

INTERNATIONAL DAY AGAINST HOMOPHOBIA AND TRANSPHOBIA

LEARNING AND
STRATEGISING
IN ASIA

The International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (‘IDAHO’),

was created in 2004 to draw the attention of policy makers, opinion leaders, social movements, public opinion, the media, etc... to this issue, and to promote a world of tolerance, respect and freedom regardless of people’s sexual orientation or gender identity.

As much as it is a day against violence and oppression, it is a day for freedom, diversity, acceptance.

The date of May 17th was chosen to commemorate the decision taken by the World Health Organization in 1990 to take homosexuality out of the list of mental disorders.

The sheer diversity of social, religious, cultural and political contexts in which the rights to express gender freedom and to engage in same-sex relationships need to be addressed makes it impossible for the International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia to take one specific form or agenda. This is why the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia is not one centralized campaign, but an opportunity for all to fight for sexual diversity and gender freedom according to the context they work in. It is a moment, a space, that everyone, including beyond the LGBTI movement, can take advantage of to take action.

The International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia is now celebrated in more than 70 countries across the world, in the most varied ways and expressions. LGBTI organisations, governments, cities, human rights organisations, etc... have engaged into action around May 17th in all world regions and in places as diverse as Australia, Iran, Cameroon or Albania.

EDITORIAL

Across the vast and diversified region of Asia, the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia knows about as many faiths as there are contexts. From nation-wide mass mobilisation in some countries, to a total absence in others.

Yet overall, in many countries some movements exist that invest the Day to undertake mobilisation, campaigning or lobbying actions.

In order to build on the learning of organisations which have already been engaged in action on the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia for a long time, and to understand the challenges that they and others are facing, a workshop was organised in New Delhi in October 2010, with the support of HIVOS and the Arcus Foundation.

During the workshop sessions, participants confronted their challenges and examined whether, and how, the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia could provide a relevant tool to face these challenges.

Regional organisations joined the discussions to input their own analysis of the challenges in the region. We also chose to include here information and contributions from Japan and Hong Kong although unfortunately no activists from these places could be at the workshop.

Some of the main outcomes of the discussions have been summarized in this booklet, so that they can be shared with other organisations, who we hope will find in these pages some interesting food for thought ... and for action.

The workshop concluded on the perspective to engage a joint activity at regional level, targeting the World Health Organisation.

Indeed, the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia commemorates the decision of the WHO to withdraw homosexuality from the list of mental disorders. Yet, 10 years after this decision, a lot of constituencies, including many medical and scientific ones, have not genuinely and fully recognised this, leaving the door open for state-sponsored and social homo/transphobia.

We hope that the seeds for national and regional activities that were sown during the workshop will keep growing, and that this booklet will help their dissemination.

The IDAHO Committee

The IDAHO Committee

The IDAHO Committee was set up by the founders of the International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia. Its objective is to make the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia a global awareness and mobilization moment that constitutes a useful opportunity for everyone to take action at all levels.

Its core strategies are to:

- ▲ **Give the initiative**, the scope, visibility and recognition that will maximize its potential as a political force at all levels.
- ▲ **Support organizations**, especially organizations working in very difficult contexts, to develop actions around the Day and maximize the use of the Day in their lobby and campaigning strategies.
- ▲ **Develop and facilitate** joint mobilization initiatives and campaigns on specific LGBT issues, using the Day as a campaigning focus.

Lessons learnt from acting on the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia in the region

The Day creates a space to discuss the very specific issue of violence and Human Rights abuses committed towards people for the sole reason of their actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity and expression.

The Day was created specifically to be a platform to address the problems of extreme physical and psychological violence that exist almost everywhere. The Day will obviously be more relevant for organizations working on these issues, and will be invested in by organizations for actions that relate to this. For example, the Day constitutes an interesting moment to present reports on hate crimes. It also constitute a privileged moment to talk to the medical sector, to psychiatrists' associations, to the academia, historians, anthropologists, etc...

In some cases, it has become the annual moment when journalists, academics, politicians, etc... get around the table to discuss the evolution over the past year. This "scientific" approach has been very effective in highly repressive contexts.

Educational entities, especially in the higher education system, can use the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia as an entry point for discussing the issue.



Our first celebration for the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia was in 2005.

