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Associated Press,
<http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/international/AP-Cambodia-Gay-Marriage.html>

February 20, 2004

[1 Cambodian King Comments on Gay Marriages](#)

PhnomPenh, Cambodia (AP) – After watching TV images of gay weddings in San Francisco, Cambodia's King Norodom Sihanouk said Friday that homosexual couples should be allowed to get married.

Since the Cambodian government chose in 1993 to be a "liberal democracy," it **should allow "marriage between man and man ... or between woman and woman," the king said in a signed statement in French posted on his Web site.**

The king, currently on a medical visit to Beijing, also said that transvestites should be "accepted and well-treated in our national community."

Sihanouk is a constitutional monarch with no executive powers but is highly respected in his country. Gay couples are not allowed to marry in Cambodia.

San Francisco has issued more than 2,800 marriage licenses to gay couples in the past week, amid a growing debate in the United States over whether such unions should be allowed. Sihanouk said in his Web site statement that he saw TV footage of gay weddings there.

On the Net: King's site, <http://www.norodomsihanouk.info>

From: <http://www.martinforeman.com/>

June 2004

2 **Borsorbor at the Golden Banana - A Search for Sexual Identities in the Shadows of Angkor Wat**

by Martin Foreman

Siem Reap, Cambodia - It's the middle of the day and five of us are having lunch in the courtyard of **the Golden Banana, Siem Reap's (and probably Cambodia's) only "gay-friendly" hotel** (click on the picture on the right). Angkor Wat is under five miles away, but I've been there twice before and this is a business trip. There's Sophat, my contact on this fact-finding trail; Phearum, my translator; a colleague of Sophat's and our driver, both of whom have names that I have not been able to catch. It's taken us five hours to drive the 300 km from Phnom Penh and we're relaxing over a beer while waiting for our lunch. The day is hot, but we're cooled by a fan and we're enjoying our surroundings in this quiet backwater, surrounded by trees and plants and the newly-built chalets.

For most of the journey, as my four companions talked and joked in Khmer, I stared out of the window at the endless plain we drove across, criss-crossed by dried up rice paddies and punctuated at intervals by tall palm trees. Every so often we drove through a village or small town. The houses were on stilts, the older, wooden ones with palm leaf roofs, perched on rickety dead tree trunks that threatened to collapse under the first wind, the newer ones trim and smart on their upright concrete pillars. Motorbikes were the affordable and ubiquitous transportation, except for the hordes of white-shirted and blue skirted or -trousered schoolchildren who flooded the roads on their ancient bikes.

Over lunch, however, I could bring the conversation back to English and **the goal of my trip: to learn what was known about the sexual networks of men who have sex with men in Cambodia**. In almost every meeting I had had, however, I had tripped over the problem that nobody seemed sure what we were talking about. Yes, men had sex with men in Cambodia, but there were **two kinds of such men: short hair and long hair. otherwise known as srey sros ("pretty girls") and pros saat ("handsome men")**.

Pretty girls with their long hair and feminine mannerisms can't hide in Khmer society, while **short haired handsome men can** pretend that they really love women. That much was agreed on - eventually - but other problems arose. Are short hairs really men who haven't grown their hair long, as one informant suggested? Does "handsome men" refer to all men, or only the men who have sex with men, or only the men who have sex with men and are willing to admit it? And what's this division between MSM (men who have sex with men - an acronym I have long disliked: read here) and "real men", who also have sex with men?

To try and cut through the confusion, I'd arranged to meet **Chart. P... Cambodia's gay activist**, the evening before coming to Siem Reap. Chart, a short, intense, energetic designer who has spent half his life in the US, surely had both the Western and Khmer perspective to explain the situation to me. So sitting in the Black Eagle, Phnom Penh's (and Cambodia's) only exclusively gay bar, half-watching the part time rent boys play pool, I listened to Chart's explanation of terms. Listened, and had my suspicions confirmed. There is uncertainty over terms, because not

only are terms new, but so is the concept. The idea of men having sex is new in Cambodian society. The closest Khmer can get to the idea is *kteuy*, a term close in meaning to transgender. Only *kteuy* is more of an insult than a statement or a compliment and those who would once be called *kteuy* now prefer the term pretty girl.

