

Thai government backs same-sex civil partnership bill

If bill is passed, Thailand would be first Asian country to recognise same-sex civil unions

Wednesday 2 January 2019, by [FULLERTON Jamie](#) (Date first published: 27 December 2018).

Thailand's military government has backed a bill that would make the country the first in Asia to recognise same-sex civil partnerships.

The civil partnership bill is likely to require approval from Thailand's new parliament after [the country's general election in February](#). Some activists opposed the bill due to limitations in the rights it would offer, while others welcomed it as a step towards marriage equality.

"It's a big moment," Nada Chaiyakit, 39, an activist and law graduate who was consulted by the government for the draft, told the Guardian. "They [ministers] have studied the UK and other countries and seen that the first step is civil unions. I'm confident that within five years they'll put [full] marriage equality on the agenda."

If the bill is passed, members of same-sex civil partnerships in [Thailand](#) will gain greater property, inheritance and succession rights. They will also gain the right to give consent regarding medical decisions if their partner gets seriously ill.

Nathporn Chatusripitak, adviser to Thailand's prime minister, Prayut Chan-o-cha, said the bill would allow same-sex couples to adopt children. There is debate over this, as the draft does not mention adoption explicitly. Currently in Thailand, individuals in same-sex relationships can legally adopt children, but same-sex couples cannot jointly adopt.

In November, voters in Taiwan [rejected legalising same-sex marriage](#) in a referendum.

The projected image of Thailand, marketed as "Land of Smiles", is one of openness, and Bangkok as a thriving gay scene.

But despite the inclusive image, Thailand's Gender Equality Act, which outlawed gender-based discrimination and included LGBT definitions, only came into effect in 2015. Nada said that further instances of hypocrisy were common. Marriage-like photoshoots in Thailand have been promoted to same-sex couple tourists, despite same-sex marriage not being recognised.

Thailand has been ruled by a military junta since a coup in 2014. The government's backing of the civil partnership bill on Tuesday, the same day it backed legalising marijuana for medical use, prompted accusations that authorities were attempting to sweeten up voters with popular policies.

Nada, who is an intersex-trans woman, was not convinced it would work, and is planning to stand as an MP for the small, centre-left Mahachon party. "People expected the draft to [explicitly] include the right to adopt and the right to social welfare, and the government cut these off," she said.

Despite this, she was optimistic that the bill would change lives in Thailand. “I know a gay couple – one of them passed away and the other couldn’t organise the funeral ritual [because they were not recognised as their partner],” she said. “Without civil partnership, they can’t do anything. That’s what we’re fighting for.”

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