

Universal Periodic Review - Singapore (January 2016)

A summary on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) human rights issues in Singapore and recommendations by Pink Dot SG and Oogachaga

Pink Dot SG and Oogachaga submitted a joint report to the OHCHR for the Universal Periodic Review 2nd Cycle on Singapore. Our report focuses on a wide range of the human rights issues faced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) persons in Singapore. This document is a selection of the key issues and our recommendations.

Abolish Section 377A from the Penal Code of Singapore

1. Section 377A of the Penal Code of Singapore is the key legislation which criminalises sexual behaviour between consenting adult males, even in private. It states that: “Any male person who, in public or private, commits, or abets the commission of, or procures or attempts to procure the commission by any male person of, any act of gross indecency with another male person, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to 2 years.”

2. Although Section 377A has not often been enforced, its existence is used by a range of government agencies to deny or uphold a wider range of discriminatory policies that effectively strip LGBT Singaporeans of many of the prerogatives and protections of citizenship.

Recommendation: The Government should abolish Section 377A and stop state-endorsed discrimination toward its LGBT citizens.

Remove all discriminatory media guidelines

3. The Media Development Authority’s (MDA) Free-to-Air Television Program Code states that “music associated with drugs, alternative lifestyles (e.g. homosexuality) or the worship of the occult or the devil should not be broadcast” while its Free-to-Air Radio Program Code adds “Information, themes or subplots on lifestyles such as homosexuality, lesbianism, bisexuality, transsexualism, transvestism, paedophilia and incest should be treated with utmost caution. Their treatment should not in any way promote, justify or glamorise such lifestyles. Explicit dialogue or information concerning the above topics should not be broadcast.” MDA has also censored print publications, public performances and media broadcasts. Through these measures, the Government restricts information and positive portrayal of LGBT issues.

Recommendation: The Government should remove all discriminatory media guidelines in order to provide accurate representation of LGBT persons and promote open discussion on LGBT issues.

Allow legal registration of LGBT organisations

4. The Singapore Societies Act gives the Registrar of Societies absolute discretion to refuse the registration of a society if it is merely satisfied that it would be contrary to the national interest for the society to be registered. On this ground, no LGBT organisation has been able to register as a society in Singapore. Without a legal registered status, LGBT organisations are unable to raise funds effectively, apply for licenses to hold LGBT-related events, and lack the legitimacy to engage the Government in improving the lives of LGBT Singaporeans.

Recommendation: The Government should allow legal registration of LGBT organisations in Singapore.

Implement comprehensive and LGBT-inclusive curriculum in schools

5. The Education Ministry of Singapore has strict policies on its education curriculum, especially its sexuality education. Sex education does not address issues related to sexual orientation or gender identity.

Moreover, the inclusion of homosexuality or positive portrayals of same-sex sexual relations is strictly forbidden. School educators and counsellors are also not permitted to discuss LGBT issues in schools. This position prevents school authorities from acknowledging the existence of LGBT bullying as well as providing support to LGBT students and teachers.

Recommendation: The Government should implement comprehensive and LGBT-inclusive curriculum in schools. It should also enforce policies and procedures to promote better understanding of LGBT issues and prevent bullying and harassment based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Healthcare & Social Services for LGBT persons

6. Singapore has an under-developed social service, mental health and healthcare services for its LGBT persons as there are only three non-profit, LGBT-specific non-governmental organisations (NGO), namely AFA Gayhealth, Oogachaga and The T Project. As a result, LGBT people have very limited access to the LGBT-specific services that they most need.

Recommendation: The Government should allocate resources and implement comprehensive LGBT-specific services in social service, mental health and healthcare sectors.

7. Since 2013, no public hospital in Singapore has offered Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS). Transgender persons who wish to undergo SRS can only do so overseas. This restricts their access to pre- and post-surgery care, and increases their health risks. Such restriction also prevents them from accessing their personal social security savings from the Central Provident Fund Medisave account to their medical costs. These treatments are also excluded from Medishield, a national health insurance scheme.

Recommendation: The Government should reinstate Sex Reassignment Surgery services in public hospitals, and allow Medisave and Medishield Life coverage for these procedures.

Workplace discrimination towards LGBT persons

8. Employment protections for LGBT individuals do not exist in Singapore. Benefits and workplace policies aimed at levelling access for LGBT employees are nearly non-existent, save for a small handful of multinational organisations. Stories of workplace bullying, prejudice, harassment, blackmail and intimidation are often discussed privately within the community. Victims will rarely speak publicly for fear of being outed or shamed in an environment where being gay and/or transgender remains highly stigmatised.

Recommendation: The Government should include “sexual orientation and gender identity” in the employment laws.

Contact information

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OOGACHAGA[®]
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OOGACHAGA (OC) is a community-based counselling, support and personal development agency for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) individuals, couples and families in Singapore. OC was formed in 1999, and formally registered as a non-profit business in 2004.
www.oogachaga.com

pinkdot.sg
supporting the freedom to love

PINK DOT SG is a social movement that advocates the freedom to love regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity. Started in 2009, the yearly Pink Dot campaign culminates in an annual rally where Singaporeans from all walks of life are invited to show their support for the LGBT community in Singapore. www.pinkdot.sg