



Kartini Asia Network E Bulletin

Dear Kartini fellows,

The monsoon has arrived in the Southern hemisphere bringing torrential rain to our days; a month after Kartini Asia and SEPHIS (The South-south Exchange Programme for Research on the History of Development) finished an International Policy Dialogue on Sexuality.

Held in Yogyakarta, the meeting has brought 47 sexuality researchers and activists on sexual rights together to bridge the gap between research and advocacy in the field. In this edition of Kartini's Newsletter, we can find the lessons learnt from the meeting.

The wet weather also did not discourage people to celebrate our plural sexualities. Organizers of Q-munity opened their 9th Q! Film festival, the biggest gay-themed film festival in Southeast Asia and the only one in a Muslim-majority country Indonesia, on Sept.24. The festival aims to create people's awareness on LGBT issues and to bring alternative films to audience. We can read about the festival's kick off in the

regional updates section.

In the global updates, we have reports from Nepal and India. A study in the United States shows an interesting development on the definition of family, as a majority of Americans now includes couples with children, as well as married gay and lesbian couples in their definition of family. While, Americans are becoming more open to gender roles and sexual orientation in a family, part of their community still faces discrimination as the policy "don't ask, don't tell" in the military bans gay men and women from serving openly in the armed forces.



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Kartini Asia Network E Bulletin



2008

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U.S.**Study Finds Wider View of 'Family'**

By Sam Roberts

The New York Times, Published: September 15, 2010

A majority of Americans now say their definition of family includes same-sex couples with children, as well as married gay and lesbian couples.

At the same time, most Americans do not consider unmarried cohabiting couples, either heterosexual or same-sex, to be a family — unless they have children.

The findings — part of a survey conducted this year as well as in 2003 and 2006 by Brian Powell, a sociology professor at Indiana University, Bloomington — are reported in a new book, "Counted Out: Same-Sex Relations and Americans' Definitions of Family," to be published on Wednesday by the Russell Sage Foundation. Since the surveys began, the proportion of people who reported having a gay friend or relative rose 10 percentage points, said Professor Powell, the book's lead author.

"This is not because more people are gay now than in 2003," he said. "This indicates a more open social environment in which individuals now feel more comfortable discussing and acknowledging sexuality. Ironically with all the antigay initiatives, all of a sudden people were saying the word 'gay' out loud. Just the discussion about it made people more comfortable."

The book concludes that framing the equality of same-sex couples in terms of "the best interests of the child" might prove to be a more successful political argument than others.

"Neither the numbers from our data nor actual votes on initiatives are anywhere near the sufficient magnitude to support the idea that the public is ready to embrace same sex-couples with open arms," the authors say. But, likening the resistance to laws and mores against interracial marriage, "we envisage a day in the near future when same-sex families also will gain acceptance by a large plurality of the public."

The latest telephone survey of 830 people conducted this year found that Americans were almost equally divided on same-sex marriage. "I don't think people are ready to embrace it, but people are ready to accept it," Professor Powell said of same-sex marriage.

The survey also found a growing acceptance that genetics, rather than parenting, peers or God's will, was responsible for sexual orientation.

Since 2003, the survey found a decline of 11 percentage points in the number of people who generally define family as a husband and wife with or without children.

Prof. Stephanie Coontz of Evergreen State College in Washington, director of research and public education at the Council on Contemporary Families, a research and advocacy group, said that "Americans seem to be open to seeing same-sex couples with children as families, even while they hesitate to recognize their unions as marriage."

David Blankenhorn, president of the Institute for American Values, a marriage research and advocacy group, said he was not surprised by the findings. "I like the standard definition of family: two or more persons related by blood, marriage or adoption," Mr. Blankenhorn said. "Keeps it simple and coherent."

But, he added: "We live in groups, and we need each other. So it's always a good thing, isn't it, when any of us truly loves and is loved by another."

