

## Confronting Prejudice With Honest Conversations

Cheng Sambath sits to the left of Hun Heim and Lim Borin, who is hosting the radio show. The Kampong Cham resident is talking to them about coming out as gay to their parents. He talks about how the experience nearly ended his parent's marriage and ruptured his relationship with his family.

Sambath says he faced discrimination from an early age when people in his village used a pejorative term for him. At the time, he did not mind it. But, he did not like it as he grew older and understood the subtext to the term, Sambath continues.

"We cannot expect others to be like us because nature is diverse," says Sambath. "How can we expect all humans who are created by nature to be the same?"

As a young man, Sambath moved to Thailand with his family, who worked as migrant workers. While working in the neighboring country can be a harrowing experience for many Cambodian workers, it turned out to be enlightening for Sambath. After years of feeling "different," Sambath says he met more people like him and he started to accept who he is.

A little later in the show, the host calls a listener. It is Sambath's father. The father says it was very difficult to accept that his son was gay but also that he was worried about his future and realized that he had to embrace his son for who he is. "I tried many strategies to change him but then I gave up and understood that this is who he is," says Chheun Chheng.

These are difficult conversations happening in homes across Cambodia. But having the people involved talk about it themselves and delve into the topic of sexuality, acceptance, coming out and support for queer people can help others who find themselves in these situations, where they are either forced to "convert" to a binary identity or ostracized by their families.







The radio show is hosted by the Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR), non-aligned, independent, non-governmental organization that works to promote and protect democracy and respect for human rights – primarily civil and political rights – in Cambodia. The NGO also advocates and informs people about sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, using the radio show to challenge the prevailing norms that target and discriminate against queer people.

While same-sex sexual activity is not prohibited in Cambodia, the state does not recognize same-sex marriages. And while there are no laws actively targeting the LGBTQIA+ community, there are no protections against discrimination or hate crimes based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

As the radio show winds down, Hun Heim, Sambath's mother, talks about how she came to embrace her son for who he is. She says it was important not to listen to what other people said about her son and to focus on him as a person and his good attitude.

"My son's future should not depend on the people who criticize him," she says. "This is his nature and I cannot change who he is."



*Cheng Sambath and his mother Hun Heim on the CCHR radio show discussing Sambath's sexual orientation and experiences with coming*