Chart's hair was definitely short. What do you call yourself in Khmer, I asked him. Short hair? Gay? He shook his head. A man who loves men. Not MSM he insisted – in either English or Khmer. Not sex. Love is better than sex. So what was the Khmer term he put on the leaflets of the parties he organised? Man-love-man. Women-love-women for lesbian. And pretty girl for transgenders – except not all pretty girls are transgenders... but that's another detail that gets lost in the discussion.

Wind forward 16 hours to the Golden Banana. What, I asked Phearum, was the transliteration of the Khmer term for a man / men who love(s) men (Khmer is one of the lucky languages that doesn't have a plural form.) He took a pen and my notepad and wrote *boros sralanh boros*. It's very long, I said. Maybe it will be supplanted by "gay". He and Sophat shook their heads. "Gay" is too foreign, too suggestive of pretty girl. But *boros sralanh boros* doesn't trip off the tongue easily, I pointed out. You could say *bros sralanh bros* Phearum suggested.

Two syllables shorter, but still a mouthful. Some new term is bound to emerge, I said, something to describe the emerging awareness of both short and long hairs that there is a community, and potentially **a culture of men have have sex with / love men**. Something short and snappy. How about *bor sor bor*? Phearum suggested; more accurately, since written Cambodian does not separate words – **borsorbor**. Like MSM but nicer, said Sophat, more Khmer and less emphasis on sex. As our two other companions listened, Sophat and Phearum repeated the word several times. They liked it. They could see it catching on. "Are you *borsorbor*?" Sophat asked. Maybe, said the driver. More like *borsorbeer*, I suggested, indicating his glass. He smiled and nodded.

So now we have a Khmer word for MSM, Sophat said. No! I said, you don't. There's a difference. **Borsorbor are men who want to have sex with them. But lots of MSM only have sex with men for money, or because there are no women around.** I had heard enough stories in the previous 48 hours to convince me that there was an epidemic of drunken, nominally heterosexual men being waylaid late at night in the toilets of bars by long-hair, and sometimes short-haired, men looking for quick sexual partners. men who prefer women aren't *borsorbor*. Sophat nodded doubtfully.

Well, I thought, it doesn't really matter. You can't dictate how a word is used, particularly when it isn't your language. Anyway, for the first time in my life, I had been present at the birth of a neologism; for history's sake and mention in future editions of the Khmer version of the Oxford English Dictionary, I noted the date: it was Wednesday 12 May 2004 – a day that should Go Down In History.

History is history because time passes. Three hours later the three of us were in the suburbs, in the yard of an anonymous house that served as the offices and **training grounds for Long Hairs who learned about HIV/AIDS** to pass on the information to their friends and peers. They talked about their lives and their dreams. They were all young, and all dressed very effeminately and all wanted "real men" as their longterm partners, but although they **sometimes called themselves Pretty Girls**, they didn't want to have a sex change, at least partly because they had heard that those who did become women died young.

One was in tears every night because her boyfriend was marrying a real woman that day; another bore the parallel scars on her arm that told of the time when deeply unhappy she had cut herself; **a third joked about how he was beaten up by a gang of men offended by his effeminacy and how he had managed to run away**; others, no doubt, had been raped but did not talk about it. All were proud of the work they were doing with both long and short hair, telling them about HIV and how to protect themselves, and proud of standing up in the community and saying I am a Pretty Girl – respect me.