A version of this article appeared in print on September 15, 2010, on page A14 of the New York edition.

Bid to end policy on gays in military fails in Senate

By Ed O'Keefe and Shailagh Murray

The Washington Post, Published: September 22, 2010

Senate Republicans dealt a severe and potentially fatal blow Tuesday to efforts this year to repeal the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy, which bans gay men and women from serving openly in the armed forces.

Democrats were unable to sway a single Republican to begin debate on a defense authorization bill that included the repeal.

The failure to repeal the law, despite White House backing and majorities in Congress, marked a low point in the more than decade-long effort to rid a policy begun under President Bill Clinton. Democrats thought this was their best chance to undo the 17-year-old measure after President Obama had won the support of Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates and other military leaders to get rid of it.

But Republicans objected that Majority Leader Harry M. Reid (D-Nev.) had attached several politically motivated proposals to the measure.

Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), who led the charge against repeal, called Reid's plan a "blatant and cynical" political ploy aimed at galvanizing Democratic voters for the midterm elections.

The high-profile failure left some advocates of repeal feeling burned and blaming the

White House and congressional Democrats for not acting sooner.

"The Democrats have been against 'don't ask, don't tell' for more than a decade and why we allowed this law to remain in effect for another two years is beyond me," said Richard Soccarides, who served as an adviser to Clinton on gay rights. "The Washington-based gay rights groups made a decision early on that they were better off going along with the president's timeline and that right now that looks like a serious miscalculation."

White House officials and Senate Democratic leaders said they hoped to revive the issue after the November elections, when they attempt once again the defense authorization bill.

White House press secretary Robert Gibbs told reporters that he did not think this was the "decisive moment" for the law's repeal and that the administration would "keep trying."

But the bill's fate after the election is murky, given the uncertainty of the outcome at the polls. If Republicans make major gains, it could be difficult for Democrats to push a contentious issue during an end-of-the-term lame-duck session.

A senior Republican Senate aide also said that although some GOP lawmakers don't necessarily oppose repeal, they don't want to act before a Pentagon review of the policy change has been completed. That deadline is Dec. 1, leaving little time before the end of the year to revive the issue.

Repeal advocates have pushed since the ban was put into effect in 1993, saying it unfairly discriminates against gays, who have to hide their sexual identity while serving in uniform, and keeps thousands of potential recruits from enlisting.

But opponents say lifting the ban goes against the wishes of many military leaders and would introduce radical social change to the force at a time when it is focused on fighting two major wars. Critics are especially concerned with potential distractions for troops serving on the front lines in Afghanistan and Iraq if heterosexual troops would have to live and bathe in close quarters with gays.

"The issue isn't about individuals or liking gay people," said Elaine Donnelly, president of the Center for Military Readiness, a group opposed to repeal. "The issue is about what's best for the armed forces."

Reid announced last week that he would allow three amendments to the defense bill. One would allow Republicans to take a vote on striking "don't ask" from it. The second would end a senator's right to place anonymous holds on executive branch nominees, a measure with broad bipartisan support. And the third would grant legal status to young immigrants who attend college or join the military - a

measure that could help Reid court Hispanic voters in his tough reelection back home in Nevada.

"This is just transparent, brazen, let's check special interests bloc politics, 40-something days before an election," said Sen. Lindsey O. Graham (S.C.), summing up the feeling of many Republicans.

The bill's fate was sealed Tuesday when Sen. Susan Collins (Maine), the one Republican who had supported repeal in the Armed Services Committee, announced she was opposed because Reid had decided to restrict amendments to the massive underlying bill.

"For the life of me, I do not understand why the majority leader does not bring this bill to the floor and allow free and open debate and amendments from both sides of the aisle," Collins said before the vote. Vice President Biden called the moderate Republican senator in a last-ditch effort to convert her, but Collins refused to reconsider.

Gay rights advocates vowed to keep pressure on the Senate, although some said they were skeptical of victory before the Pentagon concludes its study.

