

2nd Asia Pacific Rainbow Family Forum, Hong Kong

An expanding contingent of parents, intended parents and experts gathered from around Asia, the Pacific and beyond to engage in courageous conversations during the recent Asia-Pacific Rainbow Families Forum. The event centered around engaging dialogue, learning and listening from personal stories, extensive networking and the placement of a deliberate spotlight on the need for visibility for Rainbow Families in regional dialogues focused on SOGIESC issues.

Rainbow Families, those headed by SOGIESC adults, exist all around the world including all parts of the Asia-Pacific. But the support, acceptance and visibility of these families has been ignored in the region for far too long. Proof of this was seen the incredible growth seen from the inaugural Forum in 2017 which hosted 10 countries, compared to 26 countries represented in 2018, nearly tripling participation. Our goal is to raise awareness of the existence of Rainbow Families in the Asia-Pacific region and highlight the important ways families headed by sexual-minorities require and seek support. By raising awareness we hope to achieve recognition, protection and equal treatment of Rainbow Families and LGBTQI+ people inclusive of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics. (SOGIESC).



Some of the key highlights of this year's forum were our collaborations with the Global Interfaith Network, media advocacy training day with Sparking Change, considerably more Pacific Island representation, more transgender/ third gender parent participation, and a focus on issues including the collection of data, intersex awareness and faith and spirituality.

This year not only did we show 2 documentaries and not only were they both award-winning and Hong Kong Premieres, but this time our own country delegates were the stars of the show! Rainbow Mum and filmmaker Cha Roque premiered 'What I Would Have Told My Daughter If I Knew What To Say Back Then,' which included a touching Q&A with Cha and her daughter Kelsey. We also previewed 'Leitis in Waiting,' featuring Rainbow Mum and Tonga Leitis Association Founder Joey Mataele. This was also used as a fundraiser to raise funds for the TLA after a wrath of cyclones left the centre and safe space in ruins.

The Forum was an unbelievable opportunity to dive deeply into the unique lived experiences of LGBTQI+ people who are parents, and those that support them, from across some of the many cultures and traditions that make up the mosaic of cultural identities and cultural practices of parenting across the Asia-Pacific region. On behalf of our organising team, may I say we are profoundly moved and humbled to be part of nurturing this ever-expanding and progressive movement. We look forward to sharing more and invite you and your families to join us for this historic and joyous occasion in 2020 in the Kingdom of Tonga!

Finally, let us never forget friends all around the world who may never create their family due to barriers, barriers that may be economic, geographical, political, social, cultural, let's never forget all our friends around the world who long to have a family and are not able, because they are part of this movement and they always will be!

Bess Hepworth

Co-Founder, Asia-Pacific Family Forum and Network,
Executive Director, Planet Ally
IFED Board member



SEED Nobody Gets Left Behind, Malaysia

I was invited to attend the 2nd Asia Pacific Rainbow Family Forum (APRFF) in Hong Kong, May 11–13, 2018, which coincided with International Family Equality Day (IFED) and International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOT), and it was certainly a refreshing new experience.

Let's face it, most of us who are activists or advocates are oriented to action, with the usual focus on "what's out there," and we usually put aside our own personal challenges, thinking that the cause is bigger than "me," thus sacrificing the need for happiness and accepting burnout and anger as part of our lived reality as an activist/advocate.

Coming from Malaysia, a South East Asian country where emotions are not usually uttered in ways that would be beneficial or emotionally supportive for an individual, to be included in forums and conversations that incorporate the most pertinent situation in one's life into the greater cause can be confusing and welcome at the same time.

Confusing because there are so many emotions being shared freely among participants, and welcome because it's warm and uplifting. The most apt description I can think of is similar to a mother's warm embrace.



When I was asked to write a few words, I was torn between writing a report that's filled with text or a personal feedback of my experience throughout the forum, and I decided that I wouldn't do the APRFF 2018 justice unless I was completely honest in my feedback.

In any type of forum, workshop or event, there will be speakers and topics that have been set according to the theme, but what makes APRFF different is that the forum is not just talk...it's about living the experience, the close relationships and hospitality – you immediately feel a sense of belonging.

One of the most emotional and meaningful sessions for me was during the breakout of Global Interfaith Discussion, when we were encouraged to continue our sharing and conversations with any of the faith leaders and speakers. We spoke about our deeply personal issues, and for me to be able to share my concern about being a transgender parent with a child who has ADHD and is dyslexic, knowing that I can share my deepest fears with people who understand and are in the same boat...it was freedom.

The Asia Pacific Rainbow Family Forum creates a platform like no other, especially for LGBTQ parents, a platform that's solid and supportive, for creating a better and brighter future filled with love and hope for our children.