As the sun set, Sophat, Phearum and the group leader drove off into the countryside and eventually down a dusty dirt track through a small forest, passing the occasional man on a bicycle or shack where a young woman sat patiently to sell a rare customer stopped a can of something or packet of something else. Here and there in the fading light through the trees could be spotted the poorest houses I had seen so far. Eventually we turned off the road and drove through **an arch that marked the entry to a village** and soon stopped. Small children, naked, half-naked or in the dustiest old clothes watched we walked towards one of the houses. At the back an old man in blue shorts and a body covered in long-faded tattoos squatted on the ground hacking a piece of bamboo into shape for a structure that I could not identify. He smiled an acknowledgement at us and carried on his work.

In the next fifteen minutes, emerged out of the gloom, on foot or on bicycle, **over twenty youths, some not yet teenagers, but most in their late teens, and sat round a table** in a small half-open hut in the corner of the yard. Some greeted each other quietly, others sat and waited, only a few glanced at the bald Westerner watching from a few feet away. A small fluorescent light attached to an unseen energy source was switched on. As Phearum whispered a translation to me, the son of the man in blue shorts, a 25 year old primary school teacher, explained my presence and said that **today's topic was the impact of HIV on Cambodian society. What did they think that impact would be?**

They're not long-hair, I whispered to Sophat and the group leader, who was watching. No, they're short hair. I looked again. A group of under twenty year olds in rural Cambodia who **identify as men who have sex with men?** Yes, this one had long fingernails, a couple had shirts that were bright or well-tailored, another's mannerisms were gentle and effeminate, one or two rested their arms on a friend's back. **How many villages do they come from? I asked. Three – about 700 families overall. That meant 1 in 35 families had a young son who was becoming aware of his different sexuality.** Not only that, but there was a group that welcomed him. And the teacher's family, I asked, they have no problem? Well, the mother knows that they are borsorbor – that word again – but the father thinks they're just talking about HIV.

The seminar was not going well – few seemed to understand the question and the answers were vague. But they were all paying attention. Lack of TV, I thought, lack of anything else to do – too dark to play football, no money or too far to go into town. So why not join this group of like-minded friends... There was a commotion above me. Against the night sky, I could see the silhouette of man climbing a palm a few away. There was a sawing sound and the thump as coconuts hit the ground. Five minutes later, one was thrust into my hand, a hole pierced and a straw inserted. It tasted good.

An hour later, I was on my way back to Siem Reap. The teacher came up and in good English asked what I thought. I could only be complimentary. **How do you get to know each other, I asked? At pagoda dances, he said.** We see someone standing on his own, we get to know him, we go and talk to him, invite him to our meetings. I thought of gay rights groups back in London and the US – the offices, the telephones, the computers, the suits and the rolodexes detailing members of Parliament and Congress. **These young men had a long way to go before they felt comfortable expressing themselves in their society, but some of them, I was sure, would make it.**

NY Transfer News Collective (<http://www.blythe.org>)
Altnet (<http://www.altnet.org/story/20550/>)

November 19, 2004

3
Compassion in Cambodia (from the gay-friendly King)

by Cyril Chin-Kidess

Anyone disheartened by the way many U.S. leaders cast gay marriage as a "threat" to moral values should remember that there is a world beyond the reach of America's courts and legislatures, where gays and lesbians and their unions are acknowledged and accepted, often without great fanfare. Take my story, for instance.

Although I grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area, I've lived abroad for the last 10 years and have been with my partner, Theo, for eight years. Theo is a German diplomat, so we move around a lot. At the beginning of this year, Theo was offered a posting to Phnom Penh. He accepted on the condition that the German foreign ministry find a way for me to accompany him. While **Germany legally recognizes same-sex unions and the German foreign ministry supports our partnership, the Cambodian government does not**, nor would it grant me the same long-stay diplomatic visa typically issued to a diplomat's spouse. I could, of course, have tried to find a job in Cambodia and apply for a work permit.

But if I wanted to live in Cambodia solely on the grounds of my relationship with Theo, I would have to go in and out of the country on a monthly tourist visa, become a student or go under the guise of Theo's domestic help -- a common scenario for gay diplomats and their partners worldwide, including those posted to the United States. I was fortunate enough to find an alternate way.