"This issue doesn't go away," said Aubrey Sarvis, executive director of the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network, a group providing legal assistance to troops affected by "don't ask." "The Senate absolutely must schedule a vote in December when cooler heads and common sense are more likely to prevail once midterm elections are behind us."

A coalition of gay rights organizations, led by Sarvis's group and the Human Rights Campaign, launched a national lobbying campaign shortly after Obama reiterated his support for repealing "don't ask" during his State of the Union address in February.

The groups spent millions of dollars targeting moderate Democrats and Republicans with advertising, and rallies in their home states. They held a final rally starring pop star Lady Gaga on Monday in Maine to try to woo Collins and her Republican colleague, Olympia J. Snowe.

Some repeal advocates said privately that the Lady Gaga event might have backfired. Collins dismissed it Tuesday: "I look to [Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman] Admiral Mike Mullen for my advice."

The Pentagon declined to comment on Tuesday's vote. "This was an internal procedural matter for the Senate," spokesman Geoff Morrell said. But the president's choice to lead the Marine Corps, Gen. James Amos, told the Senate Armed Services Committee on Tuesday that he doesn't think lawmakers should lift the "don't ask." Morale could suffer, and a change in personnel policy could affect operations in Afghanistan, Amos said, echoing sentiments expressed this year by

Gen. James T. Conway, the Marine Corps commandant.

Several conservative groups heralded Tuesday's outcome. Penny Nance, head of Concerned Women for America, said Senate Democrats attempted to "covertly hijack good legislation" with nonmilitary issues, including provisions that would allow for abortions at military bases.

Staff writers Scott Wilson and Greg Jaffe contributed to this report.

CUBA Men's Group Champions "Diverse Masculinities"

By Dalia Acosta

IPS, Havana, Published: September 22, 2010

Men representing an array of sexual identifications have organized in Cuba to defend sexual rights and promote respect for "other masculinities," with the belief that greater visibility is needed to achieve true social change and acceptance.

Hombres por la Diversidad (HxD, Men for Diversity), a group "for the right to free sexual identity," promotes social transformation and "works along the lines of education and advocacy for sexual and reproductive rights," coordinator Alberto Roque told IPS.

HxD stands out in this socialist-run Caribbean nation for spreading the human rights focus to other associations and groups dealing with related issues.

The group tries to maintain a balance between the institutional world and autonomy, which can be a challenge for citizen initiatives in Cuba.

Although it has offices at the government's National Centre for Sex Education (CENESEX), making the most of "organisational support and space provided by the institution," HxD maintains its own objectives, said Roque.

The immediate goals, he went on, are to consolidate as an organisation, become a presence on Internet-based social networks, participate in the annual events of International Day Against Homophobia (May 17), and organise a national symposium on sexual rights, which would involve individuals and groups with similar aims.

Additional efforts, he said, include building HxD as an opinion leader, create an observatory for homophobia in Cuba, and serve as a clearinghouse of information for the communications media.

But the greatest focus will be on human rights because Cuban society needs "to get rid of a little prejudice" in this matter, said Roque, who is also a critical care physician.

"When people hear 'human rights' they think of things that are extremely political.

For some people, it can even be a negative term," he said.

This prejudice arises from problems associated with denunciations against the Cuban government for the lack of spaces for political opposition, freedom of association and of expression.

Official sources, meanwhile, link the restrictions on civil rights to the more than 50-year conflict with the United States.

In this context, HxD is not the first group of its kind to emerge "sponsored" by CENESEX. Courses for transvestite, transgender and transsexual people, which in the last decade have drawn more than 500 individuals, include topics like personal and group empowerment.

As a result, with the aim of reclaiming and maintaining their masculine identity, the proposal came in July to create a social network of transgender and MSM ("men who have sex with men," a behaviour-based term used in medical and social research).

