



BY **AUBREY BELFORD**
AFP, KURULU, INDONESIA

Wearing nothing but feathers and a long, tapering gourd jutting from his groin, Papuan tribesman Suroba says the Indonesian government cannot force him to wear pants.

Suroba, who estimates his age in his 60s, remembers the last time the government launched a campaign to eradicate the penis gourd, known here as a *koteka*, in the 1970s. It was a dismal failure.

“Back then we were wearing our traditional clothes, like the *koteka*, and we’re still wearing them now,” he said.

The latest threat to the *koteka*, and traditions like it, is a new anti-pornography law passed in October by mostly Muslim lawmakers in the capital Jakarta, 3,500km away.

The law, which criminalizes all works and “bodily movements” deemed obscene and capable of violating public morality, was pushed through by Islamic parties despite stiff opposition and years of rancorous debate.

Opponents of the law say its definition of pornography is too broad and could threaten local traditions, from nude temple carvings on Hindu-majority Bali island to tribal dances and phallic totems on Papua, a vast territory of untouched forests and mountains on the western end of New Guinea island.

The law, which is expected to be signed soon by President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, contains provisions protecting local cultures, but opponents say they would do nothing to prevent a crackdown.

Thousands of people on Bali have protested, and activists and politicians from Indonesia’s far-flung non-Muslim regions, such as mainly Christian and animist Papua, have begun

Indonesian anti-porn law cramps Papuans’ style

The legislation is causing ructions among Papuan tribesmen who fear their traditional dress, a long, tapered gourd worn on the penis, could soon be under threat

murmuring of civil disobedience.

In Kurulu, the *koteka* is an old tradition. The village sits in the remote Baliem valley, a fertile bowl carved out of the mountains running down Papua’s spine that had no contact with the outside world until after World War II.

The 370-year-old smoke-blackened mummy of one ancestor, Wimintok Mabel, which squats in the grass-roofed hut where the village men sleep, wears nothing but the remnants of a headdress, a necklace and a shattered *koteka*.

But traditions here are slowly giving ground to modernity. Children and younger adults already wear Western clothes, and Suroba conceded he sometimes wears pants on cold nights.

But it’s the suggestion that outsiders can force locals to abandon their culture that raises hackles.

Papua’s highlands are a hotbed of anti-Indonesia sentiment. Many Papuans see Jakarta’s sovereignty over the region — gained in a widely discredited 1969 UN-backed vote of select tribal heads — as an occupation.

Thousands of Indonesian troops guard against a low-level insurgency that still simmers in Papua’s forests, and this interviewer was only granted rare access to the region with an escort from the state intelligence agency.

“The anti-pornography law is definitely a threat, because it runs against our cultural values,” said Lemok Mabel, a member of the local Customary Council.

“There will definitely be opposition because it’s not what the people want. It’s something that violates locals’ rights as indigenous people.”

Another member of the council, Dominikus Sorabut, said news of the law had not yet reached the highland villages, where modern communications are a rarity and education is basic.

However, a long history of tension, slights and rights abuses means any crackdown on local traditions will prompt an angry reaction.

“They’ll know later when the effects are felt, if the police come down and start arresting people and force people to stop wearing penis gourds,” Sorabut said.

“The potential for conflict is big,” he said.

The central question is whether police will try to enforce the anti-porn law. Indonesia has no shortage of grand-sounding laws that go unenforced due to political compromise, inertia or corruption.

Abdul Aziz, the head of police in the highland region, known as Jayawijaya, said he was still weighing up whether or not to enforce the law

given local sensitivities.

“We don’t know yet, we have to look at the conditions first. Up to now there are pros and cons for enforcing it,” Aziz said.

“I don’t think it’s likely because the people here are still primitive. They don’t see it as pornography, but as their clothing,” he said.

Opposition lawmaker Eva Sundari, who voted against the law in parliament, said it could have its greatest impact outside of Papua in areas where Muslims predominate.

With its much-criticized clause allowing

civilian groups to enforce public decency, its real purpose was to allow Islamic hardliners to act as “moral police,” she said.

“The goal of this law is to become a legal umbrella for groups pushing for Sharia [Islamic law],” she said.

But however it is enforced, many say the law has already damaged inter-communal bonds that have held together a diverse country that spans thousands of islands.

“The law has already wrecked the feeling of togetherness,” Sundari said.

Left: Papuan men sport the traditional *koteka* in Kurulu, New Guinea. In Kurulu, the *koteka*, a tapered gourd worn on the penis, is customary dress.

Below: Papuan people wearing traditional outfits sit next to their homes.

