

'Homosexuality is a crime worse than murder'
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Mageswary Ramakrishnan

Abdul Kadir Che Kob describes homosexuals as "shameless people" and homosexuality as a "sin worse than murder." Abdul Kadir is head of education and research at Malaysia's Islamic Affairs Department, which operates as the morality police with 50 enforcement officers across the country. These officers are empowered to arrest Muslims -- including unmarried couples, homosexuals, transvestites and transsexuals -- suspected of breaking Islamic laws. Last year, 111 men were arrested in Kuala Lumpur for "attempting to commit homosexual acts." Abdul Kadir spoke recently to TIME contributor Mageswary Ramakrishnan. Excerpts:

TIME: How does Islam perceive homosexuality?
Abdul Kadir: Homosexuality is forbidden in Islam. It is a crime worse than murder.

TIME: What do you think of homosexuals?
Abdul Kadir: They are shameless people.

TIME: Can it be wrong for two people to be in love?
Abdul Kadir: Love? How can men have sex with men? God did not make them this way. This is all Western influence -- and the gay people expect us to be open-minded?

TIME: Your department made 111 arrests in Kuala Lumpur last year compared with 165 in 1998 and 166 in 1997. Is this an indication that the number of gays is decreasing?
Abdul Kadir: No, I don't think so. Perhaps they have become smarter in avoiding us. Maybe the department received fewer complaints. We only act based on complaints. It is difficult to act otherwise. How would we know what is happening? We don't know what is happening behind closed doors.

TIME: What do you do when you receive a tip-off?
Abdul Kadir: Usually people give us precise information like where these men are. We then go to the place, say, a hotel room. We knock and force them to open the door, but they are usually fully clothed by then. We still charge them for attempting to commit homosexual acts.

TIME: What about those who say that people have a right to choose who they want to be with?
Abdul Kadir: What right are you talking about? This is a sin, end of story.

TIME: What about gay women?
Abdul Kadir: We have never arrested lesbian women. There are no complaints, maybe because it is difficult to gauge who is a lesbian.

TIME: What happens when gay men are arrested?
Abdul Kadir: We charge them in court, but before that we put them through what we call Islamic counseling sessions. They recite the Koran everyday and we will tell them they have committed a grave sin.

TIME: Do these people change?
Abdul Kadir: It is difficult to make them change; it has to come from within. I know there is

very little effect. Out of 100 people, only one will change.

TIME: If your approach is not working, then why not abandon it?

Abdul Kadir: No, we have to tell these people they are doing something very wrong in the eyes of Allah [God]. It is a major sin. Gay people think being gay is a fashion.

TIME: Malaysia has three major ethnic groups -- Malays, Chinese and Indians. Is homosexuality more prevalent in some groups than others?

Abdul Kadir: It is prevalent among the Malays, I have to admit.

TIME: If homosexuality is just a fashion, why do you think so many Malay men are willing to risk arrest by your department?

Abdul Kadir: Like I said, this is a Western influence. They also operate very smoothly. Even if we know they are gay, we cannot arrest them unless we receive information about them.

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