CENESEX is also involved with three groups made up of lesbian and bisexual women: Oremi in Havana, Fénix in the central city of Cienfuegos, and Las Isabellas in Santiago, in eastern Cuba.

Oremi opens its doors to anyone who shares a "solidary, respectful, friendly and healthy" attitude towards the reality of the lesbian community.

Meanwhile, with 10 years of experience, the MSM Project of the government's National Centre for the Prevention of Sexually Transmitted Disease focuses on preventing the spread of HIV. In Cuba, eight out of 10 people carrying the virus develop AIDS.

With representation in all of Cuba's provinces and more than 1,500 volunteers, MSM-Cuba works to raise awareness about the different models of non-heterosexual masculinity and improve the situation of homosexual and bisexual men, who often face stigmatisation and marginalisation.

"In previous groups, the focus on human rights hasn't existed," said Roque, who is also president of the sexual diversity unit of the Cuban Multidisciplinary Society for the Study of Sexuality.

The dozen founding members of HxD represent a wide range of "masculinities." Journalist and gay activist Francisco Rodríguez stressed to IPS: "It's inclusive, it does not exclude heterosexual men."

The creation of Hombres por la Diversidad represents for Rodríguez "one more step" in the growing struggle for acceptance of homosexuality that he began with his blog "Paquito from Cuba" a year ago.

"I believe greater visibility is needed in our country for those who are of sexual orientations different from the dominant heterosexuality," he said.

HxD is "the natural result" of the first training session in "Sexual Diversity and Human Rights," led by CENESEX in August, said Rodríguez, who is also a professor at the University of Havana.

The course, facilitated by Roque, borrowed a participative methodology from the Canadian non-governmental organisation Equitas and contextualised it for the Cuban reality.

Most of the participants, who had strong leadership qualities from the beginning, decided when the workshops were done to form their own group, which became official this month.

Theologian Yoimel González Hernández, who studies gender and religion and is an HxD member, underscored the relevance of the mere act "of establishing a space for reflection" on these indispensable citizen debates.

Rodríguez wanted the initiative to turn into a "multitude" -- one that is "organised, modest, patriotic, anti-capitalist, pacifist, environmentalist, cross-cutting and respected."

But he also proposed taking on other essential focuses, like gender and race, "debates that have yet to be opened up as they should be" in Cuba.

The transformation of society that Men for Diversity seek requires changes in the way those silenced realities are understood.

"In Cuba, there does not yet exist a political discourse about sexuality at the macro social level, within those groups," said Roque: "We cannot demand, nor can there be social change if we don't think from the perspective of policies and politics." (END)

NEPAL

UN urges Nepal to respect verdict on discrimination against sexual minorities
UN News Service, Published: 16 September 2010

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Nepal today urged the country's Government to expedite the implementation of a Supreme Court ruling issued three years ago that upholds equal rights in the granting of citizenship and identity documents to members of sexual minorities.

OHCHR-Nepal voiced concern over what it described as structured forms of discrimination and stigmatization faced by self-described members of the third gender, and lack of respect for their human rights by the State.

The Office pointed out that under key instruments and decisions of the UN human rights mechanisms, lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgender (LGBTI) and other sexual minorities have the right to non-discrimination and equality.

"In fact, Nepal is to be commended as the only South Asian country to extend equal rights to the LGBTI members via a historic Supreme Court ruling," said Jyoti Sanghera, acting head of OHCHR-Nepal.

"My Office has deployed a team of human rights monitors for the first and second day of the protests by members of sexual minority in Kathmandu. Our monitors have reported that the protests are peaceful and the police have acted responsibly," Mr. Sanghera said. "I call on the Government entities to respect the rule of law by implementing the court order as soon as possible," he added.

INDIA

Indian women subjected to "degrading" rape tests - HRW

By Nita Bhalla
Reuters, New Delhi, Published: September, 6, 2010

Rape victims in India who undergo forensic examinations are being subjected to a "degrading" finger test which is archaic and unscientific, according to a report by Human Rights Watch on Monday.

