

Philippines makes arrests in online extortion ring

August 22 2014, by Teresa Cerojano

Philippine police have arrested eight suspected members of an online syndicate accused of blackmailing more than 1,000 Hong Kong and Singapore residents after luring them into exposing themselves in front of webcam, an official said Friday.

The raid on the syndicate's locations in northern Bulacan province on Thursday was a follow-up to an operation backed by Interpol in April in which 58 Filipinos were arrested, and another 100 linked to the extortion in a subsequent investigation in May. The victims came from all over the world, including a Scottish teenager who committed suicide after being blackmailed.

Five Filipino teenagers employed as "chatters" who befriended victims through social media sites including Facebook were turned over to social workers, said the head of the police anti-cybercrime group, Gilbert Sosa.

Victims would be lured into cybersex on Skype, recorded and a video link sent to their Facebook accounts unless they paid at least \$3,000, he said.

The gang has victimized around 700 Hong Kong residents and nearly the same number of Singaporeans in a span of two years, he added. The latest police operation was conducted in cooperation with Interpol based in Hong Kong and Singapore.

Among those arrested was a suspected ring leader. Investigators found

out that the woman's daughter owns two money transfer branches in Bulacan where the victims were asked to deposit their payment, Sosa said. The suspects are facing charges of robbery with extortion and violation of the anti-human trafficking law.

The crackdown in the Philippines was partly sparked by information that a 17-year-old mechanic in Scotland, Daniel Perry, took his own life in July last year after being victimized by a Filipino extortion group. The BBC has reported that he killed himself after being warned that his video conversations would be circulated to his friends and family if he didn't pay.

Three of the 58 Filipino suspects arrested in April were believed to have victimized Perry, who jumped off a bridge after being blackmailed, [police](#) said.

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