation cover their faces as they stay at the Cybercrime Division of the National Bureau of Investigation in Manila, Philippines on Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2014. Philippine government agents have raided an alleged Internet child porn operation based in a school and arrested its president and eight other people, National Bureau of Investigation officials said. (AP Photo/Aaron Favila)

He said the Internet operation was owned by an American from Tennessee, who rented two rooms for 40,000 pesos (\$900) in a bungalow separate from the classrooms but within the school compound. All of the suspects arrested are Filipino, and the American's whereabouts were not clear.

The raid shows the extent of the task facing Philippine authorities in cracking down on child pornographers, who exploit weak law enforcement and increasing broadband Internet penetration to base operations in the country.

Gilbert Sosa, director of the national police's Anti-Cybercrime Group said last month the Philippines was one of the top 10 sources of child pornography in the world, and that police have been cooperating with other countries to crack down on it.

Two other Internet porn operations in Quezon city were raided Monday night. At least 22 people were arrested in those two raids and more than two dozen computers seized.

Aguto said they have yet to conduct a forensic investigation on the seized computers, but based on what they have gathered so far, the suspects will be charged with violating laws against child pornography and obscene publication of adult pornographic images.

More than 40 computers were seized as evidence during the raid late Monday at the school in Metropolitan Manila's Muntinlupa city.

"It was like a computer lab inside the school," Aguto said in a telephone interview. "Even during daytime, when the pupils were there, they were using it for this kind of offense."

He said the site operators worked day and night, chatting online with clients and pretending to be women or girls depending on what the client wanted. They would then upload pictures and pre-recorded video of a nude girl or woman they claim to be.

Last month, Britain's National Crime Agency said child abuse investigators in Britain, the U.S. and Australia had dismantled an organized crime group that streamed footage of child sexual abuse. The ring abused impoverished children as young as 6, the agency said. Authorities made 29 arrests, including 11 people in the Philippines who had facilitated the crime. Some were members of the children's families.

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