At that time, we witnessed lots of violence from security forces. There had been a state of emergency since 2002 and there was a lot of misuse of power, resulting in widespread sexual abuse of Transgender people. When the Day was created in 2004, this resonated particularly well with the situation we were living in. We did not take public action, because that was not allowed then, but we held candle lit vigils and community gatherings. It was a moment that was very important for our empowerment and to break our sense of isolation.

When democracy was reinstated in 2006, things changed radically. We could again organize public action and we were supported from the start by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. After the 2007 Supreme court decision considering that “unnatural sex” did not apply to homosexuals, the level of violence significantly dropped and we moved on to more festive programs. Our actions got a very good media coverage and since then, we have been organizing ever bigger activities, including film festivals and academic conferences. This year, the dean of the very respected Teaching Hospital of Kathmandu attended the event.

Sunil Pant, Blue Diamond Society, Nepal

Many organizations, for example in China, Indonesia, Nepal, Cambodia or Sri Lanka, include festivities within their action program, partly in order to develop more ‘positive rights’ approaches.

For some organizations, like Pink Dot Festival in Singapore, the ‘reactive’ approach of denouncing Homophobia and Transphobia is put into the background, as more ‘proactive’ approaches are developed.

We just started doing actions on the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia this year. We think the idea of this Day is interesting but we also fear that talking directly about Homophobia and Transphobia publicly will trigger negative reaction. So we do not plan any public action. Rather, we use the Day to engage dialogue with journalists, lawyers and the law enforcement agencies to explain what homophobia and transphobia are, and what can be done to combat them. The Day is also a crucial time for us to engage with the medical profession, and specifically psychologists, to discuss the issue of the fear and hatred that gender variance and homosexuality generates in society.

Shale Ahmed, BANDHU Social Welfare Society, Bangladesh



The Pink Dot SG movement was built around a community event, which called for Singaporeans to converge in a public park dressed in pink, to form a giant Pink Dot: a tongue-in-cheek reference to Singapore being a ‘Little Red Dot.’ Pink Dot’s overarching objective is to focus mainstream attention on LGBT issues while recognizing the importance of garnering support from all segments of society. The first Pink Dot event took place on May 16, 2009 under the theme «Freedom to love». The event date was chosen for its significance, as it falls between the International Day of the Family (May 15) and the International Day

Against Homophobia (May 17). In the second year, the theme was ‘Focusing on Our Families’. Both events attracted thousands. Although it has been organized to coincide with IDAHO, the Pink Dot events were not advertised under the IDAHO banner. Organizers feel that the terms transphobia and homophobia may be perceived as accusatory, and are difficult to communicate in a public campaign. It also did not fit with the positive branding and vibe of Pink Dot. So instead of dwelling on these negatives, organizers preferred to focus on more positive messages such as family and acceptance.

Pink Dot is also explicitly positioned as non-political and not as a protest action of any kind, so as to encourage mainstream participation. Yet, organisers are also cognizant of the fact that organizing something around the IDAHO dates contributes to the building of a diversified global mobilization and hope that other groups and campaigns in other countries are inspired by the goodwill the Pink Dot campaign has generated.

Sylvia Tan, Fridae.com

Organisations involved in action on the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia have stressed the importance of the Day for alliance building. As the Day is not linked to any specific agenda, like same-sex relationship recognition, it can be invested in by many stakeholders who just agree on combating violence and hatred. In some instances, it can even allow some expression from groups who do not even support homosexuality or gender variance, but refuse to proactively combat them.

The Day has been used in many instances, from Hong Kong to Indonesia, to engage with usually non-supportive constituencies, like religious groups.



A large alliance of Hong Kong based LGBT groups, with special leadership by 'Rainbow of Hong Kong', Human Rights organisations, LGBT-friendly media and progressive religious groups got together this year to commemorate the International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia with a candlelight vigil. In Chater Gardens in the heart of the city candles were lit to commemorate the victims of Transphobia and Homophobia throughout the world, as part of a ceremony that featured speeches and testimonies on Homophobia and a symbolic die-in action.

In the framework of this year's international campaign on "Religions, homophobia, transphobia", the LGBT community of Hong Kong organized an inter-faith seminar where representatives from various religious groups in Hong Kong came together to urge putting aside differences among religions in order to create hope and space for reconciliation between religion and sexual minorities. Connie Chang, Women's coalition of Hong Kong



Similarly, The International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia is not a date that needs to focus only on sexual orientation and gender identity or expression. IDAHO can also be taken as a 'concept' that can be used to challenge exclusions of all kinds, and therefore create a larger ownership from other social groups. On this day linkages between LGBT issues, gender-based violence and violence against women can be highlighted. This creates bridges with other movement and helps the process of mainstreaming LGBT issues into other movements.

