

Letter to the Editor
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by Sindu Suyana [with advice from Walter Williams]

The complaints printed in Tempo against Dr. Dede Oetomo's speech at the recent Gay Seminar are confusing and bad for conditions in modern Indonesia. Despite the fact that almost all international psychological associations today say that homosexuality is not a sickness, Drs. Hansan Basri says it is a mental disease. How does he then account for many famous people in history -- kings, scholars, brilliant composers, and others -- who were homosexual? He says homosexuals are "not normal." Of course they are not normal, but so what? Neither are exceptionally intelligent people, or artistically gifted people, but we do not look down on their "abnormality."

Why should we look down on the homosexual minority? Drs. Hansan and the letter writers in subsequent issues of Tempo give no reason for opposing homosexuals except that it is cursed by Islam and Christianity. What these writers ignore is that the Quran and the Christian Bible were written in ancient times when there were not enough people. Those books condemned not only homosexuality, but birth control as well. Today, with severe overpopulation in the world, the situation is quite different.

I could hardly believe it when these writers said, "If homosexuality is accepted, the human population will be static, and not increasing." I doubt that such a statement would come true, because no amount of gay rights will change the simple fact that the vast majority of humans prefer heterosexual behavior. Do these writers really expect us to believe that if gays are accepted, then every woman will stop having sex with men?

But even if acceptance did result in some people not getting married heterosexually, that would surely be a good thing. In a time when population control is probably the major issue that will determine Indonesia's future progress, we need to do everything possible to cut down the number of births. Far from forcing everyone to become heterosexuals, society should support and applaud gays for not contributing to the overpopulation problem.

If that were done, much division in society could be avoided. If it were not for prejudiced people like those letter writers, there would be no reason for a gay rights movement. Gays would be able to form their relationships and live their lives quietly, with no controversy or fuss.

Fortunately, AIDS is not a problem among Indonesian homosexuals, but it could be soon. However, if society will act wisely this disease can be prevented before it gets spread. How? By government programs educating people in "safe sex" practices, and by having the same attitude that society has toward heterosexuality; that is, by encouraging monogamy among gays. As it is now, most gays are afraid of people finding out about their sexuality, so they try to hide their behavior by anonymous promiscuity. If society would accept openly gay relationships the same as heterosexual marriages, then gays would settle down into stable pairs. Homosexuality will not disappear, no matter how many religious quotes you give. The only sensible answer is for the government to promote safe sex and gay marriages.

In addition, acceptance of gays could bring added benefits to society. Even these writers admit that homosexuality is present in all cultures and all times, so it is inevitable that when their child is homosexual, many parents are going to react with prejudice. Acceptance of gays could make families stronger, since parents would have no reason to hate their gay and lesbian children. Moreover, if gay stable marriages were accepted,

perhaps many of these gay couples could be encouraged to adopt the unwanted children now languishing without a home in Indonesia's overcrowded orphanages. Such adoptions are now occurring in many other countries, where gays are accepted.

What do these bigoted writers suggest that we do with these thousands of children who cannot find homes? Heterosexuals would prefer to have their own children. Do those writers seriously believe that an institution is better for these kids than a stable home life? What about the expense to society of supporting all these orphanages?

Perhaps it is time for our nation to go back to the accepting attitude of traditional Indonesian societies in our ancient past. As in many other areas of the world, some traditional Indonesian religions even saw gays as sacred people, and as religious leaders. It is terrible to waste a person's talents, by making them spend their energy hiding in shame when they could be making positive contributions to society. Much of the rest of the world is dropping its prejudices against homosexuals; it is time for Indonesia to do the same.