The recently retired King of Cambodia, His Majesty King Norodom Sihanouk, has led a fascinating life. From his coronation in 1941, to achieving independence from France in 1953, to recently ensuring the continuation of the monarchy with the election of his son, Prince Norodom Sihamoni, as his successor, King Sihanouk has been pivotal in the history of modern Cambodia. In between ruling, abdicating, being prime minister and head of state (as well as a musician, a film director and an actor), living in exile, being imprisoned by the Khmer Rouge and becoming king again in 1993, King Sihanouk always demonstrated a resilient compassion for his country and people.

King Sihanouk also takes a keen interest in world events. One such event was San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom's decision to have San Francisco issue marriage licenses on a non-discriminatory basis. On Feb. 20, after seeing televised images of some of the gay weddings in San Francisco, King Sihanouk commented on his Web site, <http://www.norodomsihanouk.info> , that as a "liberal democracy" **Cambodia should allow "marriage between man and man . or between woman and woman."**

On Feb. 26, King Sihanouk followed up with a letter in which he disagreed that God absolutely opposes "gays"; rather, he wrote, "God, like Buddha, is compassion, indulgence, non-discrimination."

In March, unable to resist the opportunity presented by King Sihanouk's comments, I wrote to him for help. Remarkably, King Sihanouk personally replied a few days later, **"You are welcome to the Kingdom of Cambodia."**

With that, Theo and I moved to Cambodia at the end of July, and a month later I received a three-year Cambodian visa in my German diplomatic passport. Having lived and **travelled in many countries where gay marriages or unions are officially recognized and where most people simply don't care whether you are gay or straight**, I find it hard to believe that everyday Americans are any different at heart.

As far as I am concerned, Mayor Newsom and King Sihanouk put the issue simply and got it right. Theo and I are indebted to them, and we hope that others will find the compassion and courage to follow their example. Unfortunately, gay marriage has become a highly charged rallying cry for those desiring to push forward a much broader and divisive political agenda for the country. Perhaps the way forward is to **stop focusing on the emotive word "marriage" and press**

ahead for meaningful civil unions. Then leave it to the American people, if for no other reason than simply out of convenience, to start using the words "married" and "marriage" in everyday discourse.

Technically, Theo and I entered into a **"Lebenspartnerschaft," or life partnership, under German law**, but everyone we know just says that we're married -- or worse, that we're an old married couple. Meanwhile, as Germans see that their cities have not turned into stone and become more at ease with "gay marriage," the legal differences between civil unions and marriage are slowly being chipped away.

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The New York Times

May 22, 2005

4

By Siem Reap's Ruins, a New Night Scene (including gay/mixed bar)

by Jennifer Gampell

In the mid-1990's when tourists started trickling back to the temples of Angkor Wat after the end of Cambodia's civil war, the nearby town of Siem Reap was nearly as rundown as the ruins. The town consisted of a few dusty streets that visitors seldom had the time or inclination to explore.

Today, as memories of the area as a danger zone fade, Siem Reap is experiencing a tourism boom. The numbers of paved roads, hotel rooms, international flights and visitor arrivals are all rising rapidly. Though Angkor Wat will always be the main draw, Siem Reap offers exponentially more night-life options than it did even 18 months ago. For Americans, commerce is easy, since transactions are in dollars (small change is returned in local currency).

The newest restaurants and bars - many occupying renovated, or reproduced, French colonial-style shop houses with overhanging second-story balconies - lie within the radius of a \$1 tuk-tuk ride (those omnipresent two-wheeled carriages pulled by motorcycles). The highest concentration is in the Old Market area at the town's triangular southern end. Except for the busy stretch called Pub or Bar Street, the tiny streets and alleys are nameless. Addresses often refer to a place's proximity to one of the longer running establishments such as "near the Red Piano."

