Virtual child porn may be a crime in Netherlands

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AMSTERDAM (Reuters) - Virtual enactments of child pornography may be a crime under Dutch law if it encourages child abuse, the public prosecutor said on Wednesday.

In the virtual world of Second Life, a popular Internet destination, everyone aged under 18 is supposed to be limited to a "teen grid."

However, it would be relatively easy for children to get on to the adult grid if they wished since there is no proof of age required.

In the adult section, some users participate in "age play," in which adult users can create child-like characters and have virtual sex that would be illegal in the real world.

"There are possibilities to prosecute because it possibly incites child abuse," the spokesman for public prosecutor Kitty Nooij, who is in charge of national vice cases, said.

With the increasing popularity of virtual worlds, there are fears people may turn to them to carry out activities considered illegal in the real world.

There is no Dutch case law about virtual child pornography in writing, drawings or computer animation.

In the United States, where Second Life creator Linden Lab is based, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a law in 2002 which would ban computer-generated images that depict minors engaged in sexual conduct.

Citizens who commit Internet crimes can be prosecuted in the country where they commit the offence under local laws.

Second Life, where Reuters opened a bureau last year, has several hundred thousand regular users although only a maximum of about 30,000 are logged in at any given time.

A majority of Second Life residents are from Europe, with about 35 percent from the
A majority of Second Life residents are from Europe, with about 60 percent from the United States.

(To read more about Second Life, visit the Reuters Second Life News Center at http://secondlife.reuters.com)

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