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Over 100 couples wed in Canada's first mass gay nuptials

BY DIANA MEHTA, THE CANADIAN PRESS JUNE 27, 2014



A couple shares an intimate moment during Canada's first mass gay wedding at Casa Loma in Toronto, where more than 100 couples were married Thursday.

Photograph by: Tyler Anderson, National Post , The Canadian Press

Jane Cullingworth and Bonnie Slade could have waited to have their wedding at home in Scotland, where legislation on same-sex marriages will soon be enacted, but that wasn't the way they wanted it.

Instead, the couple flew to Toronto, where they stood alongside 108 others on Thursday as officiants from 12 denominations gave their blessing to the crowd.

The Grand Pride Wedding for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and twospirited couples was thought to be the first of its kind in Canada and involved individuals from around the world. "It feels celebratory but also quite political," said 50-year-old Cullingworth. "It's a very strong statement across the world about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights.

"I think it's a message of love and hope and equality, really, in its most simplest form - that everyone should have the right to marry a person that they love."

For Slade, opting to wed her partner of 16 years in Toronto instead of Scotland was an easy decision.

"The progressive human rights in Toronto and in Canada, it's incredible really," she said, noting the open celebration of the World Pride festival throughout the city. "It's a real sign of progress."

Richard Laslett and Colin Gunther, a couple who had travelled to the wedding from Australia, also noted Canada's lead on same-sex issues while acknowledging that their union wouldn't be recognized when they got home. "It's sad, it's embarrassing," Gunther said of Australia's stance on same-sex unions. "But we'll know we're married."

"We're husband and husband now," Laslett added. "That's what really matters to us."

Cindy Su and Lana Yu will face a similar situation when they return to Taiwan, but the couple said they were thrilled to make things official.

"We figured we didn't really want any objection to stop us from doing what we want in life," Su said.

"I'm actually looking forward to what happens when we go back. Maybe in the future there will be some problems with the legality but now that we want to start a family, we have to be really brave."

Kisses, hugs and tears abounded after the couples at Thursday's wedding said "I do" in unison.

For Inae Lee, being surrounded by such a large group provided a form of support she wasn't able to get from her own family.

"In my parents' mind they don't believe that this can be celebrated. In their mind it's something that's illegal, it's something that's not allowed, it's very sinful," said the 28-year-old, who is originally from South Korea. "I really want to let them know that we are celebrated, and it's OK for us to get married."

Lee married Jenny Chang Ho, who is originally from Venezuela. The pair met in Toronto two years ago and have been together since.

"This actually makes us appreciate more that we're able to do this and be able to live in Canada," Chang Ho said.

Canada's first legal samesex marriage was June 10, 2003, just hours after Ontario's Court of Appeal pronounced the Canadian law on traditional marriage unconstitutional.