When Mick Jagger's visit put four-year-old Khmer Kitchen, (855-12) 763 468, on the map a while back, it was the only restaurant on the pedestrian alley that parallels Pub Street on its southeastern side. By year's end there will be five or six. The owner, Perk Sophal, recently moved her kitchen across the road but retained the unpretentious ambience. Diners ranging from backpackers to upmarket tourists keep returning for local fare like chicken soup with lemon grass, lime and mint (\$2.50).

As you head southwest down the fast growing alley, you pass the rear of the new Pissa Italiana (main entrance on Pub Street, (855-12) 440 382, where the owner, a former executive chef at a five-star hotel, often takes a break from his hot pizza oven. Décor and service need improvement but not so the creamy gnocchi (\$6) or perfectly sauced and topped thin-crust pizzas (\$4 to \$10).

Anchoring the top end of the alley, airy **Linga Bar (855-12) 246 912**, www.lingabar.com, is

the town's first gay-friendly lounge-style bar. Opened last November by a hotel manager, it's now frequented by as many straights as gays. The pastel walls and black furniture, chilled sounds and regional snacks clearly have universal appeal. The large drinks menu (most at \$3) includes martinis and cosmopolitans. Like most nightspots in Old Market, Linga stays open until at least 1 or 2 a.m.

Pub Street had three occupants in 2000. Today it's almost full, with new places spilling over onto the short block leading to Sivatha Boulevard. Carnets d'Asie, at 333 Sivatha, (855-16) 746 701, fuses Khmer and French cuisine in the elegantly renovated rear courtyard of a former Chinese restaurant. In another country such beautiful presentation (like the lotus flower salad in a crispy edible bowl) and taste (fish tartar) would cost much more than \$2.50 to \$10.

The minimalist white and air-conditioned interior of Blue Pumpkin (cross the road at the end of Pub Street at the Soup Dragon), (855-63) 963 574, makes a cool alternative to the other naturally ventilated spots. Renowned for its baked goods, freshly blended health drinks, snacks and desserts (nothing above \$5), the spacious two-story cafe also features free wireless Internet access.

A few blocks outside the Old Market area, the French-owned Abacus, just off Sivatha on the west end of Om Khun Street, (855-12) 644 286, closed Sundays, is barely six months old and already a favorite with the discerning expat crowd. Set in a relocated Khmer-style wooden house with a bar underneath and extra seating in the lush tropical garden, its menu changes daily. Succulent grilled fish (with pesto, curry or saffron cream), unusual meats (ostrich) and starters like smoked salmon guacamole - more than worth the \$5 to \$10. Vegetable accompaniments are free.

Sticky Rice Gay Guide

http://www.stickyrice.ws/?view=lingas_temples

May 2007

5 Lingas and temples, bananas and cocktails - Gay Cambodia comes out There is a growing gay scene in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap

By Roberto Primavera

Maybe Ky is 37. Maybe he is only 33. The Cambodian does not know his date of birth. He was only a little child when the Red Khmer seized power and killed in the four years of their terror reign 2 million people. Amongst them the entire family of Ky. Only he and a younger sister survived the murderous regime of Pol Pot. Nobody alive remembers his date of birth. No records give evidence to the birth of Ky.

Somehow, Ky made it to a refugee camp in Thailand where the Red Cross took care of him and found him a foster family in New Zealand. In New Zealand Ky attended school, studied, had his first job, found out he was gay. After the death of Pol Pot in 1998 Cambodia embarked on the long journey of rebuilding the country. Ky in Kiwi land felt the urge to contribute to this process. He left New Zealand for Cambodia where he worked for the government. Feeling appalled, though, by the ubiquitous corruption, he quit the job. He started his own business instead and wrote history. Four years ago, he opened in Siem Reap the fabulous boutique hotel Golden Banana - the first openly gay enterprise in post-war Cambodia.