The Day has also been said to facilitate alliance building and engagement with external constituencies. Some countries and institutions such as UNDP, UNAIDS, the European Union, the European Parliament, the UK, France, Belgium, Quebec, etc... have recognized the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia. The Day is mentioned in several diplomatic guidelines for Embassy staff on how to engage with the LGBT civil society. Referring to this facilitates the search for financial or political support.

And the Day allows the expression of stakeholders beyond the institutions. A compelling example was given by a university student in a remote city of China, who hung a banner against homophobia on his campus on May 17th. This student was totally unconnected to LGBT organizations.



“Spreading the message about the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia is still a very necessary thing. As our group has been doing activities on this Day for several years now, we take upon us to send information and support messages out to groups around the country, which involves

a bit of work, as we have to translate the messages we get from other parts of the world. Of course, this does not mean that we coordinate action, and organizations engage in their own individual ways because even if at some stage a regional or international initiative can bring organizations and people together, at the end of the day it is really about how you innovatively develop your own set of activities.

Luckily this year Aibai.com, an important LGBT news source in China, translated some news of IDAHO activities around the world and introduced them to Chinese readers. My organization Common Language compiled a simple IDAHO action guide to be used by groups and individual activists to organize their own IDAHO event. All this made a crucial difference in getting the message out and it encouraged a lot of us to develop more activities.

The information also sometimes reached very surprising destinations. A student in a provincial university hung a banner out in the middle of the night to denounce homophobia on the campus. Another student launched an on-line campaign to collect 1000 smiles from straight people to show their support to LGBT friends. The campaign was joined later by many LGBT groups and individuals, and events were held in various cities to collect smiles in the street. 3000 smiles have been collected by the end of June and an exhibit was held later in Beijing. In total this year, more than 10 cities organized various events including a ‘free-hugs’ event in Beijing and Xiamen orchestrated by my organization featuring couples disguised as ‘homosexual tigers’, in a playful allusion to the fact that this year is China’s year of the Tiger. LGBT groups in many of the major universities held various activities to address their fellow students.

China Queer Independent Films kick-started the third China Queer Film Festival Tour, screening a collection of films on LGBT issues, defying official censorship that still assimilates any allusion to homosexuality with ‘pornography’.

And the British and French Embassies both hosted various events to signal their support to the Day, including meetings with the LGBT community, screening of films and documentaries, and public debates.”

Bin Xu, Tongyu (common language), China

Organisations from the region have stressed that Internalised homo/transphobia can sometimes be the worst enemy. By just existing, the Day helps to build self-respect within each LGBT individual and help people come together as a community. This is especially important in places where concepts such as homophobia and transphobia are not even widely understood, given the fact that hatred of homosexuals and trans is considered absolutely natural.



“We came to hear about the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia during a workshop gathering LGBT activists from the region. From the beginning, we thought it was a good idea to make it the time we hold our national Pride events. You see, in Cambodia the public tolerance is not big enough yet to go out on the streets. Homophobia and Transphobia are really our main issues, so we organize festivals and activity indoors, to give the community a space to exist. To know that on the same day actions happen around the world is important to build our confidence.”

Srorn Srun, Cambodia Pride, Cambodian Center for Human Rights

In countries where the government had already taken commitments to fight discrimination related to sexual orientation and gender identity or expression, the Day constitutes an annual moment for accountability.



“ Actually I think that the challenge now in Nepal is to get the government itself to take action on the Day. Getting the government to recognize officially the Day would be a first step in that direction. Let’s try to make it happen ! ”
Sunil Pant

The Global dimension of the Day gives us the opportunity to pitch it particularly well with the media. Often, the media attention the Day gets is actually identified as one of its major added values. Events around the Day create an opportunity to establish a personal relationship with individual reporters, to provide them with facts and scientific studies, to help them network with authoritative voices, such as respected doctors, psychologists, celebrities, community and religious leaders, etc...



In Japan, the main challenge we face is silence. In this context, being visible is particularly important. We started action on the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia in 2006 because we thought the idea of this Day was a good one and it would go down well with the media.



