

THAM YUEN-C,  
SENIOR POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT

It is entirely legitimate that different groups with different lived realities will organise themselves to promote their own interests, as that is part of how society becomes more open and diverse, said Minister for Finance Lawrence Wong.

But he cautioned against taking a confrontational or aggressive approach that seeks maximum entitlements and rights vis-a-vis other groups, or tribes, saying that such an attitude will lead to political tribalism, in which groups close ranks and become insular.

This has happened around the world and will quickly erode trust among people. Instead, it needs to be a two-way process with both sides subscribing to norms of reciprocity and mutual benefit, he said.



### LISTENING

“If you’re all talking, pushing, no one is listening. I think we are not having a proper conversation,” Mr Wong said during a dialogue at the Institute of Policy Studies and S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies’ Conference on Identity.

“So the calls for engagement, I think, can work if we are committed, not just to a process of advocacy, but also a process

# Need for groups to engage, listen, compromise: Wong

Minister says communities will promote own interests but cautions against aggressive approach



The Pink Dot event in 2019, an annual rally supporting the LGBTQ community. Mr Lawrence Wong (left) says attitudes around LGBTQ issues are shifting especially among young people. PHOTOS: LIANHE ZAOBAO, IPS

of engagement, listening, compromise, negotiation, and constantly expanding our common space.”

In the session moderated by former ambassador Ong Keng Yong, Mr Wong also spoke about the Government’s approach to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) issues.

Some members of the audience pointed out that some tribes, such as LGBTQ Singaporeans, had no leverage and could not engage on an equal footing with others.

Acknowledging these sentiments, Mr Wong said people have strong views on sexual orientation and gender identity, and this is the case all over the world.

“But I would say to LGBTQ groups

that the attitudes are not static, they are shifting,” he added, noting that the Government frequently engages people, including those from LGBTQ and religious groups.

“It’s very clear (that) sentiment and attitudes are shifting especially among young people, but also shifting for the whole of society.”

This shows that conversations are not futile, he said, adding: “It’s not as though things will be static forever.”

“As these attitudes and sentiments shift, society will have to think about where the balance might be. And the Government, too, will have to consider what balance would be appropriate for society and what policies we might have to adjust.”

During the session, Mr Wong had cited the change in rules to allow singles to buy Housing Board flats as an example of how policies had evolved to reflect the stronger desire for fairness as society matures.

He said that while policies will be adjusted, it would not be possible to accommodate all the requests from different groups and stressed that trade-offs would have to be made.

On its part, the Government will strive to be a fair and honest broker in conversations between the different tribes, and will listen to all sides of the debate, he pledged.

[yuenc@sph.com.sg](mailto:yuenc@sph.com.sg)

**FOR MORE, READ THE STRAITS TIMES**