Siem Reap is the gateway to the temples of Angkor from Cambodia's heydays as a cultural hub as political and military power in the region some 800 - 1000 years ago. Contemporary Cambodia is back on the tourist map with Angkor Wat, the Bayou temple with its enigmatic stone faces or Ta Prohm as its major draws, whose photogenic and atmospheric combination of trees growing out of

the ruins and the surrounding jungle served as film set for Tomb Raider with Angelina Jolie. A must is a side trip to the "River of 1000 Lingas". The creators of Angkor Wat have carved a huge number of Lingas (whether there are really a thousand remains to be counted) into the rocky river bed. Lingas were the phallic symbol of the Hindu god Shiva whom Angkor Wat was dedicated.

There is no shortage of accommodations of all sorts from backpacker joints with bulk beds to luxury five-star-hotels. Internet cafes with fast connections are plenty and laptop users will enjoy WiFi in cafes like the gay friendly Blue Pumpkin (which looks like the Latte-and-Cake-sister of the Bed Supper Club in Bangkok), the gay Linga Bar or boutique hotels like the Golden Banana. Surely but slowly, the war torn country becomes just an ordinary developing country with tourism as a major money earner. 1.8 Million people visited Cambodia last year and almost all of them toured Siem Reap and Angkor. When night falls on Angkor

Getting there and getting around is as easy as pie. From Malaysia and Thailand AirAsia flies to Cambodia and from Singaporean the low budget carrier Jetstarasia. Busses connect Phnom Penh, Siem Reap and the still somehow tacky seaside resort Sihanoukville. Air links between these cities are available though not really worth the money, unless you are on a Cambodia-in-48-hours-tour. The most pleasant way, though, to travel between Phnom Penh and Siem Reap is the 5 hours speedboat cruise over the Tonle Sap River and lake. The boats themselves are a bit dirty and smelly. However, you can sit in the bows or even better on the roof and watch rural Cambodian passing by. Fishermen catching fish, water buffalos taking a bath, busy floating villages, plus palm trees, rice paddies, temples and mosques are an Asia picture-perfect.

Siem Reap is Cambodia's boomtown. Hotels, restaurants, bars, spas are mushrooming. Only four, five years ago, Siem Reap was nothing but a sleepy provincial town. Now it sports one of the best urban nightlife in Southeast Asia. No wonder that there is also gay life blossoming. Right in the middle of it all is the fabulous gay "Linga Bar" of Martin Dishman. The American serves great cocktails such as "Linga Storm" or "Cocksucking Cowboy" and perfectly chilled beers. Right across the Linga Bar is the other half of Martin's little Linga empire: The One, which is according to Martin the world's smallest five star hotel. It has only one luxury room plus a roof garden. One night in The One sets you back 250 USD, the unofficial Cambodian currency.

Although it is an open secret that Cambodia's king is a PLU (People Like Us) nobody talks publicly about the sexual orientation of king, who was before his coronation in 2004 in Phnom Penh a ballet dancer in Paris. Homosexuality is still a taboo in Cambodia. "They have no clue about homosexuality, thus they are not really biased towards gays", Ky says about his fellow Cambodians. "The attitude towards sexuality, though, is as relaxed as it is in Thailand."

Only last October Sokha and his Thai boyfriend Oak have opened in the vicinity of the Royal Palace Phnom Penh's second gay bar "Blue Chilli" which is distinctly a hang out for local gay Khmer. Until then the trendy "Salt Lounge" at Sisowath Quay was the first and only gay bar, though not the only gay business in town. The hotel "Manor House" is gay owned and managed and so is stylish wellness spa and beauty paradise "OSPA".

Once a week Janna hangs out at the Blue Chilli. He would love to go there more often, but he can't afford it. His job in a guesthouse earns him 70 USD a month. This is not too bad, though, in a country where a teacher or a police officer makes 35 Dollar a month. Yet even 70 Dollar are not enough to live on when you have to pay 30 Dollar rent a month for a room and the litre gas for your motorbike costs 1 dollar. Now wonder that 1,50 USD for a beer at the Blue Chilli are fortune for local gays (of whom a lot identify themselves rather as bisexuals than as gay).