The test -- which involves a doctor inserting fingers into a rape victim's vagina to determine if she is sexually active -- is seen as outdated medical jurisprudence in many countries where it has been banned, said the New York-based group.

Yet in patriarchal India, the test continues and is not only traumatising, said activists, but the results are used by defence lawyers to reinforce false stereotypes of rape victims being promiscuous which can be detrimental to a victim's case.

"This test is yet another assault on a rape survivor, placing her at risk of further humiliation," said Aruna Kashyap, HRW's women's rights researcher.

"The Indian government should heed demands of Indian activists to abolish this degrading and useless practice."

Officials from the health ministry were not immediately available to comment and police in Delhi said they were not in a position to react to the report because they had not seen it.

The number of registered rape cases in India has increased almost ten-fold to 21,467 in 2008 from 2,487 in 1971, according to the National Crime Records Bureau.

But despite growing awareness, the actual number of rapes in the country is much higher, with most women fearing to report the crime due to many factors, including the "shame" it will bring on their family in often traditional and conservative communities.

The conviction rate also remains low at about 27 percent in 2008, the latest year for which figures are available.

UNNECESSARY TESTS

The report -- based on interviews with forensic experts, rape victims, lawyers and activists in New Delhi and Mumbai -- found that doctors in both cities are expected by authorities to conduct finger tests during examination.

The doctors are required to provide details about the hymen, including whether it is intact or torn, the size of the vagina and the number of fingers that can be admitted.

Activists say this information is unnecessary as it further humiliates a rape victim and provides no useful data.

Rather, the test -- which is banned in countries like Britain, the United States and Canada -- is yet another hurdle rape victims in India face if they want to get justice.

Many are often afraid to speak out due to being ostracised by their communities, while others lack trust in police.

Sometimes victims have been further molested by policemen or complaint rejected because the accused is influential.

"The government must introduce standard guidelines on how forensic examinations should be conducted based on respecting the rape survivor's rights," said HRW's Kashyap.

(Editing by Kritivas Mukherjee)

REGIONAL UPDATES

MALAYSIA

Malaysia's gay community begins to push the limits

By Beh Lih Yi
AFP, Kuala Lumpur, Published: September 1, 2010

When Malaysia's only openly homosexual pastor announced he was establishing the nation's first gay church, the proposal was met with a torrent of outrage and criticism.

Reverend Ouyang Wen Feng faced down threats to block the plan by government and religious leaders who said it would encourage homosexuality -- still a crime punishable by 20 years in jail in the Muslim-majority nation.

The church he co-founded has however been operating quietly in suburban Kuala Lumpur for the past three years, drawing a group of gay Christians for Sunday services and bible studies.

Ouyang's battle is part of a campaign being fought on many fronts in Malaysia, where there is a growing sense of activism among the gay community which is beginning to mobilise to fight for its rights.

"We are working on encouraging more people to join the church, for Christians to come out and live authentic lives," says the pastor, who was married for nine years until he "came out" publicly in 2006.

"Whether one is gay or straight or bisexual, they are sexual orientations, it is not something we do that makes us gay."

Ouyang says the church, which also embraces bisexuals and transsexuals as well as welcoming heterosexuals to its services, wants to help the community know they are not "alone in fighting the battle".

"When I was young, how I wished someone who was good, highly admired and respected in the society could come out and tell me 'I am gay too,'" says the 40-year-old.

Homosexuality remains a social taboo across the racial and religious spectrum in Malaysia, a conservative country which is also home to large ethnic Chinese and Indian communities.

Gay men and women are a visible presence out in public, and on the Internet where they are connected through online forums.

However, authorities periodically crack down on the thriving gay scene, carrying out raids at gay-friendly bars or massage parlours, leaving some with a constant fear of persecution.

Few feel they can declare their sexuality openly, and there was a dearth of groups representing the community until 2008, when the first "Seksualiti Merdeka" or "Sexual Independence" festival was held.