Every year, we organize different activities. Since 2007, the Day provides the framework for the “Yes To Diverse Sexuality” Campaign, which consists of reading out publicly in very central locations like the central train stations, stories and messages sent to us online by LGBT people and our supporters. In 2010, we started to organise the LGBT Week around the Day. Actions included a hotline for LGBT people, which was officially sponsored by one of the major mobile phone companies which provided free cell phones, and supported by the Cabinet Office and the Ministry of Justice. Activities also included a symposium and various street actions, generating large media coverage, including from the very mainstream “serious” newspapers.

- ▲ A lot of LGBT people in Japan came to know the word ‘homophobia’ through the Day.
- ▲ The Day gradually helps to reinforce networking among different LGBT organisations and individuals in different parts of the country.
- ▲ The Day provides with a set of different messages, so it can be pitched to a whole range of different media.

Asuza Takehana, GayjapanNews, Japan

“ The Day also helps us attract better media attention. Each year, we meet a lot of interest from the press, and papers do extensive coverage of our activities. Most newspapers advertise our flyers for free. We always pitch some interesting information on the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia with the media, like the number of countries participating, the type of activities, etc... Each year, we receive the support of UNAIDS. The fact that they also take action on the Day at international level has certainly an effect on us here. The Ministry of Health also joins the IDAHO actions every year. ”

Srorn Srun



“ We started commemorating Idaho in 2005. It was for us an opportunity to bring the issue of homophobia to the fore. For example, in 2006 we published a campaign leaflet which explained what homophobia and transphobia were, and thus provided a platform for engaging dialogue on this issue with various stakeholders. Since 2005, we have definitely witnessed a change in the situation. The media now has coverage of the event that was unthinkable some years ago. As an indicator, the major newspapers in each of our three languages agreed to publish our IDAHO campaign advertisement. Gradually, pro-LGBT voices are beginning to emerge ; Our partners are also much more willing to engage with us. In 2010, we asked all diplomatic missions in the country to raise the rainbow flag, which is a very bold initiative given the fact that homosexuality is criminalized in the country, even explicitly for Lesbians. Despite this day witnessing a terrible thunder storm with many streets being under water, the UK, Germany, Switzerland, Australia, the EU and the Netherlands raised the Rainbow Flag. In solidarity, organisations like OXFAM Australia, the Centre for Policy Alternatives and Women Defining Peace also joined in, creating a powerful demonstration of unity. This is one of the impacts of our regular participation in other campaigns like Women’s Day celebrations, etc... Of course, this visibility triggers reactions. We were very shocked to see that one of the newspapers that had previously carried our advertisement campaign for IDAHO, published an extremely homophobic editorial. Maybe careful planning of backlash and negative effects of mobilizations, like the ones we do for the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia is something we should learn more about. The experience of Indonesia is unfortunately very relevant for us : Although we are primarily influenced by Buddhism, which does not condemn homosexuality, there are powerful political lobbies belonging to the church, the Muslim groups, and the Orthodox Tamil groups who increasingly pick on LGBT people as part of their nationalistic strategies. So far, we have followed a strategy of being open about our activities to all, and the very fact that we are not hiding anything has been our safety net, for the time being ”

Rosana Flamer Caldera, Equal Ground, Sri Lanka

In certain contexts like Indonesia, the Day serves as a unifying factor and can help overcome divisions within the LGBTQI community, as it creates a focus for joint action. Of course, various groups will do activities that are the most relevant for them, but especially in contexts where groups are few and small, the Day can provide this one annual opportunity that will get organisations working together. It can also provide a forum for solidarity, as better equipped groups help less resource-rich groups to build capacity.

Challenges – questions and answers from Asia

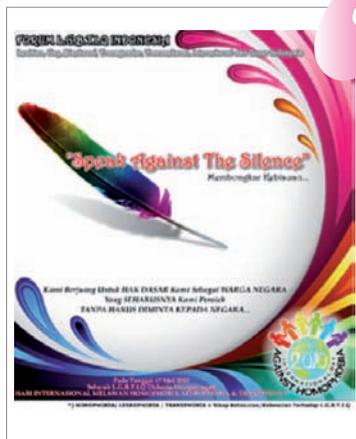
THE DAY CAN BE SEEN AS A FOREIGN IMPOSITION AND MIGHT BE COUNTER PRODUCTIVE IN CONTEXTS WHERE THIS IS HIGHLY SENSITIVE, LIKE MUSLIM COUNTRIES. HOW CAN WE RESPOND TO THIS ?

