

Cambodia's PM speaks out against anti-gay bias

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PHNOM PENH, Cambodia (AP) — Cambodia's prime minister urged the Southeast Asian nation's people on Tuesday not to discriminate against their gay countrymen.

Prime Minister Hun Sen spoke at a ceremony to hand land titles to villagers in southern Cambodia.



Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen. Pic: AP.

Gay rights is not a major issue in Cambodia, and Hun Sen seemed to have been inspired by discussions of the subject on International Human Rights Day on Monday, including on local television. Cambodian society, as in neighboring Thailand, is generally tolerant of homosexuality.

He said he had heard requests from gay Cambodians that they be able to enjoy the same rights and freedoms as others.

“There are gays and lesbians in every country, so there should be no discrimination against them just because of their destiny,” he said.

In 2007, Hun Sen announced that he was disinheriting his adopted daughter because he was disappointed that she had taken a lesbian partner.

However, he appealed to society to show respect for gay people, saying “Most of them are good people and are not doing alcohol, drugs or racing vehicles.”

Former Cambodian King Norodom Sihanouk, who died in October, caused a stir in 2004 when he wrote on his website that he supported the right of gay couples to marry.

Sihanouk said he was inspired to state his views after watching news reports about gay marriage in San Francisco.

The late king said that as a “liberal democracy,” Cambodia should allow “marriage between man and man ... or between woman and woman.”

“It’s not their fault if God makes them born like that. ... Gays and lesbians would not exist if God did not create them,” wrote Sihanouk, who abdicated in favor of his son later that year.

Same-sex civil unions are not legally recognized, but many marriages in Cambodia are common law rather than officially registered.

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