Janna could make some money on the side if he would charge for sex. Yet Janna doesn't like that. "I did ask money for sex", the 25 year old says. "Not any more. I didn't like it." Cambodians are very proud people.

July 20, 2007

6

'Asia must overcome HIV stigma'

Sydney - Asia has made progress in containing HIV but must remove the stigma associated with the virus to fully consolidate the gains and keep it under control, international research chiefs say. Speaking ahead of an international conference of 5,000 HIV/Aids researchers in Sydney next week, America's top expert Anthony Fauci and his Australian counterpart David Cooper said HIV remained a major public health risk in Asia. Fauci said predictions HIV would devastate Asia as it had Africa had proved false after local health authorities, which were initially slow to heed warnings, adopted pro-active policies. But he said the potential for an epidemic still existed in a region estimated to have eight million people with HIV, a figure aid agency USAid says could climb to 40 million by 2010.

"The population density in Asia is so great, with countries like India and China that have a billion people each, that infection rates just have to track up a few percentage points and you're potentially looking at a catastrophe," Fauci told AFP. Cooper, the co-chair of the International Aids Society (IAS) conference, said responding to HIV was complicated by the fact that many sufferers existed on the fringe of Asian society and faced discrimination. "We're not going to have the generalised epidemics in our region that we've got in sub-Saharan Africa, we're going to have explosive smaller epidemics," he said.

"They tend to occur among drug users, also among gay men, sex workers or mobile workers such as truck drivers, fishermen who are more likely to pay for sex. In Asia, they're stigmatised and discriminated populations. The trick is to get into these vulnerable populations and provide non-judgemental healthcare." Cooper cited China as an example of a country that had overcome its initial denial of an HIV problem but could go further if discrimination ended. "China is responding pretty well, their response has changed, they're putting treatment in place and doing research," he said. "But people are still very much concerned about the human rights issues and how people with HIV are treated in Chinese society."

China estimated last year that it had 650,000 HIV cases, although United Nations (UN) officials estimate the actual number is now higher. A recent paper in British medical journal The Lancet praised China's adoption of schemes such as needle exchanges and awareness campaigns among gay men, although the UN said there was still resistance to confronting the problem at a local level.

In India, where the estimated number of HIV cases was this month halved to 2.5 million, the government has set out to target the type of at-risk groups identified by Cooper. "They're talking about upscaling programmes with marginalised groups," said Anjali Gopalan, head of the Naz Foundation, which works primarily with men. There was quite a bit of silence on them earlier." Indians with HIV are still often treated as social outcasts, with reports of doctors shunning Aids patients and HIV-positive children being barred from attending school with other pupils.

In Cambodia, one of the countries hit hardest by HIV/Aids, the authorities are concerned that discrimination is helping the virus spread. "It is difficult for us since stigma causes infected people not to speak out and this quietly spreads the infection," said Ly Peng Sun, deputy director of the National Centre for HIV/Aids and Dermatology. "Bias can prevent us from fighting the virus successfully."

Vietnam has introduced laws banning discrimination against people with HIV, although locals say it means some employers simply find a pretext to sack infected workers, rather than admitting it is because of their illness. "If this new law is effectively implemented, it will serve not only as a

shield for the fundamental rights of people living with HIV...but also as a positive tool for fighting stigma and discrimination," UNAids Vietnam director Eammon Murphy said.

Thailand has adopted a different tack to breaking down the taboos regarding HIV with innovative education campaigns such as traffic police handing out condoms, an initiative dubbed "Cops and Rubbers." The country, which has experienced about half a million Aids deaths and has about the same number of HIV cases, has slashed infection rates since it appointed a cabinet-level anti-Aids co-ordinator to oversee prevention efforts. It is also pushing international drugmakers over access to generic versions of newer and more expensive HIV medications that are needed to treat patients who have become resistant to the old drug