Insisting on the links between the Day and the fact that it commemorates the World Health Organisation's decision to take homosexuality out of the list of mental disorders is a powerful strategy.

The WHO is one of the most respected UN institutions and its scientific nature shields it from presumptions of political interference. Very often, the decision of the WHO is largely unknown, even to professionals in the health sector, and can provide a powerful argument for advocacy and public education. The Day can actually provide a core opportunity to get this information across. This unfortunately does not apply yet to Trans people, so this argument is only valid for homosexuality.

In contexts where talking about homosexuality is either illegal or too confrontational, organizations might want to make a loose connection to the Day and just talk about celebration of "love", like the Pink Dot Festival in Singapore. It is then left to others, like the press, to make the connection with the International dimension of the Day.

There are places where the American reference in the "IDAHO" acronym (which of course never derived from any political intention) is far from being a good idea... In these cases, references to the acronym have to be avoided.



On whether the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia is seen as a foreign initiative, well, anything related to sexual and reproductive health and rights, including HIV-AIDS, is seen as coming from outside, so the Day of course as well. But if we can display the diversity of actions in Muslim countries and show that there are LGBT organizations in all the countries, then we can actually use the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia to change this idea in people's heads. *Shale*

We have been investing the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia as an annual campaigning moment for several years now. In terms of activities our most successful events have been the street action that we have done in 2007 2008 and 2009. Sadly, since then the situation has dramatically deteriorated due to systematical threats and attacks from fundamentalist Muslim groups. Today, the LGBT activists are divided on the issue as to whether we should do street action at all or not. Maybe a temporary good compromise will be to develop the kind of cultural activities that we have done for IDAHO and that are more festive than political. Luckily, the Day is not restricted to one particular set of actions. Everything is possible and this flexibility is important in countries like Indonesia, where we constantly have to adapt. We now have to keep reflecting on how we can create wider strategies to combat fundamentalism. The Day is one of the instruments we can invest, but we need to assess how much the link to an international movement is a positive thing or not. Fundamentalist always use the argument that homosexuality corrupts the morality of the nation - thereby using the argument that homosexual identity is also a foreign concept as a side argument. Sadly, playing the religious moral card is often very effective. Therefore, the debate should focus on the supremacy of citizens' rights above moral issues. Using the global dimension of the Day, and involving global actors, like the WHO, that the Indonesian State is party of, and which enjoys credibility with the population, can constitute an interesting strategic position. Indonesia has actually followed the example of WHO by deleting homosexuality from the list of mental disorders and diagnosis. We should be able to build on this. *King Oey, Arus Pelangi, Indonesia*

The perception of the Day as alien to the local contexts can also be reinforced by international initiatives that are not appropriate, like the "Great Global Kiss-in". In these cases, organizations might very well chose not to participate. They can also try to find creative ways to participate, like making the kisses symbolic rather than physical, or express 'kisses' in their own cultural ways, like holding hands, ... But at the end of the day, responsiveness of international initiatives to the variety of local contexts has to increase and this can happen through more engagement of Asian groups in the discussions. Asian countries can also chose to develop their own regional actions, such as the IGLHRC Asian video (see box). In any case, the same challenge to make the Day relevant to all levels exists also between the national groups and the local communities, especially in remote areas. The dissemination of information, especially in local languages, is a central part of all strategy around the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia.

I would like to reflect more on how we can make the Day work for women. One has to understand that lesbians, bisexuals and Trans men are governed by social conditions that limit their ability to take actions along with others in the LGBT communities/ activism. But because the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia allows to address everyone's issues and in their own way and within their ability, IDAHO can be potentially empowering for women. But there needs to be a special effort made to disseminate the information and to mobilize lesbian and women's organizations. One essential element for this is to make information accessible in local languages.

Anjana Suvarnananda, FOR-SOGI, Anjaree, Thailand

Our connection to the international dimension or even the regional dimension has not particularly been developed. Japan in this sense is extremely insular, and the language barrier causes problems to overcome this. We need to keep working on this and the regional action on IDAHO might be very helpful for this.