Organiser Pang Khee Teik, an art gallery owner, said he was inspired by rising activism in the region.

India and Nepal have de-criminalised homosexuality in recent years, in Thailand the annual Gay Pride festival is being revived, and even in conservative Indonesia there is an annual gay film festival.

"We thought the time was right to replicate something similar in Malaysia," Pang says. "We are trying to tell people: you have sexual rights whether the state recognises it or not."

"The long-term goal could be the repeal of laws against sodomy and oral sex for instance," says Pang, adding that anti-discrimination laws are also needed.

The annual festival, which includes talks, music performances and film screenings, has seen the number of participants dou-

ble from 400 in 2008 to about 800 last year.

It will be held for the third time later this year and has managed to avoid any action from protesters or the authorities, partly due to efforts to keep it low-key.

But religious figures who have an influential role in Malaysian society remain vehemently opposed to the new mood. A top religious body in 2008 also issued a "fatwa" or Islamic religious ban on lesbian sex.

"Homosexuality is going to destroy the world as we are not thankful to God's creation and we are going against His wishes," says outspoken Islamic cleric Harussani Zakaria.

"Homosexuality is a very bad thing. God has created men and women, how can it be man with man, and woman with woman?"

The gay community takes heart from small steps, including a recent Malaysian Film Censorship Board decision to reverse a ban on the depiction of homosexuality and allow gay characters to be featured in films.

But in an indication of the distance campaigners still have to go, the new guidelines also stipulate that gay characters must repent or go straight before the credits roll.

"They recognise that we do exist and that is a something positive, at least," says Azri, who has a boyfriend of five years, as he sips coffee at one of Kuala Lumpur's upmarket shopping malls.

"My ideal world is to be recognised as a couple and enjoy the rights just like any other heterosexual couples," says the boyish-looking 28-year-old.

"We can't rush, we are slowly building the momentum."

INDONESIA

Paving the way for sexual rights

By: Prodipta Sabarini

The Jakarta Post, Jakarta, Published: August, 25, 2010

In a Semarang court in Central Java, a prosecutor groped a transgender woman charged with running away as well as having sex with a teenage girl, and said: "You have breasts, you're a woman".

Before the trial, the teenage girl's family had beaten the transgender woman.

The court sentenced her to five years in prison. Soka Handinah Katjasungkana from the Indonesian Women's Association for Justice (LBH APIK) Semarang, who advised her in her last trial, said that despite the transgender woman's obvious violation of the children's protection law,

she had been discriminated against because of her sexual orientation.

In the country's rural areas, parents continue to encourage their teenage daughters to marry young. But, because the charged person had defied cultural and religious norms by having same-sex relations, she was reported to the police by the girl's parents. "Compare that to teenage girls being wed off to middle-aged men as their second or third wives," Handinah said.

In Indonesia, where heterosexual relationships are considered the norm, discrimination and violence against people with different sexual orientations and gender identities is widespread.

However, a movement to bring equal rights irrespective of sexual orientation and gender identity by researchers and activists in Asia is gaining ground.

Handinah presented the convicted transgender's case study at an International Policy Dialogue on sexuality last week in Yogyakarta. The three-day workshop, held at Gadjah Mada University's Center for Population and Policy Studies (CPPS), and attended by 45 researchers and activists from India, Brazil, Bangladesh, the Netherlands, Syria, Egypt, and the Philippines, discussed issues under the theme "Bridging the gap between sexuality research and advocacy for sexual rights".

Organized by an Asian research network for women/gender studies, Kartini Asia, and the Amsterdam-based SEPHIS (The South-South exchange program for research on the history of development), it was the first international meeting to discuss sexuality, including the rights of Lesbian, Gay, Transgender and Bisexual (LGBT) individuals, after the failed International Gay and Lesbian Association conference held in March in Surabaya that was stopped by hard-line religious groups.