For more information: <http://seedfoundation.com.my/>

Video: https://youtu.be/Bec_vLLGaQ8

Mitch Yumar Yusof

Co-Chairperson

ASIA PACIFIC TRANSGENDER NETWORK



Quotes from the activists participating to the Asia-Pacific Rainbow Families Forum

“My kids now know you can create change. My kids now know you can change a law! That’s one of the positive legacies that came out of this.”

Jacqui Tomlins
Founder, OUTspoken Families

“In the Pacific it’s culturally taboo to be gay especially in Fiji, and it’s still an evolving country we still have not accepted the fact that there’s gay men and women so having someone that has a son and is gay, you know it’s still new to them and so the discrimination is very evident.

Mawon Wahid Cpp (CIPD)
Co-President, IFED, Founder, Vanua Taqomak

“A year ago they even burned the surroundings of my house 5 times in 10 days. They really wanted to scare us and they wanted to keep me, my family and my organization out of this area.”

Matcha Phorn-in
Director, Sangsan Anakot Yawachon Development Project, Thailand and IFED board member

“Now with climate change happening, with rising sea levels more and more and more you hear every single day it’s LGBT people that cause this, “it’s just like in the Bible, it’s just like with Noah,” and so yes there is space, yes there’s space in the Pacific as a whole but in some contexts things are getting worse.”

Lana Woolf
Founder and Director, Sparking Change, Committee Member, APRFF2018

“As a parent, I look forward to that day when I don’t have to mention the word Rainbow. It’s just family. And, family is family, and it is all about love.”

Ging Cristobal,
Project Coordinator for Asia, OutRight International, Board Member, IFED, Philippines



“Whereas before it was just lobbying the legislators, now it’s lobbying the whole country. I love Taiwan and I feel like the people of Taiwan have perhaps not been getting all the proper messages through media or through their neighbors, maybe because there’s just so few of us who are willing to actually speak up. I think we need to fill that void.”

Jay Lin
Founder, Portico Media, /taiwan

“As a rainbow families movement there is so much that you can do in raising our issues in the context of IVF clinics, challenging quality of life assessments challenging the way that intersex variations are disordered by IVF clinics and by medicine more genuinely, that is a phenomenal contribution that you can make to our movement.”

Morgan Carpenter
Sydney Health Ethics/GATE/IHRA

"I know of a same-sex couple, two women that are working at the same workplace and they have a child, and they have to use different roads every morning to go to work so nobody will notice they they're a couple and their child has to pretend that she doesn't know one of her Mums."

Dana Buss
Russian LGBT Network, Vladivostok, Russia

"I don't need a vagina to be a mother. I'm a mother and father to my children. On the birth certificate of all my children, I am listed as a father, BUT I have only ever heard them call me their Mother."

Afata Tiara Tulaimalo Aisaka Tuulua
Registered Nurse and Midwife, Founder, Samoa Rainbow Families, Samoa

"Most of lesbian activists in Indonesia are facing a forced marriage from their family so the threats come from family first and then second come from the society within the Islamic majority society and then the other threats also come from online and digital threats."

Lini Zurlia
Advocacy Officer, ASEAN SOGIE Caucus, Indonesia



"Forced marriage in Iran is a big issue for lesbians. And, so it brings us to another level of discussion around the stigma of whether you are "pure lesbian" or not a pure lesbian when you have a child, so the concept of Rainbow Family has a lot of levels and aspects and we need to look at that."
Shadi Amin
Founder, GRang, Iran



"Samoa is 99% Christian, so is Tonga, so are most of the Pacific Islands. We weren't just colonised by the Commonwealth, our minds were colonised through religion. Religion in the context of the Pacific, it is very exclusionary, and they have chosen to fixate on certain aspects of the bible to exclude us. They are using the bible to do that and it's time for us to fight back against that."
Ymania Brown
Co-Chair GIN-SSOGIE / Executive Director Pacific Human Rights Initiative



"It's about security and we have to be safe and she [her daughter] has to be safe. It's not an ideal situation when you have to make up stories, but it's about prioritising her safety."
A lesbian mother, (whose name for security reasons, we can't disclose) lives with her daughter in Pakistan where she is completely closeted about her sexuality.



"I think as a filmmaker, I've learned how powerful film is in sending a message and in helping you get your advocacy across. Film is not only a tool for me to do that, but is also a tool for me to reclaim something that was stolen from me."
Cha Rocque
Filmmaker, Communications Director, DAKILA Philippine Collective for Modern Heroism, Philippines

"I'm with you with every step of the fight and I promise to not stop fighting and educating people that love is what makes a family."
Kelsey Hadjirul
LGBTI and Women's Rights Activist (daughter of Cha Rocque)

MatchaPhorn-in
Director, @SangsanAnakot Yawachon Development Project