Azusa

In Thailand, every November 29th since 2008, we remember and celebrate the LGBT human rights in a commémoration of the day Miss Samart, the courageous transgender girl took the Ministry of Defense to court, to force them to stop writing "serious permanent mental illness" as a reason for giving transgenders exemption from compulsory military services. We find the concept of the Thai LGBT Human Rights Day very close to that of IDAHO. We want to promote the visibility of LGBT issues and rights which is more important than just a celebration. In our first year, we promoted the Yogyakarta principles, in collaboration with IGLHRC and the Thai National Human Rights Commission. We are now in the process of preparing the Thai LGBT Human Rights Day for the third year. It will be very difficult for us to organize IDAHO as a separate event since there are few of us and we are already occupied with the organizing of the National Day for the Human Rights of LGBT. There have been some other initiatives in the past which often cannot be sustained. It is usually the same small bunch of us activists doing various tasks at various different places. Anyhow, at the National Day for the Human Rights of LGBT, we could make announcement of IDAHO and share the information of various ways each group and even each individual could celebrate IDAHO.

Anjana

MANY OTHER DAYS ALREADY EXIST, DRAWING ON NATIONAL CONTEXTS. HOW CAN THE INTERNATIONAL DAY AGAINST HOMOPHOBIA AND TRANSPHOBIA FIND ITS PLACE WITHOUT DISRUPTING THE EXISTING DYNAMICS ?

Some countries have already developed their own national mobilization day around Human Rights, sexual orientation and gender identity or expression, such as Thailand, who celebrates November 29 or India, where the 2nd of July commemorates the Delhi High Court verdict. In some other countries, the local organizations are already stretched to their full limit with organizing the events that are planned yearly, such as the pride march. In that case, a media statement, a lobby letter, a web podcast or blogpost might be the limit of the action. In any case, showcasing the diversity and vastness of actions happening elsewhere is always a good idea to attract media attention. In some cases, existing activities were shifted to take place on May 17th so as to take advantage of the extra attention the international dimension of the Day gets from various stakeholders while at the same time not increasing action. Candlelight Memorial Day, commemorating the victims of HIV-AIDS, being very near, MSM organizations, and Transgender organizations working on HIV-AIDS often link the two events together.

In India we have had heated discussions on whether all cities should hold their pride on the same day, to create national visibility. This is understandable because India is a vast country and at any given date, you will find places where it is either the rainy season, or far too hot, or the time of annual local festivities, etc... It was therefore decided that various parts of the country should do pride at a time that is most suitable for them. This issue is very much likely to come up again for the IDAHO and this is one of the issues this initiative might never be able to resolve. Furthermore, it is likely that in India, the Day should be celebrated under other names, which are more relevant to the local culture. The connection to the regional and international levels will happen in a very organic way. This is very much in line with the spirit of the Day, which is not to impose any type of activity or any specific policy agenda, but to be invested by local groups according to fit within their own contexts..

Aditya Bondyopadhyay, Adhikaar, India

THE NOTIONS OF HOMOPHOBIA AND TRANSPHOBIA ARE GLOBAL CONCEPTS THAT DON'T NECESSARILY RESONATE WITH LOCAL PERCEPTIONS AND DENOMINATIONS. HOW CAN THIS BE RECONCILED ?

The terms 'Homo' and 'Trans' exclude the people who don't self identify as such and reinforce identity politics. It can lead to burn bridges rather than build them. In many Asian countries, these terms are only relevant to some of the people concerned by stigmatization and discrimination on the ground of their sexual orientation and gender identity or expression. Kothis, Hijras, Kathoey, Tomboys, Waria, Mak Nyah and others... might find it difficult to relate to such terms as "homophobia" or "transphobia", if there are not organizations and individuals who help create the bridge between these abstract terms and the reality that the people face on the ground. Organisations in all Asian countries should be free to adapt the name of the Day in their local language to fit realities. Having said that, the notions of homophobia and transphobia can in return also be mainstreamed with the local organisations as, at the end of the day, what we are all talking about are similar violence, stigmatisation, discrimination.

Khartini Slamah, Asia-Pacific Transgender Network, Pt Foundation, Malaysia



Harnessing the potential : Using the Day to increase collaboration between organizations at regional level



In various parts of the world, the Day is used by organisations to engage in collective action at various levels. The diversity of the Asian region has been identified as a challenge for this. Yet, interesting perspectives have been identified to use the Day as a moment for joint mobilization initiatives, such as the video project organized by IGLHRC and LeAP! Furthermore, some narrower scopes have been identified as more relevant for the development of strategies, like China-Hong Kong-Taiwan- Korea ; Pakistan-Bangladesh or Nepal-India.