Open discussion: Activist Hartoyo speaks to participants at an International Policy Dialogue on Gender and Sexuality in Yogyakarta. JP/Prodipta Sabarini Open discussion: Activist Hartoyo speaks to participants at an International Policy Dialogue on Gender and Sexuality in Yogyakarta. JP/Prodipta Sabarini

In the opening speech, Muhadjir Darwin, the head of CPPS, set the tone for the rest of the conference: "[Human] sexuality is not a dichotomy, either black or white, male or female. It's created. God created diversity. It is against humanity, against human rights, and against god's will to discriminate against people on the basis of their sexual orientation and gender identity," he said.

Muhadjir's statement was still a far cry from the mainstream view in Indonesian society, Asia and around the world. According to a 2010 ILGA study, it is a crime to be gay in 76 countries.

Last year, Indonesia's westernmost province Aceh released a bylaw criminalizing homosexuality and stipulating adulterers should be stoned to death. The controversial pornography law also criminalizes homosexuality.

But while intimidation and discrimination against LGBT still exists in Indonesia, it is also the place where the first international principles on the application of International Human Rights Law in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity, the Yogyakarta principles, were signed.

Outlined in Yogyakarta, the principles were drawn up at a meeting between the International Commission of Jurists and human rights experts from around the world at Gadjah Mada University in November 2006. The first principle states: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Human beings of all sexual orientations and gender identities are entitled to the full enjoyment of all human rights."

In its third decade, Indonesia's LGBT advocacy movement has come a long way since the 1980s when gay men, transgender and lesbian women networked exclusively through the first and — at that time — only gay magazine, GAYa Nusantara. Since then, more LGBT rights groups have emerged — such as Arus Pelangi and Ardhanary Institute — and fought for the right of sexual orientation to be acknowledged as part of Indonesia's universal human rights.

But as the LGBT movement seeks more space in the public arena, hard-line minority groups are showing resistance through violence and intimidation, instilling public fear, said Soe Tjen Marching, the founder of two publications on sexuality.

Sexual rights: Transsexuals join a rally to protest against the Pornography Law in Jakarta. JP/Arief Suhardiman
Sexual rights: Transsexuals join a rally to protest against the Pornography Law in Jakarta. JP/Arief Suhardiman

Legal practitioners advocating sexual rights have warned that LGBT groups' increasing advocacy work might end up being counterproductive for the LGBT movement, suggesting they should focus on winning people's hearts first.

Ratna Batara Munti, who headed the Network of the Pro-Women's National Legislation Program (JKP3) — an association of various NGOs, including the Women's Health Foundation (YKP) and LBH Apik — explained that while the association was fighting for universal access to reproductive health care in the revised Health Law, a book titled *Indahnya Perkawinan Sesama Jenis* (The Beauty of Same Sex Marriage) was released.

Legislators shocked by the contents of the book felt compelled to push through Arti-

cle 72 in the revised Health Law, stating that "Everyone has the right to a healthy and safe reproductive and sexual life, free from force and/or violence, with his or her lawful spouse". In other words, the Health Law they passed only protects legally married couples, according to Ratna.

"Legal advocacy runs the risk of being counterproductive. There should be more advocacy work at the socio-cultural level. [Starting with] the space they [LGBT] have, in which they can work, socialize, and in some cases have relationships without being harassed — let these spaces be wider first," Handinah said.

To address this gap at the socio-cultural level — and widen the public's openness to different sexual orientations and gender identities, Soe Tjen runs two publications: *Bhineka*, a free magazine on pluralism issues and *Jurnal Gandrung*, a journal on critical sexuality studies.

Jurnal Gandrung, the first journal on sexuality in Indonesia, launched its first edition in June. The journal's first essay, written by progressive Islam scholar Siti Musdah Mulia, focuses on Islam and homosexuality, calling for a reinterpretation of Islam's understanding of homosexuality.