PHOTOS: AFP



‘Sorry, I won’t be in today – I’m out’

Today, supporters of same-sex marriage across the US are being encouraged to stay home and call in ‘gay’ to work to protest the passage of California’s Proposition 8, which reversed an earlier state Supreme Court decision

BY **LISA LEFF**
AP, SAN FRANCISCO

Some same-sex marriage supporters are urging people to “call in gay” today to show how much the country relies on gays and lesbians, but others question whether it’s wise to encourage skipping work given the US’ economic distress.

Organizers of Day Without a Gay — scheduled to coincide with International Human Rights Day and modeled after similar work stoppages by Latino immigrants — also are encouraging people to perform volunteer work and refrain from spending money.

Sean Hetherington, a West Hollywood comedian and personal trainer, dreamed up the idea with his boyfriend, Aaron Hartzler, after reading online that a few angry gay-rights activists were calling for a daylong strike to protest California voters’ passage last month of Proposition 8, which reversed this year’s state Supreme Court decision allowing gay marriage.

The couple thought it would be more effective and less divisive if people were asked to perform community service instead of staying home with their wallets shut. Dozens of nonprofit agencies, from the National Women’s Law Center in Washington to a Methodist church in Fresno collecting food for the homeless, have posted opportunities for volunteers on the couple’s Web site.

“We are all for a boycott if that is what brings about a sense of community for people,” said Hetherington, 30, who plans to spend today volunteering at an inner-city school. “You can take away from the economy and give back in

other ways.”

Hetherington said he’s been getting 100 e-mails an hour from people looking for volunteer opportunities, and that his Day Without a Gay Web site has gotten 100,000 hits since the middle of last month.

Despite Hartzler and Hetherington’s attempt to fashion a positive approach, some organizers of the street demonstrations that drew massive crowds in many cities last month have been reluctant to embrace the concept, saying that it could be at best impractical and at worst

counterproductive to “call in gay.”

“It’s extra-challenging for people to think about taking off work as a form of protest, given that we are talking about people who may not be out [as gay] at work, and given the current economic situation and job market,” said Jules Graves, 38, coordinator of the Colorado Queer Straight Alliance. “There is really not any assurance employers would appreciate it for what it is.”

Graves’ group nonetheless is arranging for interested participants to volunteer at the local African Community Center in Denver. The

agency said it could find projects to keep 20 people busy, but so far only 10 have pledged to show up, said Graves.

Scott Craig, a school teacher at Independence Charter School in Philadelphia, had no problem requesting and being granted the day off. So many of the school’s 60 teachers were eager to show support for gay rights they had to make sure enough stayed behind to staff classrooms.

About 25 teachers plan to take today off and to have their work covered by substitutes while they discuss ways to introduce gay issues to their students and volunteer at the local branch of the American Civil Liberties Union, Craig said.

A letter telling parents why so many teachers would be out went home on Monday.

“We want to get the conversation going in the community that gay is not bad,” Craig said. “For kids to hear that in a positive light can be life-changing.”

Join The Impact, the online community that launched protests last month over the passage of gay marriage bans in California, Florida and Arizona, has urged people to withdraw US\$80 from their bank accounts today to demonstrate gays’ spending power, and to devote the time they might otherwise spend watching TV or surfing the Internet to volunteer work.

Witeck-Combs Communications, a public relations firm in Washington that specializes in the gay and lesbian market, published a study this year that estimated that gay and lesbian consumers spend US\$700 billion annually.

Bob Witeck, the firm’s chief executive officer, said it would be difficult to measure the success of today’s strike since gay employees occupy so many fields. And rather than suspending all consumer spending for the day, gay rights supporters would have a bigger impact if they devoted their dollars to gay-friendly businesses year-round, Witeck said.

“Our community leaders who are running book stores, newspapers, flower shops, coffee houses, bars and many, many other things are hurting right now, so paying attention to their needs during this hard time is an effective form of activism,” he said.

Hetherington said he has been careful to design A Day Without a Gay — he came up with the name after the film *A Day Without a Mexican* and liked it because it rhymed — so no one feels excluded or threatened.

He has specifically urged high school students not to walk out of their classes and assured college students they won’t be disloyal to the cause if they go ahead and take their final exams. He also has listed opportunities — ranging from writing letters to members of Congress about federal gay rights legislation to spreading the word about Wednesday on social networking sites — to gay marriage backers who cannot miss work.

On the Net: www.daywithoutagay.org



Curt Garman, left, and Richard Looke hold hands in June, 2008, as they look for a quiet spot to hold their wedding at City Hall in San Francisco. California voters’ last month voted in favor of Proposition 8, which reversed this year’s state Supreme Court decision allowing gay marriage.

PHOTO: AP