In line with the 2011 International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia, IGLHRC - Asia and the Lesbian Advocates Philippines (LeAP!) is sponsoring a 30-minute video documentary on LGBTI activism in Asia and the Yogyakarta Principles. The video will be distributed to all LGBT, human rights and women's groups to for their work in asserting, promoting and protecting LGBT rights. The video, tentatively titled, «Courage Unfolds: Living the Principles» will develop specific actions to support LGBTI activism in the region and to promote the Yogyakarta Principles and will be launched by partner LGBT and HIV/AIDS groups and organizations from the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, India and Mongolia around May 17, 2011 in line with the celebration of IDAHO. Around the screenings, there will be numerous activities to supplement the celebration such as a Human Rights Video Caravan which will tour cities, host panel discussions, letter writing campaigns, Photo/art competition & exhibit, among others by groups and collaborations with regional partners such as the UNDP in India.

*Ging Cristobal, International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, Asia Region
Maria Lourdes Marin, AngLadlad, LeAP Philippines*

EXAMPLE OF A REGIONAL INITIATIVE : CAMPAIGNING THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION FROM A REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE.

In most countries in the region, the WHO decision to declassify homosexuality from the list of mental disorders is not fully effective. In some hard line countries, the WHO decision has not been recognized. In others, it has hardly been transposed in national health guidelines, some of which still need to be reformed. Even in countries which have adapted their guidelines, practicing psychiatrist develop discourses and practices aiming at changing people's sexual orientation rather than helping them to address and overcome social and political stigmatization and discrimination, let alone engaging proactively themselves in fighting homophobia and transphobia. Religious movements have been increasingly using this ambiguity of the medical profession to insist on their capacity to cure homosexuality.

In this context, organizations from the region have identified a common interest to see WHO engage more directly in the fight against homophobia and transphobia and use its moral and scientific clout to reaffirm the non pathological nature of sexual diversity. Given the roots of the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia in the 1990 declassification decision, to use the Day as a hook to lobby the WHO was identified as a coherent entry point. A renewed and visible engagement of the WHO on this issue was identified as bearing good opportunities for organizations to engage at national level with their psychiatrist associations, health workers unions, etc... This would facilitate further lobbying at national level to have the medical (non)status of homosexuality highlighted in medical students curricula A WHO engagement would constitute a useful argument to oppose medical approaches and practices which, like shock therapies, are classified as torture and ruining countless lives. It would also contribute to open the door for the declassification of Transgenderism as a mental condition (while at the same time keeping it in other WHO classifications to allow access to consented medical treatments)

“ The idea that as a regional group we have launched an initiative towards the WHO resonates particularly for lesbians, bisexuals and Trans men because the general conception for us, probably even more than for gays, is that there is something not quite right with us, like we haven't met the right man or so. So we are particularly vulnerable to “cure” discourses, be it in the families, the churches, the public discourse. In extreme cases, this is the vision that leads to “curative” rapes. ” *Anjana*

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS AND CONTRIBUTORS :

Shale Ahmed – BANDHU Social Welfare Society, Bangladesh
Akkai – Sangama Trust, India
Sunil Babu Pant – Blue Diamond Society, Nepal
Sumit Baudh - Lawyer, India
Jol Bedos - IDAHO Committee
Aditya Bondyopadhyay - Adhikaar, India
Connie Chang - Women's coalition of Hong Kong
Ging Cristobal - International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) Asia Region
Rosanna Flamer Caldera- EQUAL GROUND, Sri Lanka
Anupam Hazra – SAATTHI, india
Pallav Himanshu Patankar - Infosem, India
Shivananda Khan, Naz Foundation International, India
Annanditta Kushwaha - Sangini, India
Maria Lourdes Marin- AngLadlad – LeAP, Philippines
Pramada Menon – Queer Activist, India
King Oey- Arus Pelangi, Indonesia
Lok Prakash - Adhikaar, India
G. Prashanth Kumar- Maan AIDS Foundation, India
Ashok Rao Kavi – UNAIDS New Delhi
Khartini Slamah - Asia-Pacific Transgender Network and Pt Foundation, Malaysia
Srorn Srun - Cambodia Pride and Cambodian Center for Human Rights
Anjana Suvarnananda- FOR-SOGI and Anjaree, Thailand
Asuzu Takehana – GayJapanNews, Japan
Sylvia Tan - Fridae.com, Singapore
Bin Xu - Tongyu (Common Language), China



INTERNATIONAL DAY
AGAINST
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