Kartini Asia coordinator and human rights activist Nursyahbani Katjasungkana also pointed out that the issue of sexual rights was not limited to discrimination against LGBTs. The problems with violence against women stems from the issue of sexuality as well, she said.

There is a need to link research findings and activism, Nursyahbani went on. Many studies on sexuality can be used by advocacy groups, but the problems disseminating research findings to advocacy groups hamper the exchange. For example, bringing together researchers from different countries could create an exchange and dialogue on sexual rights issues in their respective countries.

Gay Film Festival Opens in Indonesia

By Arlina Arshad
Agence France-Presse, Jakarta, Published: September 24, 2010

A gay film festival hailed as the biggest in Asia and the only one in the Muslim world kicks off in Indonesia on Friday, hoping to draw 15,000 viewers to screenings and fringe events.

In its ninth annual edition, the Q! Film Festival (www.q-munity.org/) will showcase 150 films from more than 20 countries, including France, Japan and the Philippines, highlighting such issues as gay rights and HIV/AIDS.

Festival director John Badalu said organizers did not expect public opposition but prefer to keep the event low-key due to the "stigma against gays" among conservative sections of the mainly Muslim population.

"We don't want to publicise the event in the mainstream local media as they're still very conservative," Badalu said.

Social networking sites such as Twitter (twitter.com/Qfilmfestival) are abuzz with chat about the event, however, signalling it has already achieved one of its chief aims — to "let people know that the queer community exists in Indonesia", he added.

Indonesian Muslims are often categorized as "moderate" but such generalizations, favoured by Western diplomats, upset religious and other minorities who have to endure the daily opprobrium of Islamic conservatives.

In March, a regional gay and lesbian conference was forced to cancel when scores of Islamic radicals stormed the venue and reportedly went from room to room hunting participants.

A month later, Islamic vigilantes burst into a civil rights awareness session for transsexuals held by the National Commission for Human Rights and sent the participants fleeing in panic.

Homosexuality is technically legal in the country of 240 million people but it remains a taboo, especially among the 80 percent of the population who are Muslims.

Lawmakers in deeply Islamic Aceh province last year voted to make homosexuality punishable by up to 100 lashes under local religious by-laws which the provincial government has refused to approve.

Communications Minister Tifatul Sembiring, chief of an Islamic party, in June implied a link between pornography and HIV/AIDS, and questioned whether state funds used to fight the disease could not be better spent.

"The country has dispersed 180 billion rupiah (\$20 million) to curb HIV/AIDS. The budget should actually be reduced so the money can be allocated for other things that are beneficial for the country," he told reporters.

Despite these attitudes, Communications Ministry spokesman Gatot Dewa Broto said the central government had given its assurances that the Q! festival could go ahead.

"We have no objections. As long as the content is not too sexually explicit, not too vulgar, we're OK, we can tolerate it," he said.

"This festival has been taking place for many years already. I'm sure the organizers know the do's and the don'ts and consider the ethical and normative nuances in Indonesia," he added.

Organizers are not taking any chances and have taken steps to ensure the festival takes place without incident.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Screenings, which are free, will be held in private clubs and foreign cultural centres in six cities, including Jakarta and Yogyakarta.

International backing also provides a protective umbrella and cosmopolitan legitimacy that radical fringe elements would be reluctant to challenge, Badalu said.

“Funding for the festival comes from foreign groups. We hold screenings at foreign centres. The radicals won’t dare to attack us. If they do, it’s like attacking several countries at one go,” he said.

He said Indonesia’s “double standards” on issues of sexuality, morality and privacy left space for events like Q! and what organizers jokingly refer to as the “Q-munity.”

“Indonesians are generally tolerant towards gays because you see, people have double standards. Some claim to be religious but surf porn Web sites at home, some say no to piracy but still use pirated goods,” Badalu said.

“Anyway, whatever happens, we’ll still be around. We can’t disappear just like that.”



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