

# **Singapore: NDR 2022: Repeal of Section 377A a relief but move to protect marriage definition is 'disappointing', say LGBTQ groups**

Tuesday 23 August 2022, by [ONG Justin](#) (Date first published: 22 August 2022).

**Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) rights groups said that the repeal of Section 377A is long overdue. They welcomed the relief it brings and hoped for more open conversations about challenges the LGBTQ community face. However, they expressed disappointment at Constitutional changes to protect the definition of marriage, saying it will 'codify discrimination in supreme law'.**

SINGAPORE — Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) rights groups said on Sunday (Aug 21) that the Government's move to repeal Section 377A of the Penal Code was long overdue, describing the prime minister's announcement of the decision as a "historic moment".

However, these groups also expressed disappointment that changes are set to be made to the Constitution to prevent future legal challenges to the existing definition of marriage, saying that it would codify "further discrimination into supreme law".

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong [had announced](#) in his National Day Rally speech on Sunday that Section 377A, the law that criminalises sex between men, will be repealed.

In a joint community statement by more than 20 LGBTQ rights groups, including Pink Dot SG, Oogachaga and Young Out Here, the groups said: "The repeal of Section 377A, while long overdue, is a significant milestone and a powerful statement that state-sanctioned discrimination has no place in Singapore."

The groups added that for those in the community who has experienced bullying, rejection and harassment "enabled" by this law, the repeal "finally enables us to begin the process of healing."

Mr Clement Tan, a spokesman for Pink Dot SG, the non-profit movement that organises the annual LGBTQ event Pink Dot, said that the community's reaction to the announcement is one of "overwhelming relief."

He added that the community has been "holding out for change" for a long time, and that both LGBTQ individuals and those who support their rights have made "significant contributions and sacrifices for a more inclusive Singapore."

"To finally see this day arrive within our lifetimes and to hear it from Prime Minister Lee at the National Day Rally — this is a historic moment."

Several LGBTQ rights groups leaders were also in attendance at Mr Lee's rally at the Institute of

Technical Education headquarters in Ang Mo Kio.

Among them was Mr Benjamin Xue, co-founder of LGBTQ youth support group Young Out Here. He told TODAY that the news of the repeal felt like a “large weight lifted off my shoulders.”

“Hopefully, there will be more conversations about LGBTQ lives here in Singapore... it creates more opportunity for understanding, and in turn, more empathy for our community,” he said.

Mr Leow Yangfa, executive director of non-profit organisation Oogachaga, which provides community-based counselling and support for the LGBTQ community, was also in attendance at the rally.

He, along with Oogachaga chairman Bryan Choong, said in a statement issued after the rally that repealing Section 377A will pave the way for more constructive debates about the advantages of decriminalising consensual intimacy between adult men.

Professor Roy Chen from Action for Aids (Afa) Singapore said in a statement that the organisation will “work to increase and strengthen efforts to eliminate the stigma and discrimination faced by gay and other men who have sex with men, and the wider LGBTQ communities in accessing early diagnosis and care for human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection, sexually transmitted diseases (STD) and other health challenges.”

The president of the non-profit organisation added: “We look forward to more inclusive sexuality education programmes in schools and fairer portrayal of men who have sex with men in the media that can facilitate HIV and STD treatment and prevention.”

## **‘DISAPPOINTED’ AT CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES TO PROTECT DEFINITION OF MARRIAGE**

While the LGBTQ advocacy groups welcomed the repeal of Section 377A, they expressed disappointment regarding the constitutional changes that will be made to prevent future legal challenges to the existing definition of marriage.

Said the joint statement by the LGBTQ groups: “Any move by the Government to introduce further legislation or constitutional amendments that signal LGBTQ+ people as unequal citizens is disappointing.”

The groups urged the Government “not to heed recent calls from religious conservatives to enshrine the definition of marriage into the Constitution.”

“Such a decision will undermine the secular character of our Constitution, codify further discrimination into supreme law and tie the hands of future Parliaments.”

Agreeing, Mr Xue said that he hopes that “more conversations” can take place in the future regarding this constitutional change between the community and the Government, which will help create “more understanding for our own community and the struggles that we go through.”

## **THE WAY FORWARD**

The LGBTQ groups said in the joint statement that repealing Section 377A is the “first step on a long road towards full equality” for LGBTQ people in Singapore.

“Our immediate priorities in the wake of Section 377A will be to tackle the areas of discrimination

that we continue to face at home, in schools, workplaces, and in housing and health systems,” the groups added.

“The true impact of repeal will be determined by how the people of Singapore respond to it and treat each other in the days and months to come,” they added. “We cannot allow this to polarise us, deepen fissures, or make an already vulnerable community more susceptible to contempt.”

Looking beyond the community, Mr Leow and Mr Choong from Oogachaga said that repealing 377A will not only improve the lives of LGBTQ Singaporeans and their families.

“It will also bring other benefits to business and trade, and boost our international reputation as a progressive, developed economy.”

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## **Justin Ong**

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## **P.S.**

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