

Dr Wijesingha is first openly gay politician here, sparks debate



Photo: ST

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SINGAPORE - Opposition politician Vincent Wijesingha has come out of the closet as the first openly gay politician in Singapore, sparking discussions on whether it signals that society has moved on homosexuality.

Last Friday, Dr Wijesingha posted on his Facebook page that he was going for the Pink Dot gathering the next day. "And yes, I am gay," wrote the 43-year-old social work lecturer. "PS. And no, I don't have a gay agenda."

The latter was a reference to a controversy during the 2011 General Election, when Dr Wijesingha was fielded as a Singapore Democratic Party (SDP) candidate in Holland-Bukit Timah GRC.

The People's Action Party had highlighted an online video showing Dr Wijesingha at a forum on gay issues and asked if he or SDP intended to pursue a gay agenda.

At that time, without commenting on Dr Wijesingha's sexual orientation, SDP chief Chee Soon Juan declared that neither the party nor any of its candidates was pursuing a gay agenda.

After last Saturday's Pink Dot, Dr Wijesingha posted a longer explanation on Monday of his decision to speak openly of his sexuality. "In truth, I wasn't intending to 'come out'. I merely wanted to encourage every LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) person in Singapore to attend Pink Dot and therefore I had to say why it means so much to me."

The gay rights event drew a record 21,000 turnout. Dr Wijesingha also spoke against the "oppression" that LGBT people experience, paid tribute to activists and urged the community to participate in a national census.

Dr Wijesingha did not reply to queries on Tuesday.



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Observers like Associate Professor Reuben Wong from the National University of Singapore yesterday said Dr Wijeyesingha's coming out sends a signal that SDP is "comfortable with being seen as one of the more liberal parties in Singapore".

Dr Wijeyesingha's courage in coming out was praised by People's Action Party MP Baey Yam Keng. Asked if the move represents a shift in Singaporeans' acceptance of homosexuality, Mr Baey and Dr Wong felt it was hard to say how the silent majority felt but agreed that there has been a shift towards greater acceptance, especially among the young.

Associate Professor Eugene Tan from the Singapore Management University said while some voters might count Dr Wijeyesingha's sexual orientation against him, "Singapore society has become a lot more accepting and there will be voters who will look at the total package that Dr Wijeyesingha is".